English Language & Literature Teaching, Vol.27, No.2 Summer 2021
https://doi.org/10.35828/etak.2021.27.2.1

An Educational Approach to Critical Content Analysis of Visual Images in Picturebooks for Young Readers

En Hye Lee
(Kongju National University)

Lee, En Hye (2021). An educational approach to critical content analysis of visual images in picturebooks for young readers. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, *27*(2), 1-22.

Based on the *critical* perspectives of content analysis in children's literature, the paper examines visual images portrayed in the two picturebooks *Mirror* (2010) and *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001), both of which were published in the United States. Immersing with Freire's (1970) critical theory of *reading the word and the world*, this study discusses the power of taking a critical stance of analyzing visuals with a particular focus on representational issues and the danger of a single story, making a challenge to the traditional concept of reading in classroom settings primarily based on the general understanding of story *per se*. Findings in this paper shed light on the significance of interpreting multiple layers of meanings and their underlying messages within images; understanding a wide range of voices and stories; and exploring much broader socio-historical and cultural contexts in which the stories are embedded. Discussions on the findings give educators insights into bringing a critical lens to their future teaching. Finally offered are major educational suggestions for language and culture educators so that they can provide young readers with a literary space to read the world from various perspectives.

[children's literature/critical content analysis/critical theories/picturebook/ reading the world]

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature serves as a powerful tool for young readers to explore the world and understand its multiple perspectives. As mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990), children's books invite young readers to see themselves through stories and also to shed light on other's lives that are different from their own. Those readers are powerfully influenced by

the texts in children's literature as they contain what is told through words or images, and what is conveyed from the combination of the two (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Jalongo, 2004; Kim, 2015; Short, 2004). Through the transaction with texts, whether written or visual, readers become meaning-makers of the world and they further gain critical lens to be able to examine their own lives (Rosenblatt, 1938; Short, 2004, 2009). Not only the young readers but educators also transact with texts in children's literature to investigate themes or patterns emerging from the texts, to interpret their meanings, and to make references from them.

Critical content analysis grew out of an inquiry about an analytical tool to examine words and images that are integral to meaning-making in books for young readers (Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017, 2019). Literary critics, scholars, researchers and educators who focus on representational issues and power relations have gathered to engage in critical content analysis as a research methodology for understanding and analyzing words and images in children's literature (Beach et al., 2009).

Essentially rooted in qualitative content analysis, critical content analysis takes a theoretical position and also places much importance on socio-historical and cultural contexts in which written words or visual images are embedded. Such being the case, it is particularly noted that critical content analysis has become a new trend of research methodology in children's and young adult literature (Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017, 2019). The current paper is particularly concerned with how critical content analysis is utilized in investigating visuals in children's literature. Prioritizing Freire's (1970) *reading the word and the world*—one of the critical theories as a way of thinking with, through, and beyond words and images—critical content analysis is employed in this study with a strong emphasis on investigating possible underlying messages within visual images particularly related to the issues of power in social practices and also on resisting inequities which permeate the society and the world.

Using critical content analysis, the paper first explores visual images portrayed in a wordless book *Mirror* (2010) by Jeannie Baker and then examines a picturebook *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001) written by Frances Park and Ginger Park. Based on the exploration of visual images in the former picturebook, illustrations in *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001) are critically investigated more in depth. The major focus of the critical content analyses of visuals in the two picturebooks is on questioning the representational issues and challenging the danger of a single story. By so doing, the paper sheds light on the significance of interpreting multiple layers of meanings and their underlying messages within images; understanding a wide range of voices and stories; and exploring much broader socio-historical and cultural contexts in which the stories are embedded.

Based on the critical content analysis of the two picturebooks, the paper finally highlights the ways in which educators bring a critical lens into their own future teaching.

With a view to providing young readers (students) with the potentials to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), this study is particularly aimed to suggest major educational implications for language and culture educators in their classroom settings.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rooted in Freire's (1970) critical pedagogical approach, literacy is a process of understanding people's cultures, practices, and their daily lives. While he was involved in literacy education in Brazil, Freire created cultural circles to invite illiterate workers to gain awareness of understanding the world through literacy. It is explicated that illiteracy constitutes a profound social injustice, which in turn gives rise to inability of making decisions and participating in the society and the world (Choi, 2016; Freire, 1970). In the same vein, Giroux (1988) highlighted Freire's critical literacy by stating that

> In opposition to mainstream approaches to literacy which often emphasize learning how to follow words across a page and understand what is there only superficially, Freire's approach to literacy teaches people how to read so that they can decode and demythologize both their own cultural traditions as well as those that structure and legitimate the wider social order. (p.64)

Based on this understanding, both Freire (1970) and Giroux (1988) viewed critical literacy as a precondition for self- and social empowerment. They contended that critical literacy is a "narrative for agency as well as a referent for critique" (p. 65) and it is thereby a political project in that it is not only about merely reading and understanding one's own experiences but also about reconstituting one's relationship with the world by "constructing one's voice as part of a wider project of possibility and empowerment" (Giroux, 1988, p. 64). Thus, critical literacy, from Freire's point of view, is a process of locating people themselves into their own histories; becoming self-critical about the historically constructed nature of one's experiences; and making themselves present and active in the struggle for reclaiming their voices, histories, and future.

