

Art Criticism and Guided Reading: A Blend of Disciplines

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Some ideas about early reading:

“Guided reading may ... include extending the text through writing, drawing, discussion, drama, or another kind of analysis” (Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons, & Fountas, 2005).

Students bring background knowledge to the text to decode meaning.

Students use visual cues within picture books to decipher text.

Within the process of guided reading, classroom teachers using picture books often ask students to predict what will happen next.

Art educators ask the same questions of students when viewing a narrative painting.

Both educators look for semiotic cues.

Children's Book Illustration Analysis

Purpose: To execute a formal and a content-based analysis of art using elements and principles of design and semiotics.

Elements and principles are a visual vocabulary.

Elements and principles are a visual construct created around the turn of the last Century by Arthur Wesley Dow. Dow wanted to create a **unified system of design**.

- **Elements:** color, line, shape, space, texture, value, space
- **Principles:** balance, emphasis, proportion, movement, rhythm/repetition/pattern, variety, and unity

The use of elements and principles in art criticism is called formal analysis.

More formal questions:

- How does the degree of `light` and `dark` effect the mood?
- How do the objects' **proportions** reinforce the message?
- How has the artist used `space` within the work to tell the story?
- How does the artist use *balance* to create harmony/**tension**?

Semiotic Analysis

However, a formal analysis sometimes dismisses content, and critics put images into cultural contexts to engage in a semiotic reading. “Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols in culture”(Smith-Shank, 2004, p. vii).

- What information would a child bring to the story to help him or her understand it?
- What visual clues does the artist give that make us ask questions about the work and to anticipate the next action?
- How is emotion conveyed through body language, facial expression, location of an object on the page, etc.?

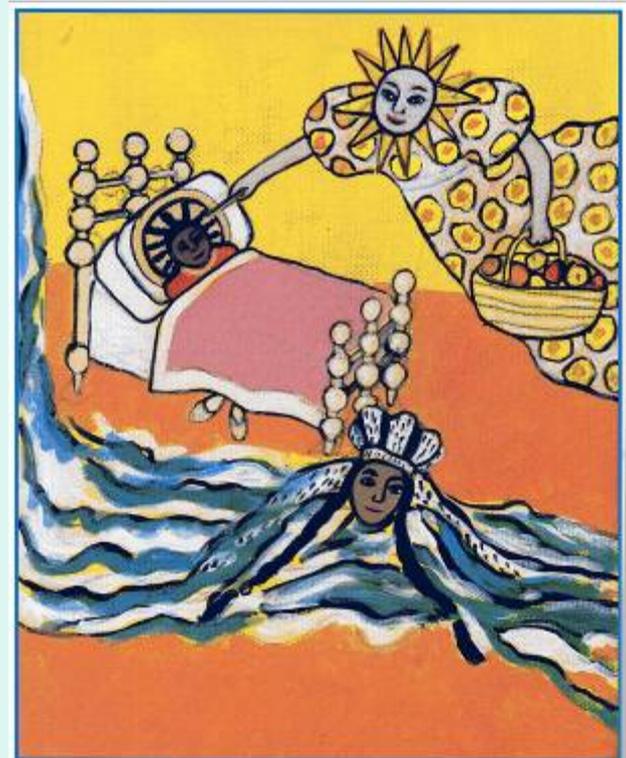
Assignment:

Write a two-page analysis of an illustration from a picture book.

- What emotion is being portrayed?
- What part of the story is it in?
- How does the artist use both art elements and principles along with cultural codes to make a statement?

