



Children's Responses to a Challenging Picturebook with a Contrapuntal Relationship Between Historical Facts and Humorous Fiction

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Abstract

In this article, the authors explore how Norwegian second-graders respond to the challenging picturebook, *Min bestemor strøk kongens skjorter* (My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts) (Kove 2000). The cognitive challenges for the young readers lie in the picturebook's humorous iconotext with a contrapuntal interplay between historical facts and fiction about World War II. In this classroom-based study, a reading event was designed to give the children an aesthetic experience with the picturebook and the possibility to explore it further. Each reading event included an opening in which the peritexts were discussed, a read-aloud (where two groups read the images on a Smart Board screen and two groups read the images in the physical book), an explorative dialogue, a creative workshop, and an ending. The analyzing process drew on Lawrence K. Sipe's (*Storytime: young children's literary understanding in the classroom*, Teachers College Press, New York, 2008) model of young children's literary understanding and included an inductive analysis of the pupil's responses that was inspired by a collective qualitative method (Eggebø

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in Norsk Sosiol Tidsskrift 4:106–122, 2020). On this basis, the authors present a model of children's overlapping responses to a challenging picturebook. The pupils' responses were embodied, creative, playful, analytical, personal and intertextual. Findings indicate that the reading event created a pleasurable aesthetic experience in which the children might develop tolerance for the complex fact-fiction relationship. The mediator's facilitation and openness for a variety of responses and literary meaning-making during the reading event allowed the pupils to use their entire selves and express meaning-making in different ways. Findings indicate slightly more embodied responses and social interaction when the children read the pictures in the physical book rather than on the Smart Board screen.

Keywords Challenging picturebook · Read aloud · Reader response · Embodied, creative, and playful responses · Book or screen

Introduction

Emily shifts her gaze from the double spread with the Royal family waving from the castle balcony to the hands in her lap. She lifts her right hand to shoulder level and starts waving carefully to herself. She proceeds to wave at the book, simulating the wave depicted in the visual narrative. Then she waves to her peers. One of them waves back to her and two others give her a big smile. (Excerpts from transcript during the read-aloud, June 2020)

Emily's waving to the illustration in the picturebook *Min bestemor strøk kongens skjorter* (*My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*)¹ (Kove, 2000) is one example of a pupils response to a picturebook read-aloud. Children express their meaning-making of picturebooks in a variety of different ways (Kachorsky et al., 2017; Sipe and Brightman, 2005; Sipe, 2008). Young children who find it difficult to articulate their responses verbally can show their literary understanding through artistic creations (Arizpe and Styles, 2016, p. 9) or through performative responses (Adomat, 2010). Emily's waving demonstrates a child throwing herself into the task with an embodied, wordless response.

In this study, we explore what implications the intentional choice of a challenging picturebook has on the pupils' responses, since challenging picturebooks are "open, multimodal texts and cognitively stimulating fields of meaning that invite the reader

¹ In the following, we will use the English title from the short film (Kove, 1999). An English version of the picturebook was published in 2017. The verbal text in the English version differs from the Norwegian in some spreads. In those cases, we translate the Norwegian text into English.

to think, explore, and interpret the word–image interplay” (Ommundsen, 2022, p. 99). When focusing on the reading process and reading experience within educational contexts, challenging picturebooks have obvious advantages as they include a wide range of thematic, cognitive, and aesthetic challenges as well as educational affordances (Ommundsen et al., 2022, pp. 8–9). Björn Sundmark and Cecilia Olsson Jers note that “If something is a challenge, the implication is that it is something that can be overcome, handled or learned—not that it is impossible or will defeat one” (2022, p. 232).

The aim of this article is to explore how Norwegian 2nd-grade pupils (7–8 years old) respond to and make meaning of the challenging picturebook *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts* (Kove, 2000). The research question is: How do young readers respond to a challenging picturebook? We approach this issue by first presenting the selected picturebook followed by theoretical perspectives on children's responses to picturebooks. On this basis, we introduce the method, then present and discuss the results before we offer our conclusion.

Presentation of the Selected Book

My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts is a mix of factual and fictional prose transmediated from Torill Kove's Academy Award nominated short film of the same title. The narrative has two main storylines: first, it explains how Haakon VII became King of Norway, and second, it follows the King's flight during World War II. The heroine of the book, the author's grandmother, Aslaug Bech, irons the King's shirts. When Norway is occupied by Germany, Grandmother—as she is called in the story—is forced to iron shirts for the German soldiers. She does not like her new customers and begins sabotaging the Germans' cause by destroying their uniforms. She pulls out buttons and soaks the uniforms in itching powder and insects. Eventually, Grandmother organizes a crew of women to join her resistance movement for which, at the end of the narrative (and the war itself), she receives a bravery award from the King.

The King chronotope of King Haakon's arrival in Norway in 1905 plays an important role in several Norwegian books and films and is transformed in Torill Kove's picturebook into a “herstory” focusing on an ordinary woman instead of the male royal (Ommundsen, 2013, p. 102). As we can see in Fig. 1, the female protagonist is focalized in the cover image.