Freire and Macedo (1987) developed a model of critical literacy that embodies dialogical relationship between a reading the word and the world. Freire (1970) noted that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p.10). He further elaborated that "decodifying or reading the situations pictured leads readers to understand how human practice or work transforms the world" (p.36). In this respect, literacy does not merely consist of decoding written word

or language, but it is rather intertwined with knowledge of the world.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Critical Content Analysis

Content analysis in children's literature has been divided into two types: a quantitative content analysis and a qualitative content analysis—with the former being followed by the latter from the perspective of their historical evolution (Galda, Ash, & Cullinan, 2000). As opposed to quantitative approach, qualitative content analysis is based on humanistic approach, characterized as a way of "recontextualizing, reinterpreting, [and] redefining the research until some kind of satisfactory interpretation is reached" (Krippendorff, 2003, pp. 87-88). As a reader-response-oriented approach (Rosenblatt, 1938), qualitative content analysis advocates that meaning is not in the texts but rather in the reading events, focusing on the transaction between the texts and the readers/researchers.

Scholars engaged in the field of children's literature have further expanded the qualitative content analysis into *critical* content analysis (Beach et al., 2009; Stephens, 2015). They have been particularly interested in defining what 'critical' part of the content analysis is and also in exploring procedures for critical content analysis focusing on locating power in social practices.

The term 'critical' is rooted in the critical theory that reveals the issues of power, knowledge, discourse, and hegemony (Freire, 1970; Gee, 2011; Giroux, 1992, 2009). Taking a critical position, readers/researchers focus on locating power and domination in social practices by reading the world, uncovering unequal conditions, and transforming realities that are embedded in society (Freire, 1970; Rogers, 2004). According to Beach et al. (2009), researchers in critical content analysis employ a critical lens by "taking a theoretical position that frames the development of research criteria for text analysis based on the understanding of texts and readings of these texts in social, cultural, and political contexts in which they are considered" (p.130).

Listed below are questions that may be posed in critical content analysis:

- What (or whose) views of the world are represented in words and images?
- Why are the words written in that way?
- Why are the illustrations portrayed in that way?
- What assumptions do the words and/or images make about age, gender, class, culture, etc?
- Who is silenced/heard?

- What ideological positions can readers identify?
- How do particular cultural and social contexts make particular readings available?

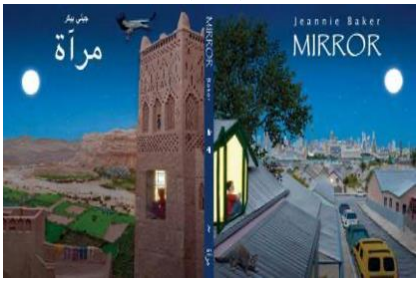
Keeping these in mind, critical content analysis prioritizes critiquing the accepted norms and questioning what is presented in texts, whose stories are told or silenced, and how the stories are being told. (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017, 2019). The readers/researchers are invited to read and reread words and images, thinking critically how written and visual texts work together and thereby taking stock of how power is represented in the contents. It is through this critical content analysis that readers/researchers are exposed to historical and socio-political dimensions of power relations that are constructed in words and images. Moreover, the theoretical position they take guides them to deconstruct dominant ideologies that have been instrumental in perpetuating social inequities and also in distributing unequal power in a society. This further creates a space to disrupt binary thinking, to examine issues of privilege and power, to uncover how the power structure is exercised in words and images, and to interrogate power relations that give a privilege to particular groups and discriminate others (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Johnson, Mathis, & Short, 2017, 2019).

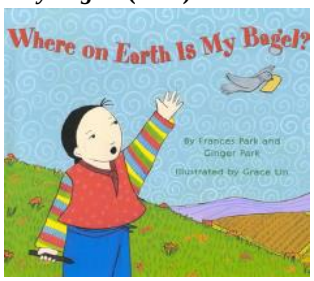
2. Procedure of Data Analysis

While immersing with Freire's theoretical orientation of critical literacy and major understanding of critical content analysis as a research method, I deeply engaged with the two picturebooks: *Mirror* (2010) and *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001), as seen in Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

***Mirror* (2010) and *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001)**





Written by an Australian author Jeannie Baker, *Mirror* (2010) is primarily characterized as its wordless book, representing the lives of the two boys and their families: one in

Morocco and the other in Australia. A strong emphasis is placed on how critical content analysis is used for readers to be able to reach critical awareness from the images in this wordless book. And the second picturebook to be discussed in this paper is *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001), which is written by Frances Park and Ginger Park, and illustrated by Grace Lin. The story is about a Korean child named Yum Yung, who is eager to eat a real New York bagel.

Despite their difference in cultural settings between the two stories, *Mirror* (2010) and *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001) have something important in common in that they are all based on a dramatic effect of Orientalism. The former, particularly noted for its wordless book, is characterized by its unbalanced representations between Australia as one of British Commonwealth countries and Morocco as one of newly independent African countries. And the latter, despite its brilliant description of two different cultures, is also characterized by its unbalanced representations between the U.S. as a superpower and Korea as one of newly independent Asian countries after World War II. It is of interest to be able to elicit the fact that these unbalanced representations in both stories are crucially attributed to postcolonial perspectives that permeated consciously and/or unconsciously between the two cultures, leading to a rationale for critical content analysis as well as critical literacy in children's and young adult literature.

