12 Point of View in Picture Books and Animated Film Adaptations: Informing Critical Multimodal Comprehension and Composition Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION: LITERARY PICTURE BOOKS AS TRANSMEDIA NARRATIVES

Popular culture for children is increasingly characterized by a digital multimedia dimension. One highly visible example is the adoption, adaptation, and re-versioning of stories from literary picture books to movies, animations, and videogames (Unsworth, 2006; Unsworth, Thomas, Simpson, & Asha, 2005). The experience of literary narrative by today's children involves taking the "multiplicity of media and versions for granted" (Mackey, 1994, p. 19). Classic picture books such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1962) as a popular mainstream animated movie (Jonze et al., 2009) have been highly celebrated within broad popular culture. Australian picture book author Shaun Tan's winning of an Oscar in 2011 for the best animated short film of his book *The Lost Thing* (2000) initiated a flurry of online responses from children and adults. These phenomena indicate how digital multimedia is merging literary picture book culture with popular culture animated movies.

Although discussing children's literature in terms of print media texts alone "ignores the multimedia expertise of our children" (Mackey, 1994, p. 17), it cannot be simply assumed that experience of multiply versioned stories equips young readers to understand how the interpretive possibilities of story are shaped by the affordances of the different media through which the stories are being experienced. Despite a very significant proportion of young people being highly adept at using digital media for creative expression, research, and social life, they are not necessarily correspondingly adept at understanding how multimedia affordances influence the interpretive possibilities of the texts they are negotiating (Jenkins, 2006; Kellner & Share, 2007; Luce-Kapler, 2007). Appreciating that no text is 'innocent' and understanding how to interrogate or analyze texts to determine how they have been structured to convey a particular evaluative stance, whether explicitly or implicitly, has long been held as a crucial aspect of critical literacy (Gee, 2003; Hood, 2010; Lemke, 2006; Luke, 2000). Such critical interpretive analysis of texts may be facilitated by explicit knowledge of how meanings are made through the structuring of the semiotic resources of language and image.

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Burn and his colleague, for example, found that early adolescents were able to develop explicit knowledge of the meaning-making resources of moving images and demonstrate strategic application of this in sophisticated commentaries on their reformulated digital movie texts (Burn & Durran, 2006).

What is suggested here is that close analysis of picture books as transmedia narratives in the form of animated movies can be an enjoyable basis for explicit teaching of aspects of multimodal narrative techniques such as point of view. This explicit meta-semiotic understanding can help students appreciate the multimodal 'constructedness' of story and hence become a resource for critical comprehension and for enhancing students' own multimodal digital narrative authoring. Following a brief explication of options for the construction of point of view in images in picture books (Painter, Martin, & Unsworth, 2012), the focus in this chapter will be on the story of The Lost Thing in picture book (Tan, 2000) and animated movie formats (Ruhemann & Tan, 2010). A comparison of a selection of corresponding segments of the story in both formats will examine how point of view is constructed. The comparative analysis will then address the interactions of the narration with the image/viewer interactive aspects of the images, their depiction style, and the role of point of view, in affording the interpretive possibilities of the story in each format. Finally, examples of analyses of point of view in other picture books and animated movie adaptations will be mentioned and some early work on point of view in digital animated narrative authoring pedagogy will be briefly noted.

2. IMAGES AND POINT OF VIEW IN PICTURE BOOKS

In verbal narrative a distinction can be made between (1) who is telling the story, the narrator, and (2) from whose point of view, or through whose eyes, we experience the story, which may change as the story progresses. Such changes in 'focalization' (Genette, 1980) and the subtlety and sophistication of shifts in point of view are the subject of detailed scholarly enquiry (Huhn, Schmid, & Schonert, 2009), but here we will simply illustrate some basic relationships between 'who tells' and 'who sees'. We will firstly look briefly at shifts in point of view in a light-hearted story—"Unhappily Ever After"—in the collection *Quirky Tales* by Paul Jennings (1987). In this story a young boy, Albert, receives corporal punishment from his balding old headmaster for allegedly circulating a note ("BALD HEAD BROWN WENT TO TOWN RIDING ON A PONY").