Fig. 1 Torill Kove: *Min bestemor strøk Kongens skjorter*. (*My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*). 2000. Cappelen

The book begins with a black and white photograph of the author's grandmother and ends with a photograph of her grandfather. Photographs are commonly used in factual prose picturebooks to establish a sense of authenticity (Mjør, 2015, p. 49). Contrasting the initial, authentic photograph, the illustrations that follow are colorful, humorous, and drawn in a naïve comic-book style. Many of the illustrations support the professed authenticity by referring to specific places like Oslo's main street, Karl Johan, as seen on the cover (Fig. 1). Furthermore, several of the illustrations about World War II refer to iconic photographs from the War (Birkeland, 2011, p. 5). These photographs have become part of the cultural memory of World War II (cf. Assmann, 1995, p. 132). One example is the photograph of the King in front of The King's Birch in Fig. 2. The King's Birch has become a national symbol of the King's resistance against the German occupation of Norway during World War II.



Fig. 2 Kongebjørka (The Royal Birch) by Glomstua in Molde illustrated by Torill Kove (2000) and photograph by Per Bratland, April 1940 (As shown in Birkeland, 2011, p.5)

The blurred border between historical fact and humorous fiction raises several questions as to whether the story is real (authentic) and whether different parts of the story are true or not. One such question is whether the iconotext's claim is true that grandmother's childlike and heroic resistance towards the German soldiers is the main reason that the war comes to an end. In *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*, the cognitive challenges lie in this humorous word-image interplay (cf. Nikolajeva & Scott 2006, p.12) with its contrapuntal play between historical facts and fictional elements.

Children's Responses to Picturebooks

Our analysis of childrens' responses draws on Lawrence R. Sipe's (2008) theoretical model for literary understanding, which outlines five responses (pp. 181–185) that young children have to picturebooks. These five responses can be paraphrased as follows:²

- (1) *Analytical response*—when children analyze the text, they situate themselves *within* the text (both verbal text and illustrations).
- (2) *Intertextual response*—as children make connections from one story world to another, they situate themselves *across* two or more texts.
- (3) *Personal response*—children bring their personal lives *to* the story and take experiences *from* the text to relate to their lives.
- (4) *Transparent response*—when children live *through* the text as they enter the story world.
- (5) *Performative response*—as children remix the text for their own creative purposes, they situate themselves *in* the text.

² Sipe's model is based on tape-recorded oral responses that children had to award-winning picturebooks before, during, and directly after the read-aloud.

The analytical response contains five additional subcategories, one of which is the relationship between fiction and reality. Within this category, the young reader grapples with the different ways in which the story (both verbally and visually) relates to what they understand as “real life” (Sipe, 2008, p. 126). According to Sipe’s research (p. 127), first- and second-graders tend to show resistance to fantastical elements and seem to be in the process of constructing a complex understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality. This is relevant when we study children’s responses to the humorous word-image interplay and the contrapuntal relationship between historical facts and fictional elements in *My Grandmother Ironed the King’s Shirts*. The ability to tolerate ambiguity is fundamental to growth as a reader (Meek, 1988; Pantaleo, 2005, p. 31). Sipe (2008) highlights the importance of a skilled mediator in preparing and conducting a picturebook read-aloud. Picturebook mediation requires “scaffolding” by the teacher before, during, and after a read-aloud (Ellis and Mourão, 2021, p. 23).

Sipe’s ground-breaking work is the cornerstone in several studies on children’s responses to picturebooks. Katrina Emily Bartow Jacob (2016) builds on Sipe in her research on the role of page breaks in children’s understanding of picturebooks. Donna Sayers Adomat’s (2010) point of departure is the specific category of performative response. Her study of a picturebook read-aloud demonstrates how performative responses allow children to use their creativity and imagination (p. 209). Tori K. Flint and Marietta Adams (2018) describe how first-graders make meaning with wordless picturebooks through responsive play. In our study, we use Sipe’s model as a starting point. However, we also wanted to inductively seek out the characteristics of the young pupils’ responses to the selected picturebook throughout the entire reading event.

Method

We investigate how second-grade pupils responded to the challenging picturebook *My Grandmother Ironed the King’s shirt* (Kove, 2000) during a reading event where the children were invited to explore the picturebook in multiple ways. This reader-response study views reading according to Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, which explains how readers are affected by the synergetic interplay between individual, textual, and contextual factors (Rosenblatt, 2005). In the following, we will present the Norwegian context, the participants involved, how the reading event was designed, and how data was collected and analyzed.

The Norwegian Context

Norwegian children start primary school at the age of six. Primary education is both free of charge and mandatory. The Norwegian curriculum, *Kunnskapsløftet 2020*, has the following competence aims for childrens in Year 2:

- to listen to and talk about both fiction and factual prose;
- to express their perceptions of texts through play, singing, drawing, writing, and other creative activities;
- to listen, speak in turn, and give justification for their own opinions in conversation. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019)

Participants

Twenty-nine girls and thirty-two boys (aged 7–8), four female teachers, and three assistants (two male and one female) from two primary schools, one urban (school 1) and one rural (school 2) participated in the study. All participants, including the children's parents of the childrens, agreed to participate through a consent form. The study was approved by The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), which ensures general data protection and privacy. The names of the schools and the participants have been anonymized.