First of all, *Mirror* (2010) caught my attention, inciting my curiosity to question the contents, especially the art and images presented in the book. The story presents the lives of two boys and their families, reflecting the two different lives of rural Morocco and modern Australia within one story. While I was intrigued by the artwork representing the parallel comparison of a day in the life of two families in this book, I began to ponder over whether these representational issues, particularly as to visual images, can be raised in any other picturebook that contains Korean culture visually compared with other cultures within a story. This brought me to search for picturebooks within which Korean cultures are compared and contrasted with other cultures. Among various genres of picturebooks, I selected a contemporary realistic fiction picturebook *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001) as it both depicts contemporary life and common situations where readers can identify and explore the cultures of the two countries—Korea and the U.S.

When it comes to the procedure of analyzing *Mirror* (2010), my initial exploration began when I first read a book review on *Mirror* (2010) from World of Words collections in College of Education at the University of Arizona. The book review, which dealt with the issues of visuals portraying the story of Morocco and Australia, caught my attention to revisit the visual collage work illustrated in *Mirror* (2010). The book review brought me critical insights into understanding visuals in picturebooks and it further triggered me to go much deeper with the representational issues, analyzing illustrative work through a critical content analysis. Initially, I positioned myself as an immersion reader, rather than a

researcher. My first immersion reading was in keeping with the aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1938) to enjoy the illustrations as well as the story rather than observing the book. After that, I did a close reading of the picturebook and revisited the story multiple times. While revisiting, I took an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 1938) and made notes on the illustrations whenever there were any issues, tensions, or questions about the visual representations. I paid closer attention to the visual features and backdrops of Morocco and Australia. During this process, I prioritized interweaving Freire's critical theory into examining and interpreting the images. Additionally, I did author research, and also looked for sociohistorical and cultural sources to understand broader social contexts within which the picturebook is embedded. Understanding sociohistorical contexts of Morocco and Australia was a significant part of this analysis in that it helped me identify and uncover ideologies and social discourses underlying the images I was analyzing.

The process of data analysis for the second book *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001) is almost similar to that for *Mirror* (2010). Just like the procedures for analyzing *Mirror* (2010), immersion reading was the first step that guided me to experience the story. Instead of focusing on analyzing the words and images, I read without stopping and fully immersed myself into the story. Then, I revisited the book multiple times and began to take an efferent stance to enter into "the process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary pattern in the data" (Patton, 1990, p.381). After the efferent reading, I looked closely into the characteristics of the book in terms of storylines, theme, years of publication, background of authors and illustrators. Based on these characteristics, I revisited all the words and images illustrated in the book and recorded representations of Korea and the U.S., particularly focusing on the cultural features of Korean/US characters and backdrops. While documenting, I marked these features with sticky notes and re-viewed them. Then, I revisited these documents and began to make notes to find if there are emerging themes, issues, or questions about visual representations. Throughout this process, I wrote down my own thoughts and reflections in relation to Freire's (1970) theoretical lens of reading the word and the world.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. *Mirror* (2010)

Illustrated with a collage work, this picturebook presents two side-by-side wordless stories—one side about Morocco and the other side about Australia. The two stories *mirror* each other allowing readers to simultaneously view the lives of the two boys and their families. A bilingual introduction in English and Arabic notes the lives of Moroccan and

Australian families with parallel illustrations portraying the comparisons between rural Morocco and urban Australia.

FIGURE 2

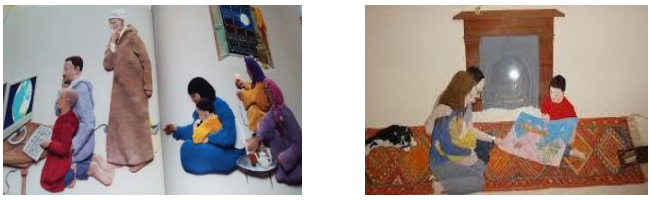
Rural Morocco and Urban Australia



The author intends to give readers the awareness of intercultural understanding and convey the message of how world is connected. The global interdependence is visually observed in the story as cell phones are sold in the rural marketplace in Morocco and a man in a turban as well as a woman in a hijab is at a store in Sydney. As seen in Figure 3, the global interdependence is further illustrated when the boy in Moroccan family sets up a new computer and his family members experience global interconnectedness through technology, while the Australian family is sitting on the carpet rug made by the Moroccan family in the marketplace.

FIGURE 3

Representations of Morocco and Australia



This wordless picturebook has received universal praise and reviews as it well interweaves contents and illustrations to deliver a thoughtful message about the ways in which our lives mirror each other across diverse cultures and ways of living. Despite its prominent book reviews praising the book for global interdependence as well as the author's artwork and designs, what matters is the representational issue (Short, 2011, 2019). As remarked in the WOW review written by Short (2011), while a parallel comparison of a day in the life of two families is accurate and authentic, what is at stake in this picturebook is the absence of fair and balanced representations. Although the accuracy and authenticity do not appear to be a concern as the details of rural life in Morocco are well presented with

careful research, what is critically at issue are the unbalanced representations of two different living environments—a modern and contemporary city filled with traffic and vehicles in Australia, and a rural and remote desert area full of sand and camels in Morocco. Figure 4 specifically shows a stark contrast between the two living environments. The two images on the left of Figure 4 represent the people in rural areas of Morocco. One portrays a marketplace located in a rural area, and the other depicts two people holding handmade rugs and some livestocks to be carried on their donkey. On the backdrop of the bottom left image, there are more donkeys standing in a desert area. On the other hand, the other two images on the right of Figure 4 show the visuals representing the living environments of Australia. Illustrated are the inside of shopping center (upper right) and the outside parking lot filled with a host of vehicles (bottom right).