One part of the story describes the headmaster, Mr. Brown, in his rowing boat on the sea:

The sea was flat and mirrored the glassy clouds that beckoned from the horizon. Brown pushed out the small boat and it knifed a furrow through the inky water. He put back the oars and soon he was far out to sea with the shore only a think line in the distance. (p. 62)

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In this segment the unknown external narrator is telling the story and the point of view is that of the narrator who is outside of the story world. But the following segment at the beginning of the story is told from Albert's point of view:

Albert pulled up his socks and wiped his sweaty hands on the seat of his pants. He did up the top button of his shirt and adjusted his school tie. Then he trudged slowly up the stairs.

He was going to get the strap.

He knew it, he just knew it. He couldn't think of one thing he had done wrong but he knew Mr Brown was going to give him the strap anyway. He would find some excuse to whack Albert—he always did. (p. 59)

Here it is the narrator again who is telling the story, but it is being told from Albert's perspective—from inside his consciousness. Just after this segment, the point of view shifts:

Inside the room Brown heard the knock. He said nothing. Let the little beggar suffer. Let the little smart alec think he was in luck. Let him think no one was in.

Brown heard Albert's soft footsteps going away from the door. "Come in. Jenkins," he boomed.

In this segment the narrator is telling the story but now it is from Mr. Brown's point of view.

The verbal text in picture books can position the reader to experience the story from such different points of view. Images in picture books can also position the reader to experience the image from an external, unmediated viewpoint, or from a point of view similar to that of one of the characters in the image, or indeed, as if he or she is one of the characters in the image (Painter, 2007; Painter et al., 2012; Unsworth, 2006). Sometimes the points of view constructed by the verbiage and the image are consistent and sometimes they are different.

Painter (2007) identifies three methods by which viewers can be positioned as if they were one of the characters in the image (Painter et al., 2012). The first method is by depicting just the part of the body that could be seen by the focalizing character (such as the hands or feet out in front of the unseen body). Since the reader can see only that part of the body (such as the hands or feet) that would be visible to the focalizing character, then the reader is positioned as if he or she is the focalizing character—with that character's point of view (see also Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 143–144). A similar effect is created when only the shadow or partial shadow of the focalizing character is included in such a way that the viewing position for the image could only be that of the character casting the shadow. This method of positioning of the reader to have the point of view of one of the characters is

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inscribed in the actual form of the image depiction. The second method of positioning is achieved across a sequence of two images. In the first image, the focalizing character looks out from the page gazing directly at the reader, so it is clear that the character is looking at something, and what he or she is looking at is depicted in the subsequent image. This has the effect of positioning the reader to see the second image from the point of view of the focalizing character (see Painter et al., 2012, for examples of such image sequences from picture books). The third method is achieved by using the angle of viewing across two images. In the first image, the focalizing character is looking at something (or about to see something), but at this point we do not know what. Then the next image depicts the focalized participant, but from the same viewing angle as that depicted for the focalizing character in the previous image. In the second and third methods, the positioning of the reader to have the point of view of one of the characters is inferred from the relationship between the successive images (evoked) rather than being inscribed in the actual form of the image as in the first method.