The Invisible Princess by Faith Ringgold

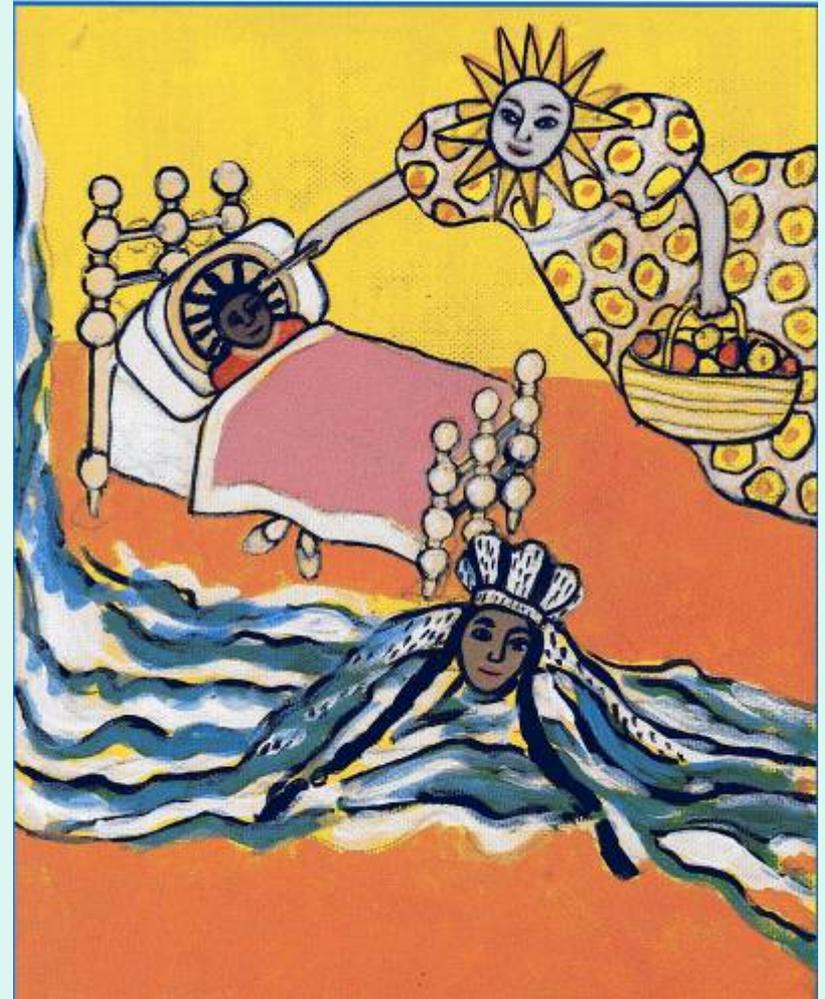
The illustration I chose was one where the invisible princess is telling her parents how she is woken up every day by the Sun Goddess with fresh fruits, and is brought fresh water from the Sea Queen. This picture has a very happy feel to it. The parents have been worried about how their child has been living and here they find that she has led a great life.



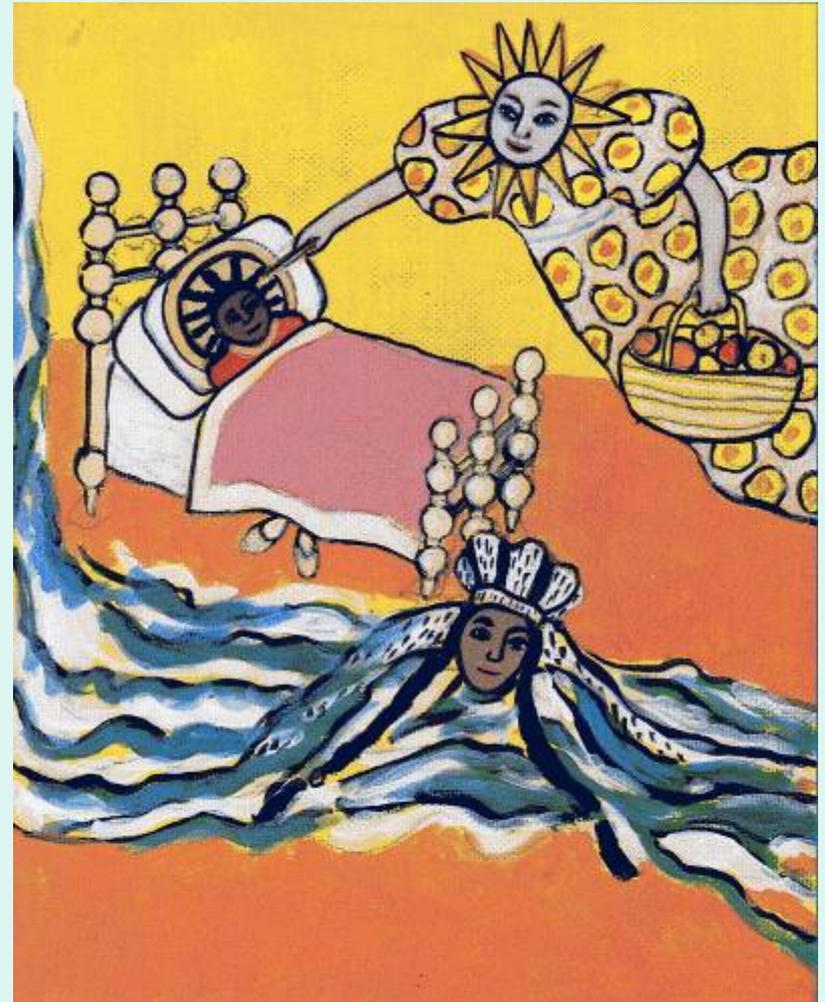
"The Sun Goddess wakes me each morning with fresh fruits and vegetables and keeps my days warm and beautiful. The Sea Queen brings me fresh water to drink and bathes me in mountain springs."