FIGURE 4

Contrasting Images of Morocco and Australia



According to Aziz (2009), a survey of picturebooks that are set in North Africa and the Middle East indicates the overwhelming depiction of unpopulated mountains and deserts with lots of sand, donkeys, and camels. She points out that these visuals lack a depiction of socio-cultural development in any way. Short (2019) also pinpoints that this lack of diversity in the representations and the unfair comparison with the images of the West perpetuate the superiority of modern Western nations over African countries represented with their poverty and traditional ways of living. Taking a postcolonial stance, it can be understood that these unfairly compared representations are rooted in the colonial discourse and hegemony, which are deeply connected to colonial mentality (McGillis, 2000), or the Western construction of enlightenment, modernity, and positional superiority

(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002; Loomba, 2005; Tyson, 2006). While Western societies viewed themselves as modern and civilized, non-Western countries were classified as primitive, prehistoric, traditional, and static as their conventions did not match dominant European traditions which are considered to be the norm. From a postcolonial perspective, this practice of judging all who are different by othering and dividing the world between 'us' and 'them' is a part of imperial display of power and also a form of colonial control (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002; Nayar, 2015; Pickering, 2001; Tyson, 2006). This binary attitude and the use of European culture as the standard created the notion of Self and Other, the process by which the Western or European countries are constructed as *Self* and their systems as well as values are established to be inherently superior to the *Other* (non-Western countries).

Going back to the wordless book *Mirror* (2010), although the places like unpopulated desert areas do exist in Morocco, the problem with this picturebook may be in the absence of modern and contemporary living environments in Morocco. In the same vein, although it may be accurate and authentic that the modern and contemporary city areas, full of high buildings and a host of vehicles do exist in Australia, the problem with visual representations in *Mirror* (2010) may nevertheless be in its complete lack of desolate desert areas in Australia. As far as desert areas are concerned, it should be noted that Morocco is no match for Australia, which is noted for vast unpopulated areas like the Great Victoria and Great Sandy deserts, etc. accounting for approximately more than half of the country. The portrayals of two rural communities or two urban cities in both countries would have been more fairly compared with similarities and differences. In other words, what is missing in this picturebook is a balanced comparison of Sydney with Casablanca or the remote outback community of Australia with rural areas in Morocco.

The unbalanced comparison, whether or not intended by the author, may raise a question of how and why it is related to socio-historical and/or cultural aspects of Australia. This needs to be discussed starting with Australia's Commonwealth government in 1901. Australia had sustained its White Australia Policy, which legally prohibits non-European, or non-white settler arrivals. It is not until 1978 that the policy was effectively dismantled and thereby even non-European people were allowed to come into the country as immigrants. As a result of it, Australia became a country of the world's eighth-largest immigrant population with immigrants accounting for 34% of its population. As of 2016, Australian census shows that non-European ancestors make up approximately 15% of all the Australian residents.

It is no doubt, however, that the White Australia Policy was not totally eradicated in Australian society, but there have been fluctuating patterns in its deeply-rooted racial ideology underlying the policy. Even in the 21st century, it is a fact that there remains voices of opposition to immigration and/or multiculturalism within the Australian

electorate and particularly among historians (Blainey, 1984; Roberts, 2006). As remarked in *Mirror* (2010), Jeannie Baker provides an author note at the end of the story, reflecting her own thoughts about how her own country, Australia was at the site of ongoing political struggle with regard to hostility toward foreigners and foreignness. She also mentions her traveling experience in Morocco, sharing not only her positionality of being a 'stranger' in the new place, but also her viewpoint of seeing Moroccans as 'strangers,' and vice versa. Her insights gained through this traveling should be praised for her intention of illuminating the generosity she received from the Moroccan people and placing the significance of the global connectedness despite cultural differences/similarities of Morocco and Australia. However, it is worthy to note that the underlying colonial discourse and Western dominant ideology still remain unchanged, possibly creating cultural dichotomy which leads to the unfair and unbalanced comparisons between Morocco and Australia.

Given the colonial discourse and Western hegemony that permeated the global world even to this present day, the danger exists that we overlook the deeper ideologies of power, oppression, and inequities implicitly embedded into the narratives and representations of children's literature (Bradford, 2007). In light of this, the unbalanced comparisons in visual representations of Morocco and Australia may further perpetuate a single story (Adichie, 2009) or even cultural stereotypes (Pickering, 2001; Short, 2019). Moreover, these unfairly compared images are likely to misguide young readers to the limited representations which can establish fixed images of the two countries. This critical content analysis gives readers a critical insight into opening the eyes to critically think about representations in the books and also encourages them to become aware of the danger of a single story. Suggesting that the educators be critical readers, Short (2019) offers educational implications for reading alongside other books in a text set, finding online images (e.g. cities within Morocco or rural areas in Australia), or searching out informational books so that young readers can explore different parts of the world from a different angle.

2. *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001)

Written by Frances Park and Ginger Park, and illustrated by Grace Lin, this story is about a Korean child named Yum Yung, who wants to eat a real New York bagel. It popped into his head out of nowhere, but he could not stop thinking about the golden brown bagel. Being eager to eat this particular New York bagel, he decides to send a message to New York on the mountaintop, where he finds a pigeon to take his message to the New York bagel shop, saying "I would like to order one bagel to go." He waited and waited, but could not get any response from New York. So he begins to ask his neighbors—the farmer, the fisherman, the beekeeper, and the baker lady—if they have

ever seen any bagels. With no positive answers from them, Yum later finds out that the New York bagel shop sent him a message along with a recipe for the bagel. After reading the recipe, he then asks the baker lady and other neighbors to help him prepare the ingredients for the bagel. All of his neighbors brought the necessary ingredients, followed the baker lady's instructions, and finally managed to make their own New York style bagel together.

