

A multimodal analysis of the representations of gender in
contemporary South African children's picture books
produced by Book Dash.

THESIS

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Abstract

In response to a demand for quality children's picture books written and published by South Africans for local children, Book Dash – a South African non-profit organisation – has devised a publishing model in which they produce high quality children's picture books in a twelve-hour period. Their aim is to publish books that represent a diverse range of South African children. However, while their objective is to create books that are representative of many races, this representation happens through gendered characters. In this thesis, I explore the representation of gender in Book Dash's picture books. I use a combination of visual social semiotics, narrative theory, and critical discourse analysis, specifically focusing on the gendered ways in which the characters are represented. My analysis of these books shows how complex it can be to contest regimes of representation that work to fix patriarchal discourses and gender inequality. My findings reveal a paradox in the representation of gender norms in female characters, as some girl child characters are represented in roles that challenge gender norms, while female adult characters are consistently represented as conforming to the patriarchal feminine ideal. There is also a notable lack of father figures in these books. Such portrayals may contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal discourses and gender inequality, particularly if these books are held up as examples of equality.

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Introduction

Book Dash, a South African non-profit organisation, was founded in 2014. It began as a “vision project” among three friends – Arthur Attwell, Michelle Matthews and Tarryn-Anne Anderson – who pooled their collective skills in and understanding of the South African publishing industry to create a new model for producing South African children’s picture books (Book Dash, 2019: 1). Book Dash was born out of a demand for quality children’s picture books written and published by South Africans for local children. Their aim is to “flood the country with new, high-quality African storybooks.” The organisation believes that every child should own one hundred books by the age of five, and it maintains that its carefully-crafted, constantly-modified lost-cost publishing model has the potential to change content-creation and access to picture books in under-resourced communities. Since 2014, the non-profit organisation has published 128 original titles. Its online library of Book Dash books contains over 450 titles – consisting of original titles and translations thereof – and with the help of partners and donations, have printed and distributed over half a million copies through Early Childhood Development centres, schools and literacy programmes. For instance, Nal’ibali – a national reading campaign driven by the Project for the Study of Alternative Education (PRAESA) in collaboration with Times Media – distributes Book Dash’s books through their country-wide reading clubs (Book Dash, 2019; Naidoo, 2014).

In order to generate their publications, Book Dash organises fast-paced, 12-hour book-making events in which creative professionals volunteer their time and talents to create new open-source African storybooks that are freely available to print, translate and distribute (Book Dash, 2019: 1). These events take place over a single day, in which teams of three volunteers – a writer, an illustrator and a designer – have 12 hours to create a 24-page children’s picture book, which is then published and made freely available in Book Dash’s online library. The books are often translated into a variety of South Africa’s official languages after they are written.

The dearth of South African-produced children’s literature can be traced through South Africa’s colonial past and the legacy of apartheid, and although the past two decades of democracy have resulted in the publication of many South African-produced books in which South African children of all races and cultures are represented, there are not nearly enough

(Naidoo, 2014: 268; Jenkins, 2006: xii; Kruger, 2012: 10; Book Dash, 2019: 2). To understand how such a paucity came about, it is important to note that historically, children's literature written by South Africans for local children has been shaped by the country's publishing trade and education departments (Jenkins, 1993: 4; Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011: 591).

History of children's book publishing in South Africa

The publishing trade of South African children's books has been influenced by both political and economic constraints from its beginnings in the early nineteenth century (Jenkins, 2006: 5). A quantitative study of the production and publication of children's books shows that while the country was a British colony – from 1806 when British settlers first arrived in South Africa, to 1961 when South Africa left the British Commonwealth – very few children's books were being published in South Africa (Labuschagne, 2009: 17). During this time, the majority of the children's books available to the English-speaking public were imported from England (Labuschagne, 2009: 17). However, there was a rise in the publication of Afrikaans children's book from 1925 onwards – the year in which Afrikaans became an official South African language, alongside English. Although some African language publishing occurred during this period in the form of teaching resources produced by missionaries for African children (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011: 590), these children's books were “characterised by intellectual, critical and imaginative mediocrity” (Mpe, 1999). During this time the market for indigenously produced books was “very small, particularly given the high rate of illiteracy among African people as a legacy of the colonial period, but also with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, particularly in response to British rule” (Labuschagne, 2009). Due to limited demand for South African-produced books, the production of these books was incredibly expensive. This resulted in locally produced English-medium books not being able to compete with the price or quality of imported titles (Labuschagne, 2009: 18).