It is also possible for the reader to share a character's point of view rather than being positioned as the character. The reader's view subsumes that of the character. The reader sees the character (or part of the character) while also seeing what the character sees from that character's perspective. This is achieved by having the reader view what is depicted 'along with' or 'over the shoulder' of the focalizing character. The 'over-the-shoulder' view can be achieved by positioning the reader's point of view as being from slightly to the rear and to one side of the focalizing character or directly behind the focalizing character, which may be seen as a stronger alignment with the focalizing character's point of view (Unsworth, 2006, pp. 95-97). The 'back view' is briefly mentioned by Kress and Van Leeuwen as "complex and ambivalent" with possible interpretations such as "maximally confronting", "trust", and "abandonment" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 138–139), but they do not discuss the 'back view' in relation to focalization. In children's literature this is very important in establishing alignment between the reader and the point of view of the focalizing character. For example, in Anthony Browne's (1983) Gorilla there are four back-view images of the main protagonist, Hannah, alone, four of Hannah and the gorilla, and one of Hannah and her father. While the earlier rear views of Hannah tend to align the reader with Hannah's perspective on the events of her life, and then those with the gorilla on how she imagines her life should be, the final rear view of Hannah and her father focuses the readers' view on the togetherness of father and daughter as they walk hand in hand into the future (see Painter et al., 2012, for further discussion and examples of 'back view' and focalization).

Developing explicit knowledge of the construction of point of view, and how it relates to the ways in which the depiction of images construct a kind of pseudosocial interaction between the viewer and the represented participants, is important in understanding how the text is positioning the reader/viewer to perceive the unfolding story. How the resources of image and

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language are used to align the reader/viewer with viewpoints of one or more characters is a significant means of privileging the interpretations that are consistent with the perspectives shown by those characters. Understanding this aspect of the 'constructedness' of story is therefore a crucial resource for critical interpretation and response. One way of exploring this 'constructedness' is comparing different versions of ostensibly 'the same' story.

3. COMPARING POINT OF VIEW IN PICTURE BOOKS AND ANIMATED MOVIE ADAPTATIONS

The Lost Thing (Tan, 2000) is a humorous story about a boy who discovers a bizarre-looking creature while out collecting bottle tops at a beach. Having guessed that it is lost, he tries to find out who owns it or where it belongs, but the problem is met with indifference by everyone else, who barely notice its presence. Each is unhelpful; strangers and parents are all unwilling to entertain this uninvited interruption to day-to-day life. Even his friend is unable to help despite some interest. The boy feels sorry for this hapless creature, and attempts to find out where it belongs.

In the book *The Lost Thing*, there are no images where the gaze of the characters is directed straight out toward the reader, so there is no "contact" between the depicted characters and the reader. Nearly all of the images are long-distance views, with only three images that are middle-distance views, and no close-up views at all, so the social distance between the reader and the depicted characters is generally quite remote. The depiction style used to represent the characters visually can be categorized as 'minimalist' as opposed to 'generic' or 'realist' (Painter et al., 2012; Welch, 2005). In broad terms, the minimalist style for a human character is one that uses circles or ovals for people's heads, with dots or small circles for eyes, and does not need to maintain accurate facial or body proportions. Painter and colleagues (2012) suggest that this style is indexical of what they refer to as 'appreciative' engagement of the reader, with limited emotional involvement. The generic style they see associated with an 'empathic' role for the reader, recognizing something of themselves and others in the characters, and the realist style is considered to support a 'personalizing' engagement of the reader, responding to the characters as real individuals. The minimalist images in The Lost Thing construct a reader role of appreciative engagement.

The visual point of view in the book is overwhelmingly unmediated observation—viewers are positioned as detached outside observers. This combination of semiotic features does not orient the reader to become involved with characters as individuals and build up personal relationships with them, so, although the verbal dimension of *The Lost Thing* is a first person narrative, the images construct a reader stance that is predominantly distant and detached. The tension between the alignment of the reader and the character of the boy as the first person narrator, and the distancing of

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the images, reflects the treatment of the relationship between the boy and the lost thing, where the boy believes he should be concerned about the abandonment of the lost thing by society, but does not establish any interpersonal closeness with it. Subtle changes in the language and very significant differences in the images from the book to the movie remove this tension.