The authors' intention of building an intercultural understanding between Korea and the U.S. was well woven into Yum's story. Not only does the story guide young readers to gain awareness of Korean and the U.S. cultures, but it also leads them to cultural exchanges between the two countries. What is more, through literary imagination of transcending time and space, the readers are encouraged to learn a lesson of unceasingly yearning for dreams, collaboratively working with others, and achieving goals through perseverance. Despite the authors' positive intention, literary creativity, and the significant messages conveyed through the story, special attention needs to be paid to the issues of unbalanced representations of Korea and the U.S. in the picturebook. It is notable to find that while Korea is visually depicted only as a rural and suburban place, the U.S. is completely illustrated with urban and contemporary images. In addition, traditional elements emerge repetitively and excessively when portraying Korean culture. This leads to a question of why such unbalanced representations of the two countries and fixed images of traditional Korean culture in particular are inherently embedded in the story.

In order to unpack this issue, critical content analysis is utilized from postcolonial perspectives with a particular lens of Said's (1978) Orientalism. During the process of analysis, images illustrated in the story are reread and revisited multiple times and then examined through efferent reading (Rosenblatt, 1938) with the following questions:

- How are the Korean cultures, characters, surroundings, and backdrops portrayed?
- What cultural details of Korea are emphasized in the pictures?
- What are the cultural details that main characters represent?
- Are there any cultural comparisons and contrasts of Korea and the U.S.? How are they described?
- How might these cultural details and portrayals influence young readers' understanding of the two countries?

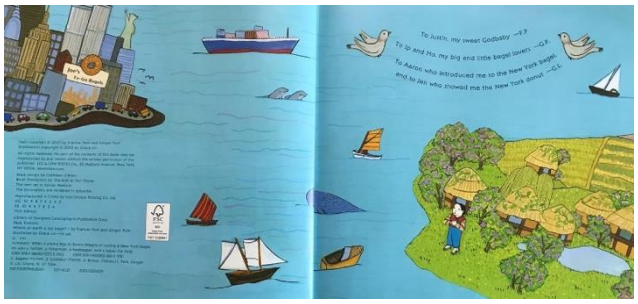
With these questions kept in mind, a close reading of visual images was conducted, including note-taking, marking, and highlighting the emerging themes, issues, or tensions. Immersing into Said's (1978) Orientalism, this analysis intends to explore how the images of Korea and the U.S. are represented in the story and how they are related to the balance of power and issues of othering. After rereading, revisiting, and recording, findings are

organized based on the themes and patterns that are undergirded by the theory.

One of the significant findings in this analysis is the issue of representation—the dichotomized opposition of East and West represented with unbalanced comparisons. Figure 5 is the front matter of the book showing contrasting images of Korea and the U.S.

FIGURE 5

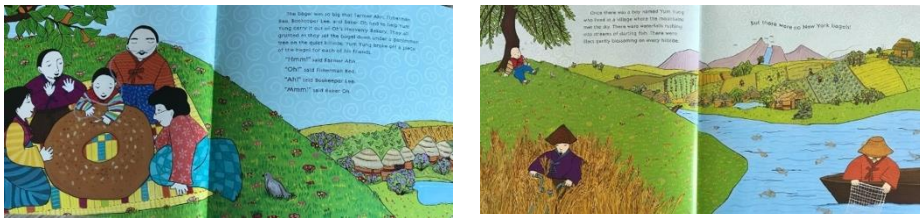
Contrasting Images of Korea and the U.S.



On the right side of Figure 5, Yum is standing near the village facing the urban cityscape of the U.S. on the left side. The place where Yum is standing is depicted with the images of a rural village, countryside, rice paddies, whereas the landscape on the other side is urban, contemporary, and modern New York, illustrated with the images of skyrocketing buildings, heavy traffic, and crowded vehicles on the city roads. These contrasting illustrations clearly demonstrate that the U.S. (the West) is viewed as modern and contemporary as opposed to Korea (the East), which is seen as rural, undeveloped and outdated. When it comes to the Korea's landscape throughout the story, visually evident is the repetitive images of rural and pastoral lifestyle (See Figure 6).

FIGURE 6

Images of Korean Landscape



In addition, another significant finding in this analysis is the representation of Korean people's daily dress and their living environments. As far as Korean people's clothing is concerned, everyone in the story is wearing a traditional Korean dress, *Hanbok*.

Throughout the entire story, Yum, the main child character wears his own rainbow-colored *Hanbok* and all the other Korean characters including the farmer, the beekeeper, the fisherman, and the baker lady in the village are also wearing their traditional dress as daily clothing (See Figure 6 and Figure 7).

FIGURE 7

Korean Characters Wearing Hanbok as a Daily Dress



Overall, findings in the visual representations of Korea and the U.S. show the unbalanced comparisons of the two countries (urban U.S. and rural Korea) and misrepresentation of *Hanbok.* That is to say, the living environments in Korea and the U.S presented in the story are unfairly compared with depictions of rural and remote Korea as opposed to the contemporary, modern and urban U.S. These dichotomized visual representations parallel those of the Orient which was constructed by the West as the Other (Said, 1978). As noted, the Orient (the East, or the Other) is understood to be static in time and place, and thus viewed to be exotic and uncivilized in opposition to the West, which is understood as Self, or the mainstream groups who saw themselves as dynamic, innovative and expansionist (Said, 1978).