Following the colonial era, came the apartheid era, which – with its separatist ideology – brought with it its own unique set of influences on the production and publication of children's literature in all of South Africa's language and cultural groups. Apartheid resulted in an upsurge in the publication of Afrikaans children's publication in the name of Afrikaner nationalism (Jenkins, 1993: 4; Labuschagne, 2009: 17). The import sanctions placed on South Africa by Europe and the Americas during apartheid resulted in a dramatic increase in the publication of English-medium children's books in the 1980s. As a result of the sanctions, the

South African demand for English-medium books could solely be catered for by local publishers (Jenkins, 1993: 1; Abate, 2007: 8). Apartheid legislation also brought with it the implementation of separate development and Bantu education, which resulted in low-quality books being published for black school children. These books were produced explicitly for educational purposes and not for reading pleasure or leisure outside of the school environment (Jenkins, 1993; Mpe, 1999; Edward and Ngwaru, 2011), and as a consequence, along with African societies being traditionally oral, a strong reading culture was not developed among black children during this era (Carpenter *et al.*, 2005:183).

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, publication of children's books in all of South Africa's language and cultural groups has been on the rise. In moving away from the separatist ideology of apartheid, a new focus on identity brought about "a flurry of books about young people from all races trying to come to grips with life in the new South Africa" (Carpenter *et al.*, 2005: 183). However, "South African children's literature needs readers if it is to be sustainable – and to grow" (Naidoo, 2014: 269), and the lack of a strong reading culture among the majority of South Africans poses an extra challenge for publishers (Dike, 2011: 13), and while it is a matter of contention who the buyers of children's books in South Africa are, "there is a general consensus that the book-buying public is extremely small, and limited predominantly to white consumers" (Kruger, 2012: 7).

This limited book-buying public in South Africa has resulted in the publishing trade being heavily dependent on the education sector in order for the books they publish to generate a profit (Jenkins, 2006; Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011: 591). The publishing of good quality children's books is expensive, as picture books require extensive illustration, typically in full colour, which is expensive, as are high quality paper and binding. "Publishers, in most cases, lack the assurance of sales that would justify large print-runs that are more cost effective" (Dike, 2011: 13). Because publishing children's books is so expensive and the South African market for children's books is small, having books prescribed to be used in schools offers a more attractive financial return for publishers (Jenkins, 1993: 5). In South Africa, 74% of all books published are destined for the schools' market (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008), and due to the cost of the publishing and production process of children's books, they are often subsidised by government tenders (Book Dash, 2019: 2). However, a publishing industry that has "developed to meet this demand is not

conducive to quality” (Jenkins, 1993: 5). Book Dash’s aim to create quality “affordable” children’s books was born as a reaction to this publishing environment (Book Dash, 2019: 2).

Multilingualism in South African children’s books

As a reaction to most books published in South Africa being published in English and Afrikaans, Book Dash also focuses on producing children’s books in all of South Africa’s official languages. In a radical shift from the apartheid era, the 1996 South African Constitution acknowledges 11 official languages – isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, SiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 2015: 4, Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011: 589). Although this legislative stipulation of multilingualism should offer a wide range of possibilities to the publishing industry, and “especially for those publishing in the historically disadvantaged African languages,” (Mpe, 1999), the publishing of children’s books in African languages continues to be scarce (Book Dash, 2019). The emergence of South African children’s literature in all of South Africa’s official languages is a work in progress (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011: 600), as post-colonial developing countries such as South Africa have had to develop an “established body of children’s literature in a relatively short space of time, compared to European countries where the same process has taken hundreds of years” (Kruger, 2012: 10). South Africa also has a complex attitude towards multilingualism, as “many speakers attach more credence to English than their mother tongues as the route to progress” (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011: 597; Mpe, 1999). This is unsurprising, as people of colour in South Africa have “mostly come to see their languages, in education, as agents of separatist ideology that [their] new dispensation cannot afford to promote” (Mpe, 1999).

Literacy rates in South Africa

Book Dash’s model was created as an attempt to “effectively override a seemingly impenetrable cycle of poverty and illiteracy simply by producing and giving away large numbers of high-quality, relevant storybooks to children” (Book Dash, 2019: 2). Their aim in giving away children’s books is to encourage an ethos of reading in South Africa households, as “the single most important thing parents can do to ensure that their children do as well as possible at school is to read stories to them on a daily basis” (Machet & Pretorius, 2003:8). The dearth of reading resources available to the majority of South African children has been detrimental to South Africa’s literacy rate. In the summary report on the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), results from a 2016 study showed South