In the movie, the images construct a pseudosocial relationship with the viewers that is very different from that in the book. In the movie there are many more mid-distance and close-up views of the characters; sometimes the main character of the boy looks directly out at the audience; and the viewer is very frequently positioned to have a point of view along with one of the characters, and on a number of occasions as if he or she was one of the characters. While the story events are almost exactly equivalent in both versions, and the narration varies only moderately, the visual depiction in the movie significantly affects the interpretive possibilities. The movie substantially maintains the minimalist depiction style of the book, but the closer social distance, more frequent contact images, and particularly the mediated point of view 'along with' and 'as' the depicted characters shift the reader/viewer engagement from *appreciative* to *empathic*, and visually accentuate the boy as a focus for interpretive issues concerning difference, conformity, acceptance, and interpersonal outreach.

While an exhaustive comparison of point of view in the book and movie versions cannot be presented in this chapter, to indicate the differences in point of view I will outline examples in the movie where the point of view is mediated as the character of the lost thing or as the character of the boy, and compare these with the corresponding sections of the book. Then, to show the interpretive impact of the different approach to point of view in the movie, I will briefly compare the scenes from the very beginning of the story, where the boy meets the lost thing, with the scenes from the very end of the story, with the character of the boy reflecting on his encounter with the lost thing.

After the boy has taken the lost thing home, in the book there is a one-page depiction of him feeding the lost thing. The image shows him on top of a ladder dropping objects from a box into the raised top 'lid' of the lost thing. The image is quite a long view showing the full height of the lost thing and a full view of the boy and the high ladder he is standing on to reach the top of the lost thing. It is also an 'observe' image, since there is no gaze from either of the characters directed toward the reader. The text at the bottom on the page reads:

I hid the thing in our back shed and gave it something to eat, once I found out what it liked. It seemed a bit happier then, even though it was still lost.

In the movie, the narration maintains the part about hiding the lost thing in the back shed and it seeming happier after eating, but the intervening information about giving it something to eat after finding out what it liked is all rendered, in the movie, through images only, and there is a much more

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detailed and comprehensive portrayal of this sequence of events. What is significant is that we see the ladder being positioned against the side of the lost thing, looking down on the ladder, and seeing only the ends of the large front 'claws' of the lost thing—as they would be seen by the lost thing when carrying out this action—so the point of view for the movie viewer is 'as' the lost thing. In this case point of view is 'inscribed', or explicit, because it is constructed directly by what is depicted visually.

In the book, the boy then notices in the newspaper a small advertisement for "The Federal Department of Odds & Ends" which would accommodate "Things that just don't belong". The full-page image showing this advertisement appears on the left-hand side of one double-page opening. The text on the bottom on the previous page reads: "I was wondering what to do when a small advertisement on the last page of the paper happened to catch my eye". On turning the page the reader sees the advertisement in the full-page image of the newspaper. While there is no image of the boy associated with the newspaper, the first person narrative statement on the previous page about an advertisement catching his eye, together with the appearance of the advertisement in the newspaper fully occupying the next page, enable a visual-verbal collaboration that evokes, rather than directly inscribes, the boy's point of view. There is another such example later in the story when the right-hand side of the double-page spread depicts the boy's arm and hand about to press a door buzzer and the text reads: "I pressed a buzzer on the wall and this big door opened up". The subsequent page shows the bizarre characters and happenings inside that door, again strongly evoking the boy's point of view. These two, and the possible further example discussed later in relation to Figure 12.4, are the only occasions in the book when we visually experience the boy's point of view.

In the movie, the advertisement is on television. We see the boy sitting in a chair watching television. The image is a mid to close view of the boy's upper body and head, with his head tilted slightly forward toward the television set, of which we see one rear corner. The angle is slightly oblique, so that he is not quite facing out to the viewer. We see him move his head closer to the television set, and then in then next shot we see the television screen. So from this combination of shots the inferred or 'evoked' mediated point of view is that of the boy.