The first author conducted the data collection and participated in the study as the mediator (reading the book aloud to the childrens) and as a co-teacher in all groups. The first author has previously worked as an elementary school teacher and a professional storyteller. For analytical purposes, as we present and discuss our findings, the first author will be referred to as *the mediator*.

The Reading Event

The reading event was designed by the mediator with the overarching aim of letting the pupils explore the picturebook in different ways. Both schools provided a room for the reading event. The room was divided in two and contained a reading area in the front with pillows and benches for the childrens to sit on, and a work area in the back. Each reading event lasted 90 min and had the same fixed structure (Table 1).

Table 1 The reading event

	The reading event
1	Opening
2	Read-aloud
3	Explorative dialogue
4	Creative workshop
5	Ending



Fig. 3 The reading area with objects related to the book

Opening

The mediator opened the reading event by welcoming the children as they entered the classroom with their teacher. The mediator had prepared a table with the book and objects from the book: An old iron, a jar of insects, a “King’s” shirt, an old photograph of Grandmother, and a saltbox with white powder that represented Grandmother’s itching powder (see Fig. 3). The purpose of the objects was to ignite interest and curiosity (Ellis and Mourão, 2021, p. 23). The mediator invited the children to guess how the objects were related to the book. She valued all their responses to show them there were multiple valid interpretations (cf. Sipe 2008, p. 235).

Read-Aloud

The mediator prepared the read-aloud in such a way as would create a shared aesthetic reading experience (cf. Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 11). The mediator had learned the verbal text by heart to be able to recite the text orally, so that the children could read the images simultaneously as they listened to the verbal text. This gave the mediator the opportunity to watch the pupils during the read-aloud, employing gaze and gestures to capture their attention, and to acknowledge and value their responses during the act of reading. She had not planned any reading pauses for the pupils to reflect during the read-aloud but was open to exploring the spreads through child-initiated reading pauses. Talking during the read-aloud is one of the “unique affordances” of picturebook read-alouds (Sipe, 2008, p. 229).

During a picturebook read-aloud, children need access to the images in the book. The two groups in school 1 had access to the pictures in the physical book, while the two groups from school 2 had access to the pictures on a Smart Board screen. This

was a deliberate choice that was made in order to explore whether it was easier for a group of pupils to see the images on a Smart Board screen rather than in the physical book. However, this decision was not in the foreground of the study; rather the main purpose was for the children to experience and explore a challenging picture-book all together and in multiple ways.

Explorative Dialogue

The purpose of the explorative dialogue was to let the children explore the book through peer dialogue (cf. Alexander, 2020, p. 40). The mediator waited for the pupils to initiate the dialogue at the end of the read-aloud. She let the children lead the dialogue with their own questions based on their desire to explore and share their thoughts with their peers. Although the mediator brought a few pre-planned questions, her role as mediator was to listen closely to the children, follow their conversational trajectories and value their different responses. The dialogue ended when the pupils stopped asking questions or showed signs of waning concentration.

Creative Workshop

The creative workshop was included in order to let the children explore and make meaning of the book through their artistic creations (Arizpe and Styles, 2016). In the competence aims for Year 2, pupils should be able to express their perceptions of texts through drawing, writing, and other creative activities (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). In the creative workshop, each was encouraged to choose an object from the book to recreate. They picked the materials they wanted from a buffet of supplies like clay, fabric, crayons, etc. They were allowed to either work alone or cooperate with their peers. At the end of the workshop, they had an object to show the others.

Ending

At the end of the session, the pupils placed their handmade objects on the table together with the objects the mediator had prepared. The mediator gathered the groups to show one another's work. She retold stories the children had told her about their designs during the creative workshop. At the very end, the mediator invited the children to test whether Grandmother's itching powder worked by having a dash of powder sprinkled down their necks. This playful ending left the children in the ambiguity between fact and fiction as they exited the classroom.

Data Collection

Data were collected during one week in June 2020 (school 1) and one week in May 2021 (school 2). Video observation was chosen as it allows complex classroom activities to be studied in detail (Blikstad-Balas and Sørvik, 2015, p. 141). The video observation was conducted with a two-camera solution, with one camera facing the pupils and the other camera facing the mediator. The angle of the two video

Table 2 Empirical material

Type of data	Number
Video observation of reading events	4
Observation log of reading events	4
Photographs of student's creative work	61
Audio interview with teachers	1

cameras captured the interaction between the children and the mediator during the read-aloud, including gaze, utterances, gestures, and facial expressions. Data material also included the researcher log that was written down during and directly after the reading events, photographs of creative work, and an audio-recorded interview with the teachers from school 2 (40 min) (Table 2).

Transcription

The first author transcribed the video with an orthographic transcription (Cowan, 2014, p. 11). The verbal text was written in bold. Children's grammar mistakes were not corrected. To grasp different aspects of the multimodal interplay, gaze, facial expression, laughter, tone of voice, and movements were written into the orthographic transcription. The translation from Norwegian into English was done in cooperation between both authors.