Africa in the bottom position internationally, with 78% of Grade 4 students unable to read for meaning (Howie et al, 2017). Another PIRLS study showed that fewer than 50% of South African learners had access to more than 10 books at home, compared to 78% of learners internationally (Howie et al, 2008: 31). Book Dash notes that “living in poverty, with no books in their home, is the reality for 64% of all children in South Africa (Kibel et al, 2010)” (Book Dash, 2019: 2). Many homes in South Africa “have little for children to read beyond a Bible, and community libraries are rare in rural areas. This means that in order to develop grade-appropriate literacy, learners are almost completely dependent on their schools to provide them with books, and on teachers to show them how to use these books effectively. Yet, unfortunately, 92.77% of state schools nationally have no library materials or librarians” (Wright, 2012:26). Book Dash’s aim to provide children with books to keep in their homes revolves around the understanding that children learn to read both by reading themselves, and being read to in the home (Book Dash, 2019; Wolf, 2007: 3), and their model of creating and distributing high quality books for free aims to find an effective way to satisfy the need for more reading materials in South African homes.

Diverse representation in South African children’s books

In their prospectus, Book Dash states that “those who really need the uplifting power of books from a young age rarely see themselves or their languages represented” (Book Dash, 2019: 2). Given the economically privileged contexts in which most children’s literature is produced and consumed, and because much of the children’s literature available in South Africa is imported from Europe and the Americas, it is unsurprising that there is a lack of availability of diverse children’s picture books in South Africa (Haith, 2017: 114). Recent social media campaigns such as “We Need Diverse Books” and “#BooksForBlackGirls” have highlighted a global and local yearning for diverse representation in children’s books (Book Dash, 2019: 3).

When children’s storybooks are representative of multiple cultures and lifestyles, they can help children conceive of a more realistic picture of the world in which they live (Haith, 2017: 133). “By the same token, if the books to which children are exposed fail to represent the diversity of our multi-ethnic and multiracial society, they will not be serving our children and society at large” (Chall et al, 1979: 528). Diverse representation within South African children’s picture books still has a long way to go (Naidoo, 2014: 263). For instance, the first full-colour picture book published in South Africa featuring an urban black child protagonist

– Niki Daly’s *Not So Fast Songololo* – was published a mere 35 years ago. Diverse representation in South African children’s books has thus only been realised for a relatively short period of time in the approximate 200 years of South African children’s publishing (Heale, 2004; Lehman, 2014: 28; Jenkins, 2002: 6).

It is these representations of diversity which I explore in this thesis. However, it is important to note that diverse representation is not limited to the representation of multiple races, languages and cultures. Book Dash informs their writers and illustrators of the importance of representing a diversity in gender and gender roles in the production of their books by sending each writer and illustrator a document titled “What makes a good Book Dash book?”. Book Dash creates children’s books against the backdrop of South Africa’s indomitably patriarchal landscape. To this end, I will ask, “In what gendered ways do contemporary children’s picture books produced by Book Dash represent human characters, and what are the implications of these representations for gender identity among young South African readers?”

Gender equity in South Africa

As this study is concerned with the constructions of gender and childhood in Book Dash’s picture books, it is also necessary to acknowledge that South Africa’s society is indomitably patriarchal in many ways (Gqola, 2007: 113). Although South Africa’s 1996 constitution “affirms women’s dignity and rights to full humanity” (Gqola, 2007: 114), these institutional frameworks are not implemented effectively. Most racial and cultural groups in South Africa have long-standing beliefs concerning gender roles, based mostly on the premise that men are deserving of more power than women (Magubane, 2004). This is coupled with the high rate of poverty, the effects of which impact women more than men (Ebrahim, 2019). The gendered effect of socioeconomic rights violations has also led to the prevalence of violence against women on the basis of gender: between 2000 and 2015, femicide was five times higher in South Africa than the global average and in 2019 the Commission for Gender Equality met due to concern in the rise of sexual violence and gender-based violence in South African schools (Mthethwa, 2019).

Importance of this study

Representation within South African children’s picture books has received little scholarly attention (Jenkins, 2014: 3), and while there have been a few post graduate theses on the

subject, “in the absence of academic departments dedicated to the subject they will continue to be scarce” (Jenkins, 2014: 3). There are even fewer scholarly works pertaining specifically to gendered representations within South African children’s picture books. It is for these reasons that the research I am undertaking is necessary.

Chapter one

Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature that informs my study of Book Dash's picture books in general, as well as looking more specifically at the literature which enables me to situate my analysis of these texts within the discourses about gender and childhood. The chapter is situated in the constructionist approach – the notion that meaning, reality and what counts as “truth” are socially *constructed* through language (Hall, 1997; Prinsloo, 2009).