While there are more examples of the point of view being that of the character in the movie, the more frequently occurring point of view is 'along with' the boy, where viewers see both the boy and what he is looking at from his perspective. This is frequently achieved through a close-up foreground image of the right side and rear of the boy's head and shoulder, constructing our point of view as 'over the shoulder'. In fact, this occurs within the first minute of the story. The boy stoops to pick up a bottle top for his collection and locates the specimen in his collector's catalogue. As he is bent down looking at his catalogue on the ground, we have a close-up view of the top of his shoulders, the back of his head, and his arms manipulating his specimen over his catalogue. As this occurs, the camera moves in a little closer, as

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if to foreshadow very early in the movie the significance of the boy's point of view. The parallelism in the selection of this point of view when he meets the lost thing at the beginning of the story and when he reflects on their encounter at the end provides a very different orientation to our interpretation of the story than that provided by the unmediated point of view in the depiction of the corresponding segments of the book.

The second double-page spread of *The Lost Thing*, shown in Figure 12.1, represents the boy meeting the lost thing. The point of view is unmediated—not 'as' or 'along with' the character. They are all 'observe' images, as no gaze is directed to the reader. The large image is a longish mid view of the boy, showing more than half of his body, but in profile and at a slightly oblique angle. The small images on the right-hand column are also mostly long shots or longish mid views and the social distancing is accentuated by the smallness of the images. The smallness of these images also means that no facial affect is discernible, although curiosity is indicated by posture and gesture. Overall, the reader's relationship with the characters is quite remote and detached. In each of the four small images in a column on the right-hand side, the lost thing is prominent, and all of these images with the single line of text under each, appear to be labelled. The first three of these, each in turn, add a label of negative judgement about the lost thing:

sure didn't do much. It just sat there, looking out of place.

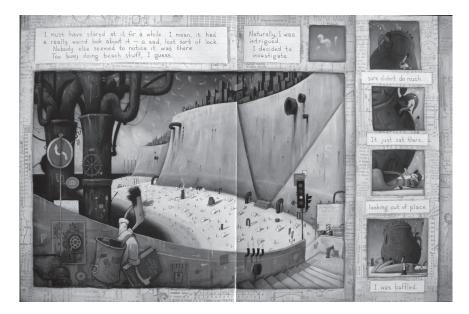


Figure 12.1 Meeting the lost thing

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The positioning of these negative judgements, like labels underneath the three small images of the lost thing on the right-hand side in the location of 'new' information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), and the social distancing of the reader from the characters, tends to give more emphasis to the unappealing incongruity of the lost thing than to the curiosity of the boy.

In the movie, there is no explicit verbal comment on the boy's curiosity about the lost thing, but curiosity, surprise, and puzzlement are evoked through facial expression and gesture and the 17 seconds of silent walking around and looking at the lost thing before any utterance of judgement is made. The point of view is unmediated for those 17 seconds, but when the boy stands still in front of the lost thing, the camera shifts to a close-up foreground view of the back and right side of the boy's head and his right shoulder, positioning us along with the boy's point of view as he looks up at the lost thing, as indicated in the top right-hand image in Figure 12.2. The lost thing does not have eyes, but the aperture at the top, behind which is what appears to be a fan, creates the impression of it having eyes. This means that the immediately subsequent shot (shown in the bottomleft image of Figure 12.2), which is a 'contact' image because the gaze of the boy is upward toward us as the viewers, can be inferred as from the point of view of the lost thing. Hence we are being positioned as the lost thing. The closer social distance, inclusion of 'contact', and shifts in point of view mean that the viewer is positioned much more within the story world experience than is the case with the corresponding segment in the book. The synchronizing of the narrative judgement statements about the lost thing with shots in the movie is indicated in Figure 12.2. "It just sat