As the rural communities and traditional Korean dress do exist in Korea, visual images of Korean rural/mountainous landscape and *Hanbok* within the story may have been described accurately, and thus cultural accuracy is not an issue in this analysis. However, what is at issue here is the total absence of urban and city life of Korea and current social practices played out in traditional Korean dress. From Said's theoretical viewpoint, this brings about a critical question of why the visuals of the two cultures are represented in this particular way and what socio-historical and cultural contexts are needed in order to understand the (mis)represented images in the story. Regarding this, it is crucial to closely look into the dynamics between Korea and the U.S. Korea had been overwhelmingly engaged with the U.S. in various ways from the beginning of the country as a nation state (Brazinsky, 2007). After its liberation from Japanese rule, Korea began to be much influenced by the U.S. through its entire society—militarily, economically and politically (Lee & Patterson, 1999). Even after the Korean war (1950-1953), the U.S. maintained a

strong alliance with Korea and built special relationship (Brazinsky, 2007; Hahm, 1981). From the 1960s to the 80s when Korea went through a host of challenges, including low standard of living, political insecurities, and issues of human rights under its military dictatorship and authoritarian governments, the U.S. used to serve as a major supporter and savior in one way or another. This gradually led to pro-American sentiments and even to American Dream among Koreans, internalizing the idea that the U.S. is deemed as a country of democracy, modernity and prosperity. This dominant ideology permeated the Koreans' mindset, accelerating their admiration of the U.S. (Park, 2009).

Starting in the 1990s, however, Korea began to give rise to democratic climate and economic growth across the country. Korea's growth in economy has created more job opportunities and also led to the improvement in the standard of living. While Korea marked a period of transition and transformation in the society, the Western lifestyle began to gradually enter and individual life choices started to impact the society. During this time, there was the growing popularity and the influx of Western culture, which caused the spread of pop culture, Western style food, music, urban fashion and clothing, etc. By the end of the 2000s, the country started to become positive about globalization as a general trend of the time, along with its open door policy toward the world. By embracing these successful shifts in political and economic development, Korea was recognized on the global stage as one of the OECD countries and it emerged as a global leading country in various industrial fields such as IT, communication, civil engineering, etc. By virtue of such societal changes and advancements in Korea, Koreans became better off in their own country socially, politically, and economically.

Considering these contexts of Korea and the U.S., it is critical to note that the socio-historical and cultural shifts are missing in the illustrations within the story. From a critical perspective, the dominant ideology of U.S. modernity and the underlying western sense of superior positionality in a global level intertwined with power and domination (Said, 1978) is deeply embedded in the visual representations of rural Korea and urban U.S. When considering the absence of modern and urban life in Korea, the representations do not seem to fully reflect the societal changes and transformation of Korea. In relation to this, it is also important to understand to the current realities of the landscape and living environment. According to the statistics by World Factbook Urbanization (2020), as of 2020 the U.S. is ranked 36th with 82.7% in urbanization rate and Korea is ranked 39th with 81.4%. This implies that there is very little difference in the degree of urbanization between the two countries. Given this, the unbalanced comparisons of the two countries may perpetuate a range of serious stereotypes one way or another, regardless of the authors' intention. These comparisons may subtly promote the underlying Western sense of cultural superiority and further reinforce the Western construction of Self and Other, (re)producing the dichotomy of East and West (Said, 1978). Thus taking a critical stance,

visual descriptions of two urban cities or two rural communities between the two countries would rather have been a more balanced comparison in the story. For instance, it would have been much better to make a fair comparison of New York with Seoul, or a remote community in Korea with its U.S. counterpart.

In addition, the representational issue also matters in visual images of traditional Korean dress. *Hanbok* as a daily dress in this picturebook do not authentically reflect the realities and cultural values or practices accepted in Korean society today. In accordance with its wave of modernization and economic development, Korea was also culturally influenced by the outside world. The growing tide of westernization in the country brought the far-reaching changes to Korean culture in general. Particularly when it comes to the issue of *Hanbok*, it used to be an everyday dress up until the early 20th century, but wearing this traditional dress began to sharply decline during the latter part of the century (Lee, 2013). It is no longer seen as daily clothing and instead it is solely restricted to special occasions such as weddings, New Year's Day, ancestral rites, a baby's first birthday, etc. In addition to these special events, people recently wear *Hanbok* in tourist attractions such as traditional folk villages and palaces. In this respect, images of *Hanbok* found in the story are misrepresented as they do not fully accommodate the range of cultural values and practices that are played out in Korean society today.

Provided that there are not enough understanding of current socio-historical and cultural contexts about the two countries, this book may add to limited representations that could possibly mislead young readers to one-sided view of landscapes and living environments of the two countries. Also, with no current realities and/or cultural practices of Korea included in the story, the traditional Korean dress may merely remain no more than an emblematic element, which may establish a fixed image of Korean culture. This can eventually misguide young readers, particularly those who are outside the Korean culture, to fall into the danger of oversimplifying, exoticizing and othering Korean culture.