Data Analysis

The analysis process drew on Sipe's (2008) model. We wanted to find the characteristic of pupil's responses to the picturebook throughout the reading event. Our collective analysis process, which contains four steps, was inspired by collective qualitative method (Eggebø, 2020, pp. 112–117):

- (1) *Review of the data material*—The first author worked through all the transcripts from the four reading events and made abstracts of each reading event. Each abstract was about one page long. She also worked through the pupils' creative works of art and made abstracts, including photographs, based on the different types of handmade objects.
- (2) *Collective grouping of themes*—The first author presented all the abstracts to the second author while the second author made notes. From these notes, we concluded that there were three themes present in the data: *body*, *play*, and *creativity*. Then we discussed our themes in comparison with Sipe's (2008) five categories.
- (3) *Collective sorting of the data*—The pupils' responses that stand out from the reading event with the selected picturebook are as follows: (1) embodied response, (2) playful response and (3) creative response; (4) intertextual responses; (5) personal response; and (6) analytical response.

- (4) *Collective disposition and outline of a work plan*—Both authors worked on the article in a shared document. The first author had the overall responsibility for the method and results section. We had eight physical work meetings in which we discussed the progress and changes in the article throughout the writing process.

Results and Discussion

Like in Sipe's (2008) study, we found overlaps between the various kinds of children's responses, so that they may belong to several categories at the same time. In the following, we will present the types of responses these pupils had throughout the entire reading event. The children's responses are influenced by the selected picturebook and the classroom context. During the read-aloud, pupils in all four groups asked: "Is it real?" and "Is this story true?" The mediator never answered these questions but asked them back: "What do you think?" When answering, the children made intertextual, personal, and analytical responses.

Intertextual, Personal, and Analytical Responses

The childrens' **intertextual responses** show that they were able to shift their "focus from within the text to its relationship with other texts" (Sipe, 2008, p. 131). Isak made an intertextual connection between the visual narrative in the book (Fig. 2) and the family film *Flukten over grensen* (*The flight across the border*) (Helgeland, 2020). In the film, two Norwegian siblings help two Norwegian Jewish siblings flee from German soldiers with the goal of reaching Sweden:

Isak points at the King by the birch: "It was the same pictures as the pictures in the book. The movie was like the book, for example in the movie I saw military planes shooting at the King like that." (Excerpts from transcript during read-aloud, June 2020)

Anton made an intertextual connection between the verbal text in the picturebook and the book *Kongens nei. 10. april 1940* (*The King's no*) (Jacobsen, 2016). The verbal text says:

All over the country, people shouted, "Long live the King who says NO!"
Anton's hand shoots in the air and the mediator gives him a nod and a smile. Anton says: "My brother has read a book called *Kongens nei!* [*The King's no*]." (Excerpts from transcript during read-aloud, June 2020)

These intertextual responses show that the pupils have a growing understanding that stories do not stand alone but rather build on other stories (cf. Sipe, 2008, p. 131). Both Isak and Anton demonstrated knowledge of the King chronotope.

Through their **personal responses**, the children connected their lives with some element of the text (cf. Sipe, 2008, p. 152). The pupils used experiences from historical places they had visited to when discussing the veracity of the book:

Rose: I think the story is true. I have been to Knaben³ and I have seen the military planes there. I also saw a sign about the war. (Excerpts from transcript during explorative dialogue, May 2021)

Jocelyn: "I have been to a cave people hid in during the war."

Bill looks at Jocelyn: "I think there are caves at Lista [name of place] as well."

Jocelyn nods at Bill: "Yes, there were many people who had to hide during the war." (Excerpts from transcript during explorative dialogue, May 2021)

The excerpts show that the children have embodied experiences with World War II as a real historical event. They use previous experiences to make life-to-text connections:

Millie: "I believe the story to be true because I have heard many stories about the war." (Excerpts from transcript during explorative dialogue, May 2021)

Millie's response indicate she has been included in the collective memory of World War II. Thus, intertextual and personal responses are closely related. For Rose, Jocelyn and Millie, their personal and intertextual experiences with World War II make them believe the story in the picturebook to be true. However, for other children, Grandmother's story contradicts previous experiences or worldview:

Eric: "I believe most to be true, but not all."

Mediator: "What do you not believe?"

Eric: "That they ruined the uniforms..."

Mediator: "You don't believe that?"

Eric: "No, I have heard many stories about the war. However, never that story. There were many countries to help each other!"

Leo: "Yes, there were many countries, which worked together, and, in the end, they won the war." (Excerpts of transcript during explorative dialogue, May 2021)

Eric's responses in the explorative dialogue indicate he is in the process of understanding the genre of historical fiction in which historical events are melded with plot elements that might or might not be plausible (Sipe, 2008, p. 128). Eric knows the book is based on historical facts; however, Grandmother's acts of resistance as a plot element do not constitute a historical fact he is willing to accept.