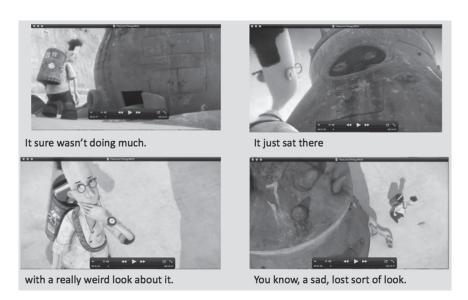


Figure 12.2 Introducing the lost thing in the movie

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there" is synchronized with an image that could just as much show the lost thing contemplating the boy as the boy contemplating the lost thing. When we hear the continuation of the narrative "with a really weird look about it", what we are actually looking at is the image of the boy shown in the bottom-left of Figure 12.2. So the synchronizing of the narration of "really weird look" with the image of the boy 'unsettles' the taken-forgranted notion that it is the lost thing only that has "a really weird look about it". And then the narration of "You know, a sad, lost sort of look" is synchronized with the bird's-eye view of the lost thing and the boy apparently wandering away from it, so the boy appears somewhat lost from this perspective, again unsettling the idea that it is the lost thing only that is 'lost'. It is as if the image-language interaction in the movie is problematizing the negative judgement of the lost thing, whereas in the book these judgements appear to be quite unequivocal.

This difference is underscored by comparing the narration in the book and the movie. The differences in the narration in the book and movie versions are indicated in Figure 12.3. While the narration is very similar, and the extent of the variation is modest, the differences in the movie version have quite a significant interpretive impact.

Space does not permit detailed discussion of the slight, but impactful, modification and rearrangement of the judgement statements from the book to the movie version, but the combined effect of the move from the simple past to the past continuous (didn't/wasn't doing), and the shift of "a really weird look about it" from an attribute in the book to a circumstance of manner in the movie, indicates the judgements in the book as being concerned with characteristic traits of the lost thing, whereas in the movie they are treated as referring more to the lost thing's current demeanour (Figure 12.3). What is clear is that differences in the image—reader/viewer relations, point of view, and the interaction of these with the language of the narration construct different orientations to interpretation in the book and movie versions of the story.

The powerful potential of the visual construction of point of view to influence the reader/viewer orientation to interpretation can be seen by comparing the corresponding later segments of the book and movie where the character reflects on his encounter with the lost thing. The relevant page from the book is shown in Figure 12.4.

The previous page is a very long-distance view of a tram, and although the passengers are very small, one is recognizable as the boy. Hence the image in Figure 12.4 could be regarded as being seen from the boy's point of view. What he sees out of the corner of his eye that doesn't quite fit is the orange-coloured creature with the light bulb for a head peering into the red box on the footpath. In the movie, we likewise see this creature through the window as the tram approaches the stop. But when it stops, the camera pulls back and we see the close-up rear view of the head of the boy looking out of the window at the orange creature, so our point of view is 'along with' that of the boy.

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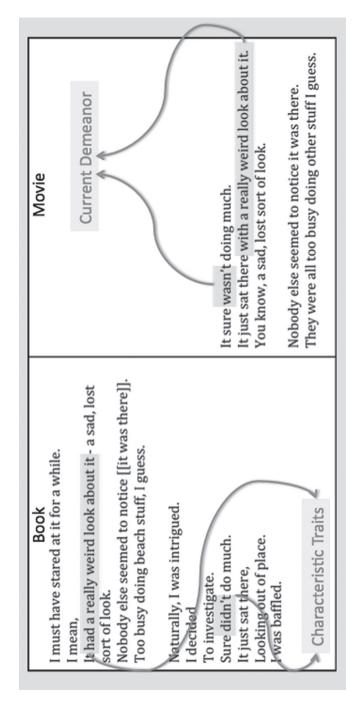


Figure 12.3 Meeting the lost thing—comparing narration in the book and movie versions