Points of Analysis

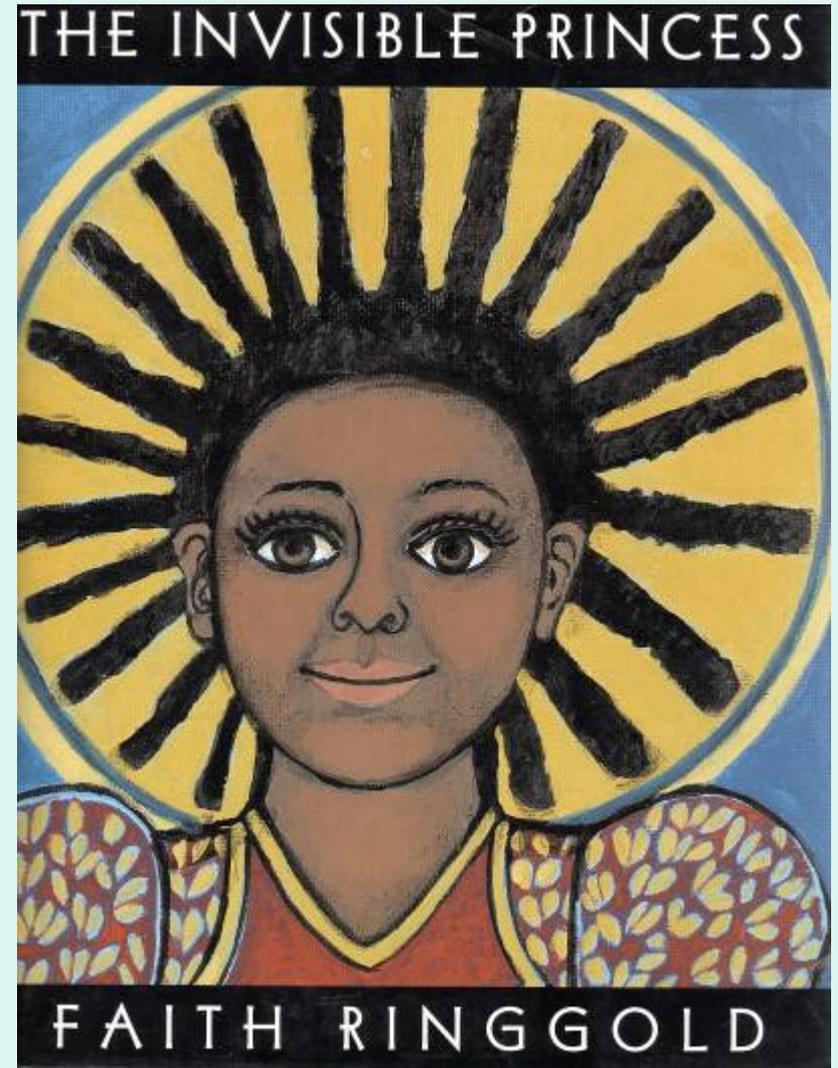
- Bright colors and yellow signify happiness. This is affirmed by the smiling faces.
- Goddesses with different skin tones suggest diversity.
- The eye is first drawn to the Sea Queen; she is painted in a darker color and stands out. She is also closest to the center of the page and is the biggest object on the page.
- The eye follows the water to the left, goes up and around the two characters in a circular motion.



- Lines are wavy, curved and thick, suggesting softness.
- Goddesses are bigger than the princess, suggesting power. They are not too big to suggest intimidation.
- Open, empty space suggests the natural outdoors where the princess was hidden
- Water flows to the right, leading you to the next page.
- The princess's halo suggests goodness.



A formal reading of an artwork, combined with a semiotic reading, broadens interpretation at any age level. Ringgold reminds us that any reading is culturally biased.



The Great Lady of Peace and the Prince of Night