Through their **analytical responses** (cf. Sipe, 2008, p. 85) the children extensively use the pictures in their meaning-making process. Both Sarah and Kate take an analytical approach as they point out the difference between the photograph on the first page and the colorful and humorously drawn illustrations:

³ Knaben is an old molybdenum mine. During World War II, Knaben was a one of the few working mines still operating in Europe. The occupying German forces stationed 100 men there. Knaben was bombed by allied forces twice during 1943.

Kate: "I believe the story to be true. The book starts with a photograph of Grandmother. Photographs are true." (Excerpts from transcript during the explorative dialogue, June 2020)

Sarah: "I don't think the story is true. It is not for real that people have noses like this." She makes a circle in front of her own nose to illustrate how noses are depicted in the drawn illustrations in the book. (Excerpts from transcript during the explorative dialogue, June 2020)

Sarah uses a hand gesture, an embodied response, to make her analytical point. Her hand movement pinpointed how noses are drawn in the comic book style illustration (Fig. 1), thus expanding her argument. In Sipe's (2008) studies, he defines the relationship between fiction and reality as a subcategory of an analytical response (p. 126). The childrens' responses in our study evolved in a collaborative exploration of the fact-fiction interplay in which they constantly negotiated meaning through peer dialogue:

Karen: "I believe most of it to be true."

Mediator: "But not all of it? What do you think is not real?"

Karen: "That they put those things in their uniforms."

Mediator: "Why do you think the author included it in the book?"

Karen: "Because it is funny!"

Aaron looks at Karen: "If not the Germans would have killed them!"

Jill: "I believe everything, but the shirt-thing."

Mediator: "Why don't you believe that?"

Jill makes a funny facial expression: "It is weird of an old lady to do something like that."

John: "It is not weird, it is funny. But is it real?"

Agnes: "I believe almost everything."

Aaron looks around at his peers: "We know the war happened."

Mediator: "Yes, we know the war happened. You (she nods at Albert) said you had heard many stories about the war."

Albert: "I have heard some, not many..."

Ian: "I have heard loads..."

Lucas: "My grandma was very young when the war started. Every time they heard bomb planes at night (he makes a hand movement to visualize a flying airplane), her parents woke her up and they had to hide in the basement." (Excerpts from transcript during explorative dialogue, June 2020)

There are several interesting aspects in this dialogue. First, it demonstrates how the children build meaning together in a joint exploration of the book, constantly moving from one type of response to another. While Aaron seems to be having an 'in-the-story-world' response (Sipe, 2008, p. 173) with his comment: "If not the Germans would have killed them!", John is grappling with the fact-fiction relationship. John's response indicates that he knows authors can use humour as means of making the story funny. From this perspective, he does not find Grandmother's behaviour strange. However, he is not sure if it is historically accurate.

Second, the dialogue indicates that many of these pupils are ready to take on the challenge offered in the counterpointing iconotext in the picturebook and seem to be in the process of “constructing a complex understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality” (Sipe, 2008, p. 127). A challenge, if it is mastered, shows “growth and possibilities” (cf. Sundmark and Jers, 2022, p. 232).

Third, the dialogue demonstrates the role of the mediator during the explorative dialogue: Out of 15 conversational turns, three of them are made by the mediator. Two of them are follow-up questions asked to Karen and Jill to elaborate their response, and the third is to validate and connect Aaron's response to a prior response made by Albert. The mediator's role, then, is to step back and facilitate as the pupils build meaning together.

Finally, all the listed responses also include elements of embodied responses, such as gestures, facial expressions, and hand movements. This indicates how the various responses overlap, and the children's bodies are an important part of all the other responses, especially within the category of playful and creative responses.

Playful Response

Our category of playful response includes both Sipe's (2008) category of performative responses and different types of play and playfulness throughout the reading event. It includes both planned playful activities like the testing of the itching powder, and spontaneous play by the children. It also includes play not intended for an audience. The mediator herself had a playful approach to the interaction between fiction and reality. She had placed a saltbox of “itching powder” as one of the objects introduced to the pupils in the opening of the reading event. In the end, she invited them to test it:

The childrens make a line in front of her. One by one she pours a bit of powder on their necks. Peter goes first. He breathes in and out heavily a few times before he says: “It doesn't itch at all!” The mediator smiles first at Peter, then at Bob. Bob is second: “I can't feel it either...” Martin is third. He jumps around while screaming: “It itches, it itches...” The other children laugh. Peter looks at Martin: “It doesn't itch at all in the beginning...” Bob nods knowingly at Peter: “But now it does!” he says with a big smile. Four children laugh. Linda says: “This is so much fun!” (Excerpt from transcript during the end of the reading event, May 2021)

As previously mentioned, the saltbox of itching powder was one of the story elements the children questioned during the read-aloud and the explorative dialogue. Regardless, they played along and tested the itching powder with laughter. This playful and embodied experience with the challenging fact-fiction relationship ended the reading event, thus leaving the pupils in ambiguity as they exited the classroom.