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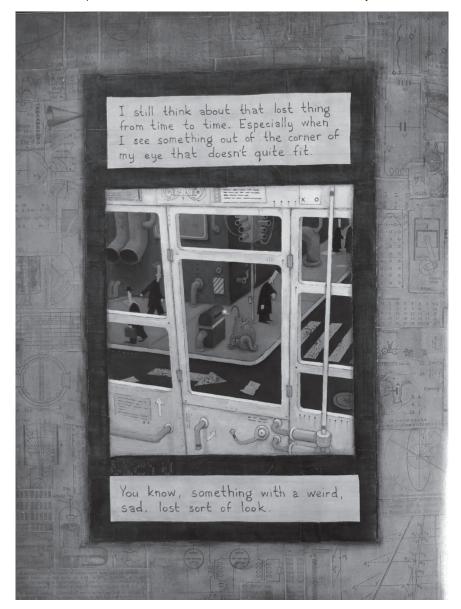


Figure 12.4 Remembering the lost thing

Simultaneous with this view we hear the narration, which is identical in the book and the movie:

I still think about that lost thing from time to time. Especially when I see something out of the corner of my eye that doesn't quite fit. You know, something with a weird, sad, lost sort of look.

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Just as the narration comes to the final words "a weird, sad, lost sort of look", the character turns around to face the camera and looks out making contact with us as the viewers, as shown in the bottom image in Figure 12.5. At the time these words are narrated we are looking at both the boy who is looking at us, and we can also see through the tram window the orange creature with the light-bulb head, raising the question of which of these characters has the weird, sad, lost sort of look. Not only does the shift in point of view facilitate this provocative synchronization of image and language, but also it precisely parallels the image-language synchronization indicated in Figure 12.2. So, in contrast to the book, in the movie the visual construction of image/viewer relations of social distance, contact, and point of view implicate the boy quite directly in relation to issues of 'looking out of place' or not seeming to 'quite fit', and appearing to have "a weird, sad, lost sort of look".

4. PICTURE BOOKS, POPULAR CULTURE, AND POINT OF VIEW IN CRITICAL NEW LITERACIES PEDAGOGY

Multimedia versions of literary picture books in various filmic formats are now increasingly easily accessible either online or as DVDs, facilitating new forms of literary engagement for children and new computer-based approaches to the use of multiple story versions in school English curricula



Figure 12.5 A weird, sad, lost, sort of look

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(Jewitt, 2002, 2006; Unsworth, 2006; Unsworth et al., 2005). However, the apparently strengthening nexus between literary picture book culture and popular movie culture brings simultaneously an exceptional opportunity for enhancing the engagement of all children with literary narratives and also a responsibility to develop the capacities of children for critical analytic interpretation of such transmedia narratives and the social, cultural, and personal values they privilege and distribute so broadly and powerfully.

A pedagogic advantage of animated movies of picture books like The Lost Thing is that the meaning-making resources of the animated images are also available to children who are using animation software such as Moviestorm (http://www.moviestorm.co.uk) or Muvizu (http://www.muvizu. com) in constructing their own films. For example, the minimalist depiction style in representing the characters in The Lost Thing (Tan, 2000) and The Little Prince (De Saint-Exupery, 2000a), which exists as both an interactive CD-ROM and a film (Donen, 2004), means that systems of meaning-making resources for the representation of facial affect (Painter et al., 2012; Welch, 2005) can be taught and deployed by the children using software that makes these simple variations in facial features possible. The changes in camera positioning and shot choice that construct differences in point of view are also able to be taught and deployed in much of the readily accessible animation software, facilitating the teaching of systems of options for the construction of point of view (Painter, 2007; Painter et al., 2012). The advantage of learning about these systems through close analysis of transmedia narratives is that they frequently provide alternative perspectives on ostensibly the same story situation, so children are able to develop a critical understanding of the interpretive difference that can result from different semiotic choices. The intersection of popular culture and traditional literary picture book culture is a significant site for critical multimodal analysis that can certainly inform multimodal comprehension and composition pedagogy and, beyond that, intergenerational and intercultural understanding in personal, social, civic, and political contexts.

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