Taken as a whole, the explorations of the two picturebooks through critical content analysis demonstrate that the images in children's literature can be examined by thinking with critical theories from which young readers can gain an effective lens of critiquing visual images. Based on discussions of the two picturebooks, what has been examined in *Mirror* (2010) parallels the critical content analysis of illustrations in *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001), both illuminating the significance of understanding representational issues and challenging the danger of a single story. These discussions have placed much importance on exploring and understanding broader socio-historical and cultural contexts to critically read visuals presented in children's literature.

V. CONCLUSION AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

As has been discussed so far, critical content analysis was used as a tool for exploring two children's picturebooks and interpreting multiple layers of meanings and underlying messages embedded in images. Discussions on the visuals in the two picturebooks give educators insights into developing a critical lens they can bring to their future teaching. In order to support young readers (students) in their critical reading with the potentials to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), major implications are made for language and culture educators in their classroom settings.

Language and culture educators are often encouraged to incorporate children's literature in their own teaching. They may think that incorporation of children's literature is to simply use literature from book awards, multicultural booklists or other reference materials. This may certainly be a good approach, but educators are sometimes challenged by the way in which they effectively use the literature and prepare themselves for teaching the contexts of the literature they are using in class.

Firstly, teachers are responsible for becoming fundamentally equipped with the notion of *The Danger of a Single Story* (Adichie, 2009), which serves as a tool for young readers' critical reading. Adichie gives a powerful message that single stories make readers see people and events as one thing, which may later become commonsense narratives. It is argued that "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie, 2009, para 24). As has been observed in the analyses of the two picturebooks *Mirror* (2010) and *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001), for instance, the major takeaway is that the danger of a single story may exist when young readers only see the one-sided part of Morocco/Australia and Korea/US. By the same token, educators need to understand the danger of a single story so that they can help students recognize that one story can never be the only story when reading about people, cultures, and events. Given this, students may have the potential to challenge single stories and eventually become liberated from limited or narrow perspectives in their reading the word and the world.

Secondly, along with the notion of the danger of a single story, educators' responsibility involves their preparation for selecting children's literature that provides stories with diverse voices and representations. It is important for educators to do careful research on and in-depth explorations of a variety of children's books. Regarding this, one of the most effective strategies of all is to never read a book alone, but instead to always read a book alongside other books. As an example, *Where on Earth is My Bagel?* (2001) can be read along with other picturebooks or novels about Korea, published not only in the U.S. but also in Korea, portraying stories set in a contemporary context of the recent years. As such, when educators create a range of text sets about a particular context they are teaching and

share them with their students in class, it is possible for their students to become exposed to various texts and build their understanding of that context in a richer way. What is also effective is that the educators should pair books and encourage students to read against and with each other. When educators provide pair texts, students are able to see comparisons in portrayals of people, cultures, and events. Comparing one text with an anchor text (Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017), or a text of counter-narrative, can be productive for young readers' critical reading in classrooms. For instance, *Mirror* (2010) can be paired with a novel City Boy by Jan Michael (2009), which is about a boy from an urban area in Malawi. In the story, the boy is taken by his aunt to a rural Malawi village, leaving behind his computer, private school and all the comforts of his city life. This story, portraying both modern city and traditional village within one and the same African country, can be supportive for students' understanding of both sides of an African country. This comparative strategy seems particularly significant as the counter-narratives resist common stereotypes around a particular theme, context or cultural group. Through this strategy, the counter-narratives offer an anchor that facilitates differences and connections across the texts.

Thirdly, educators also need to search for socio-historical and cultural sources so that they can better understand much broader contexts within which a book is embedded. Included in their doing research on contexts related to the stories are: to search for background information about authors/illustrators; to locate non-fiction books or informational texts; and to seek out digital resources that can help students understand a variety of stories reflecting a range of voices from diverse groups. To give an example, educators using *Mirror* (2010) or Where on Earth is Bagel? (2001) may possibly browse around the Internet to find images of Casablanca in Morocco and the Outback in Australia. Or, they may need to search for visuals of the cities in Korea and landscapes of rural states in the U.S. Additional possibilities can be exploring past/present cultural trends in Korea and doing research on the socio-historical contexts of Korea and the U.S. relations (e.g. Korea's alliance with the U.S., Pro-Americanism, American Dream, etc).

Finally, educators are also responsible for inviting students to an inquiry or research-based learning space. Going beyond an information-driven approach, inquiry/research-based strategies encourage students to explore contexts of the story by researching the issues or themes of the story discussed in class. Students' self-inquiry/research may include doing internet research (e.g. visiting authors' websites, online interview, book reviews and blogs, etc.) or gathering informational texts. It is through these strategies that students can do their own exploration to enrich their critical reading and further construct new perspectives as well as knowledge. More importantly, students are able to unpack different layers of meanings of the texts and thereby recognize social and cultural contexts embedded in the story. Listed below are some of the examples of guiding questions that

can be used in an inquiry/research-based approach:

1) How is the story described verbally or visually with respect to people, cultures, events, and/or countries?
   - Are they accurate enough?
   - Are they authentic enough?
   - If not, to what extend do you think they are not accurate or authentic?
2) Do you find any themes of history or tradition closely connected with the story?
3) How are characters' experiences related to your own lives?
   - Are they similar to or different from your (readers') experiences?
   - Do you feel close to or distant from the characters' lives in the story?
4) What are the socio-historical and/or cultural contexts underlying the story?
5) What other texts would be further useful to read alongside the picturebook?