Our category of playful response also includes Sipe's (2008) performative responses in which the children "enter into the text and change it at will" (p. 174) during the act of reading:

Morten looks at Ali with an excited look: "Those planes are fighter aircrafts, and the King is driving the car below. The fighters have laser inside, and they shoot". He plays out the scene with hand movements, showing how the planes move, how they shoot lasers (and the sound of it) and how the car with the King is escaping the shooting laser on the ground and screaming: "Help! Help!" Then he looks around at his peers with a wry smile. (Excerpts from transcripts during read-aloud, June 2020)

As exemplified in this excerpt of the transcript, Morten enters the story world and changes it at will when he plays out his alternative scene of events with hand gestures and dramatic sound effects. We find that playful responses often overlap with the children's embodied responses as they use their bodies to play out their responses. We also find an overlap between playful, embodied, and creative responses, for example, in spontaneous play with the objects they made in the creative workshop (Fig. 4):



Fig. 4 Children acting out scenes from the book with their handmade objects

Three boys meet on the floor with their objects. Atif, holding Grandmother, says: "Come here soldiers, I will iron your shirts!" Jacob and Peter move their figures close to Grandmother. Atif moves Grandmother back and forth in front of the soldiers and Peter stands up quickly. He runs around the classroom with his figure in front of him while screaming: "Help, help! It itches. It itches". Jacob follows Peter. They both run around the classroom once before they sit down again. Atif watches while laughing. (Dialogue written down in researcher log during the creative workshop of the reading event, May 2021)

This episode of spontaneous play shows how the childrens reenact and retell the story in their own words (cf. Flint and Adams, 2018, p. 30). The boys did not seem to pay attention to the rest of the class. They seemed deeply concentrated in the act of playing with their handmade objects.

Creative Response

Creative responses include the pupil's handmade responses constructed during the creative workshop of the reading event. Here, the children made different objects from a variety of materials. We have categorized their handmade objects into three different groups: The first group, *playful creative responses*, overlap with the playful response category. The pupils in this group made objects which they later used to play out scenes from the book. Philip's warship (Fig. 5) was one of many German warships made from old egg cartons. Philip's ship transported German soldiers away from Norway at the end of World War II. As seen in Fig. 5, the soldiers had holes in their uniforms put there by Grandmother.



Fig. 5 Photograph of a German warship leaving Norway

After making the warship, Philip and two of his peers played out scenes from the book. Their responses were creative, playful, and embodied. These episodes of spontaneous play were initiated by the children and their desire to play together. About 1/6 of the pupils made objects to play with.

In the second group, *performative creative responses*, the children used the story in the picturebook as a starting point for their own performative continuation of the narrative. James made Grandmother and the King out of clay (Fig. 6). He told the mediator that he thought Grandmother and the King became friends after they met at the award ceremony. In the photograph, the King is resting in Grandmother's lap, as he [the King] was very tired from fighting the Germans. His scene was not from the book itself but was a continuation of the narrative in the book. About 1/6 of the children were in this group.

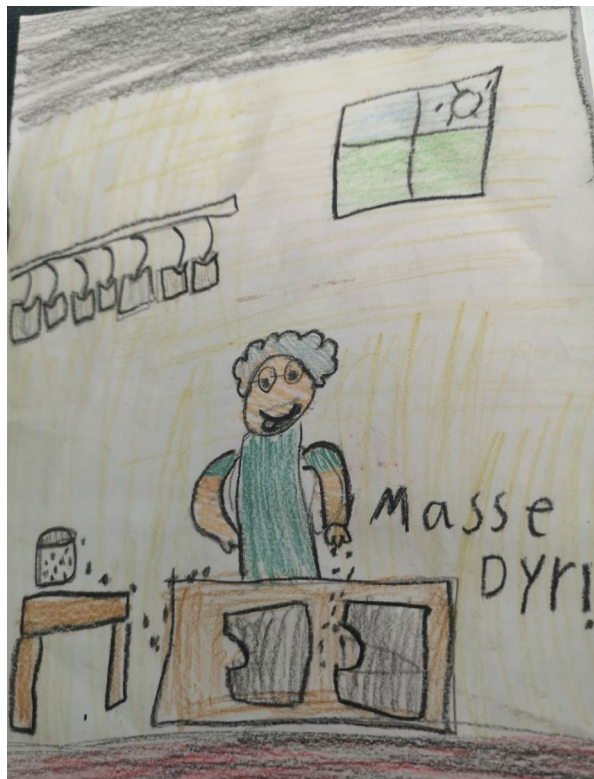
Fig. 6 Photograph of the King resting in Grandmother's lap



The third group, *analytical creative responses*, were objects made from a scene, a character or of an object from the book. Most of the pupils' objects were in this group. Here there were many different versions of the King and of Grandmother. Nadia's drawing (Fig. 7) depicts Grandmother smiling while she sprinkles the German uniforms with insects. The text in the drawing says: "A lot of animals". After the read-aloud, Nadia quickly sat down to work on her drawing, and she worked alone throughout the entire creative workshop. When the mediator asked about her drawing, she told her which scene she had decided to recreate from the book and described the details in her drawing.

In conversation with the teachers, teacher Sofia said: "I was surprised how engaged they were when they were invited to create objects of their own choice. This way, they were all able to participate, and all had handmade objects to show at the end of the lesson." Teacher Evelyn followed up: "Yes, the creative workshop includes them all." The design of the reading event allowed the children to respond to the picturebook in multiple ways, which may contribute to an inclusive learning environment in which all the children could participate, and all their responses

Fig. 7 Photograph of a drawing of Grandmother's resistance to the Germans



could be valued. As Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles (2016, p. 9) point out, young children can show their meaning-making through artistic creations even if they find it difficult to articulate their responses verbally. Also, in the creative workshop the pupils were invited to use their bodies in the process of creation, which leads us to the next category, embodied response.

Embodied Response

Embodied responses include modes like gaze, gestures, facial expression, bodily posture, and bodily movement. As we have pointed out, the pupils used embodied responses throughout the entire reading event. Hand gestures and other bodily movements helped them make and underscore their statements. They also used their bodies actively to create objects from the book and play out different scenes. Throughout the data, the children's eager enjoyment and active involvement is displayed through their bodies. Thus, our category of embodied response also includes Sipe's (2008) category of transparent responses, in which the pupils are entering the story world and have an aesthetic experience of the text during the read-aloud. Emily's waving in the introduction started as a transparent, inadvertent response: she was trying to wave the way it was depicted in the visual narrative (cf. Sipe, 2008, p. 169). For a moment she was in the story, deeply concentrated. Her waving took one minute and 25 seconds. However, her embodied response expanded Sipe's category of transparent response when she addressed her fellow pupils with a communicative intent: She waved to her peers, and they waved back to her.

During the read-aloud, the children sat still and had their eyes fixed either on the screen or on the physical book. Their facial expressions and wide-open eyes disclosed the engagement and enthusiasm they experienced. However, the video recordings reveal a difference in their embodied responses based on whether they read the images on screen or in the physical book. There was more bodily movement and social interaction in the groups that read the pictures in the physical book than those who had access to the pictures on the Smart Board screen. There may be several reasons for this difference in embodied responses. When using the physical book, the mediator sat close to the children. Reading the verbal text by heart gave her the opportunity to have eye contact and watch the pupil's responses while reading. She moved the book in half circles back and forth to make sure all the children had access to the pictures. The pupils followed the movement with their eyes and sometimes with their bodies. If a child leaned forward or stood up and moved to get closer to the book, the mediator moved the book towards them to let them see the pictures more closely. This can be illustrated in the following photographs taken from video-recordings (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 The mediator moving the book back and forth in half circles to let the pupils see the pictures in the book

When displaying the pictures on the screen, the mediator stood on the side of the Smart Board, partly facing the children, and partly facing the screen. She could still see the pupil's responses; however, she was further away and did not have the same direct eye contact with each of them individually. The children either had to look at the Smart Board screen or at the mediator. In conversation with the teachers, teacher Evelyn pointed out:

“I think showing the images in the book worked the best. Especially regarding the student's engagement in the read-aloud, and how you managed to capture their attention. They seemed much more eagerly engaged when you used the physical book.” The two other teachers nod to agree. (Excerpts from transcript during conversation, May 2021)

We will give an example of transcripts from two groups that were reading the same spread of pictures, one from the physical book, one on the screen (verbal text in bold):

She fills their pockets with insects. The Mediator moves the book in a half circle towards the childrens to let them see the picture closer. Sarah points towards the book and says: “What does it say on that box?” The Mediator looks in the book and points at the box: “It says.... Maybe you can read it?” She turns the book upside down, her finger points at the box and she moves the book towards the children in a half circle. Jenny: “Itching powder... “Kate looks at Anne and says: “Itching powder?” Mary says simultaneously to herself: “Itch and burn?” Both Jenny and Matthew look at Mary. Anne leans forward and says: “Let me see!” The Mediator moves the book towards Anne. Anne reads: “Itch and burn!” Then she looks at her peers, smiling. (Excerpts from transcript during read-aloud, June 2020)

In the excerpt, there are multiple embodied responses: Sarah is pointing towards the book while asking her question. The mediator reacts by turning the book up-side down while pointing in the book to invite Sarah and the others to read. Anne is leaning forward to see closer and the mediator responds by moving the book towards her. The physical closeness between the mediator and the children, and their desire to explore the pictures invites embodied responses and social interaction. Such a communicative situation contrasts with the reading of the same spread that was displayed on the screen:

All the childrens have eyes fixed at the Smart Board while the verbal text is being read: **She rips out buttons from their uniform jackets and soaks the skirts and pants in itching powder.** Howard nods and says: "Good thinking!" The Mediator takes a small pause (3 seconds) before she continues: **She fills their pockets with insects.** She takes another pause (3 seconds) before turning the page. (Excerpts from transcript during read-aloud, May 2021)

The observing teachers experienced an affective difference in the interaction between the mediator and the pupils. The teachers interpreted the children to be more engaged in the read-aloud with the physical book because the mediator managed to capture their attention in a different way than when the other pupil group read the images on the Smart Board screen. However, we are open to the possibility that different experiences with previous read-alouds at home or in the classroom may have had an impact on the interaction. According to Sipe (2008), allowing childrens to talk during the read-aloud is not common practice in all classrooms.