Reflecting on the power of taking a close analysis of visual images in children's literature through the lens of a critical theory, language and culture educators are committed to working with students to read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This critical reading of the world invites young readers to gain a critical lens, to think beyond words and/or images in books, and to explore much broader socio-historical and cultural contexts in which the story is embedded. This act of critical reading in educational settings further provides young readers with a literary space to develop their own critical stance of understanding a wide range of voices and stories from various perspectives and thus gain insights into creating ways of seeing and interpreting the world.

REFERENCES

Adichie, C. N. (2009). *The danger of a single story.* Retrieved July, 2009 from TedTalk: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html.

Arizpe, E., & Styles, M. (2003). *Children's reading pictures: Interpreting visual texts*. London: Routledge.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures.* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Aziz, S. R. (2009). A critical content analysis of postcolonial texts: Representations of Muslims in adolescent and children's literature (Doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, 2009).

Baker, J. (2010). *Mirror*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.

Beach, R., Enciso, P., Harste, J., Jenkins, C., Raina, S., Rogers, R., Short, K., Sung, Y.,

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, *6*, ix-xi.

Blainey, G. (1984). *All for Australia*. North Ryde, N.S.W.: Methuen Haynes.

Botelho, M. J., & Rudman, M. K. (2009). *Critical multicultural analysis of children's literature*. New York: Routledge.

Bradford, C. (2007). *Unsettling narratives: Postcolonial readings of children's literature*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Brazinsky, G. (2007). *Nation building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the making of a democracy*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Choi, S. J. (2016). Critical literacy in the EFL classroom: Perspectives of undergraduates on reading beyond the text. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, *22*(3), 35-58.

Freire, P. (1970). *The pedagogy of oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Freire, P., & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world.* South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Galda, L., Ash, G. E., & Cullinan, B. E. (2000). Research on children's literature. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research (Vol. III,* pp. 351-381). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Gee, J. P. (2011). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. New York: Routledge.

Giroux, H. (1988). Literacy and the pedagogy of voice and political empowerment. *Educational Theory*, *38*(1), 61-75.

Giroux, H. (1992). Paulo Freire and the politics of the postcolonialism. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, *12*, 15-25.

Giroux, H. (2009). Paulo Freire and the politics of postcolonialism. In Kempf A. (Eds.), *Breaching the Colonial Contract. Explorations of Educational Purpose* (pp. 79-89). Dordrecht: Springer.

Hahm, B. C. (1981, Sept). Korea Armed Forces and National Development. Paper presented to the *First Wharangdae International Symposium on Armed Forces and National Development*. Korea Military Academy, Seoul, Korea.

Jalongo, M. R. (2004). *Young children and picture books* (2nd ed.). Washington DC.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Johnson. H., Mathis, J., & Short, K. (2017). *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reframing perspective*. New York: Routledge.

Johnson. H., Mathis, J., & Short, K. (2019). *Critical content analysis of children's and young adult literature: Reading images.* New York: Routledge.

Kim, E. H. (2015). Fun-Fun English: The impact of literature-based program on students'

interests and performances. *English Language & Literature Teaching*, *21*(4), 37-57.

Krippendorff, K. (2003). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lee, S. S. (2013). *Hanbok: Timeless Fashion Tradition*. Jongno-gu, Seoul: Seoul Selection.

Lee, Y. B., & Patterson, W. (1999). *Korean-American relations 1866-1997*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Loomba, A. (2005). *Colonialism/Postcolonialism, the New Critical Idiom*. New York: Routledge.

McGillis, R. (2000). *Voices of the other: Children's literature and the postcolonial context.* New York: Routledge.

Michael, J. (2009). *City Boy*. Boston, MA: Clarion Books.

Nayar, P. K. (2015). *The postcolonial studies dictionary*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Park, F., & Park, G. (2001). *Where on earth is my bagel?* New York: Lee & Low Books.

Park, S. W. (2009). The present and future of Americanization in South Korea. *Journal of Future Studies, 14*(1), 51-66.

Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pickering, M. (2001). *Stereotyping: The politics of representation*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.

Roberts, A. (2006). *A history of the English-speaking peoples since 1900*. New York: HarperCollins.

Rogers, R. (2004). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1938). *Literature as exploration* (4th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.

Short, K. G. (2004). Building teachers' understanding of art as meaning-making in picture books. *The Dragon Lode 22*, 12-18.

Short, K. G. (2009). Critically reading the word and the world: Building intercultural understanding through literature. *Bookbird, 47*, 1-10.

Short, K. G. (2011). Book Review: Mirror by Jeanne Baker. *WOW Review*, 3(3). Retrieved from https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewiii3/10/

Short, K. G. (2019). The Dangers of Reading Globally. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature, 57*, 1-11.

Stephens, J. (2015). Editorial: Critical content analysis and literary criticism. *International Research in Children's Literature, 8*(1), v-viii.

Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide*. London: Routledge.

Wilson, M., & Yenika-Agbaw, V. (2009). Defining the critical in critical content analysis. In Leander, K, et al. *58th Yearbook of the National Reading Council* (pp. 120-143).

Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference.
World Factbook Urbanization. (2020). *Central Intelligence Agency*. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/349.html

Examples in: English
Applicable languages: English
Applicable Levels: Elementary

En Hye, Lee (Instructor)
Korean National Education and Culture Center
Kongju National University, Instructor
56 Daehak-ro, Kongju-si
ChungchungNam-do, Korea
E-mail: enhyelee@gmail.com

Received: April 25, 2021
Reviewed: May 28, 2021
Revised version received: June 4, 2021