The reading event was designed for the pupils to have an aesthetic experience of the picturebook and to be able to respond to the picturebook in multiple ways. The mediator's openness for various responses allows the children to participate on their own terms. The mediator values the embodied, playful, and creative responses as well as the analytical, intertextual, and personal responses. For children, it is important to believe that their interpretation of the book is valued by the teacher (Adomat, 2010, p. 219).

Model of Children's Responses to a Challenging Picturebook

Based on our empirical findings, we have elaborated on Sipe's (2008) work on children's responses to picturebooks, and we propose an adjustment to his established model. In our model, embodied, playful, and creative responses resemble Sipe's transparent and performative response categories; however, we have found that Sipe's transparent and performative categories do not fully include all the aspects we observed in our childrens' embodied, playful, and creative responses. If we keep three of Sipe's categories—the analytical, personal, and intertextual responses—our model of children's responses to a reading event with a challenging picturebook will then consist of six overlapping categories (see Fig. 9):

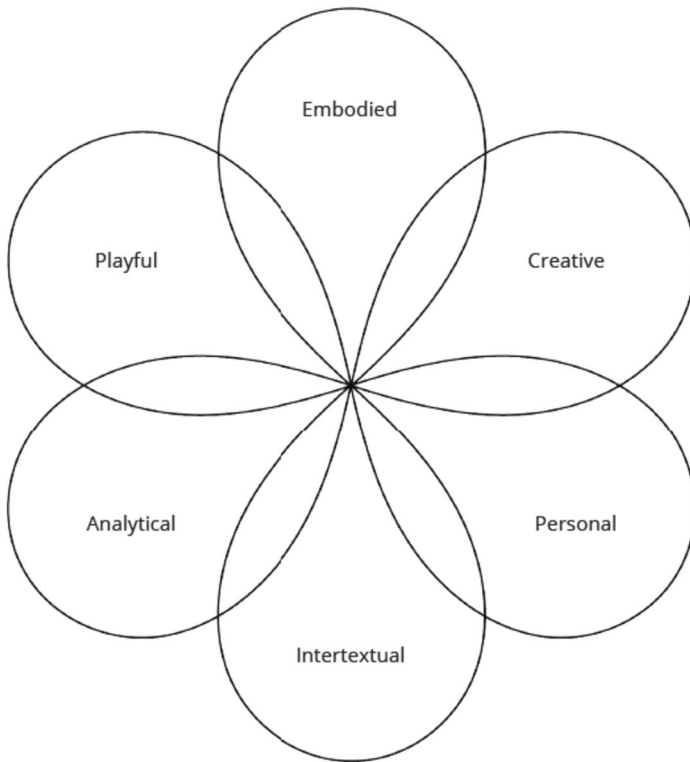


Fig. 9 Model of childrens' responses to a challenging picturebook

Conclusion

In this study, the children used both their bodies and their minds when responding to the picturebook. Their responses were playful, embodied, creative, analytical, intertextual, and personal when faced with the challenging relationship between historical fact and humorous fiction in *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*. Based on the video-taped data of the pupils' responses, we were able to adjust Sipe's (2008) model and highlight the pupils' embodied, playful, and creative responses. The children questioned the iconotext's contrapuntal interplay, and asked, "Is it real?" and "Is it true?" Furthermore, they used their previous experiences as well as the book itself to find the answers to their questions. Their interpretations drew upon intertextual references to other stories about World War II, personal experiences from places they had been, and their own family's experiences of the war. These local and familiar stories have been communicated through generations in Norway and have become part of a collective memory (cf. Assmann, 1995). The children responded with emotional engagement and narrative imagination. They lived through the story when they played; their bodies were active, and they communicated with one another verbally, through bodily expressions, including their smiles and laughter.

The mediator's facilitating and openness for a variety of responses and literary meaning-making during the reading event allowed the children to express their meaning-making in different ways, which may have contributed to an inclusive learning environment. The pupils were invited and encouraged by the mediator to actively use all their senses during the reading event. In this way, the mediator opened the floor for all the six overlapping responses (Fig. 9), not one of them valued more highly than the other. Some children expressed their meaning-making through verbal and/or embodied responses, while others expressed their meaning-making through creativity and play.

We also found that the pupils' responses and interactions differed based on whether they had access to the pictures in the physical book or on the Smart Board screen during the read-aloud. Our findings indicate that there was more bodily movement when the children had access to the pictures in the physical book. To the best of our knowledge, research is scarce in this field. In our opinion, it is essential for more research to be done on the affordances of using a physical book as opposed to a Smart Board screen, and vice versa, in picturebook read-alouds in the classroom.

The implications of our study for reading teachers are to reflect upon the purpose of the read-aloud, the selection of books, and to ask what types of responses are stimulated and valued in the classroom.

Limitations

We acknowledge the potential influence of the actively participating researcher on the classroom activities and the student's responses. The children's responses are influenced by their previous reading experiences and the circumstances of the reading event, as well as the book itself. To strengthen the validity of the study, we chose a collective, qualitative method, thus including two perspectives in the analytical phase. Each of the researchers approach the data material with her own unique eye, making sure that the richness in the selected data is visible when discussing the research question.

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