Constructionism informs my understanding of representation, discourse and gender – all of which are key to my approach to understanding how children's picture books convey meaning to and construct truth for their readers.

I present the literature in three parts: In the first part of this chapter, I review the literature on representation, and the two variations to the constructionist approach: the semiotic and discursive approaches. This broadly informs my investigation of the relationship between Book Dash's texts and their audiences. I then discuss gender, as well as childhood, both of which are social constructions that are reinforced by subjectivities constructed through gender discourses. In closing, I discuss the literature on children's media – with a specific focus on children's picture books

Part 1: Representation

The approach that I take to this research is informed by Cultural Studies' critical constructionist understanding of the relationship between media and society, drawing specifically on Stuart Hall's approach to representation. From this perspective, media representations play a central role in the production and circulation of power-relations. Media are not neutral, but rather present and validate certain ways of being while marginalising others (Prinsloo, 2003: 27; Williams, 2005: 121). How we think, act and communicate are based on what we believe to be true; and what we believe to be true is based, in part, on how media represent and mediate the outside world for us as media consumers.

Hall (2013: xix) bases his approach to representation on structuralist understandings of language, which he links to culture. He begins by arguing that we “give things meaning by how we represent them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the

images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the values we place on them.” In other words, meaning, reality and what counts as “truth” are socially *constructed* through language (Hall, 1997; Prinsloo, 2009). This understanding of representation is called the *constructionist* approach. It differs to two other approaches to understanding how language is used to represent the world – the *reflective* and *intentional* approaches (Hall, 2013: 1). The *reflective* approach avers that meaning is self-evident and that language simply reflects what already exists in the world of objects, people and events (Hall, 2013: 1). The *intentional* approach maintains that the words and images of a text mean precisely what the author of that text intended them to mean, and that meaning is simply transmitted or delivered to readers (Hall, 2013: 1).

This study is located within the constructionist approach, as this approach proposes that language can be understood and studied as a conceptual system, used to “make the world meaningful and to communicate about the world meaningfully to others” (Hall, 2013: 11). In the constructionist approach, “representation is conceived as entering into the very constitution of things; and thus culture is conceptualised as a primary or ‘constitutive’ process, as important as the economic or material ‘base’ in shaping social subjects and historical events – not merely a reflection of the world after the event” (Hall, 2013: xxi). The constructionist approach primarily focuses on the structure of a text, as opposed to the processes involved in its creation and its interpretation.

Representation is an essential component in the process of meaning-making. Hall (2013: 3) outlines two processes or systems of representation – *mental representations* and *language*. *Mental representations* are conceptual systems, or what Hall calls “conceptual maps”, which are unique and individual to each person. If we are able to interpret things similarly or have similar mental maps, we may belong to the same culture. People who belong to the same culture interpret or make meaning similarly, thereby building up a shared culture of meaning and constructing a social world to inhabit together. “However, a shared conceptual map is not enough. We must also be able to exchange meanings and concepts, and we can only do that when we have access to a shared *language*” (Hall, 2013: 4).

Semiotics and structuralism

Language is the second representational system we use to construct and convey meaning. A useful way to understand the way we construct meaning through language is what Swiss

linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, calls the structuralist approach. De Saussure defined language in two parts – the *langue* and the *parole*. The *langue* is essentially the language system or the rules and codes that the users of a language have to follow in order for communication to work (Hall, 2013: 18). The *parole* relates to particular acts of speaking, writing or drawing, produced by the actual speaker or writer through than language. “*La langue* is the system of language, the language as a system of forms, whereas *parole* is actual speech, the speech acts made possible by the language” (Culler, 1976: 29). De Saussure focuses primarily on the *langue*, maintaining that it is the social component of language, as the speakers of a language collectively agree to follow the rules and codes outlined by that language. This part of language can “be studied with the law-like precision of a science because of its closed, limited nature” (Hall, 2013: 18). Studying the structure (rules and codes) of language led to de Saussure’s approach to language being called structuralist. “Saussure’s great achievement was to force us to focus on language itself, as a social fact; on the process of representation itself; on how language actually works and the role it plays in the production of meaning” (Hall, 2013: 19).

By studying the *langue*, we can understand language as a symbolic system – a set of signs organised according to an underlying set of rules, that operates in order to create and communicate meaning. We correlate our conceptual maps with spoken sounds, written words and visual images – which Hall call signs. In order for members of a culture to understand what these signs signify or mean, they require shared codes, which attempt to “fix” the meaning of signs and enable them to decode these signs in a meaningful way (Hall, 2013:13; Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 138). These codes are constitutive of meaning, as meaning depends on the symbolic function of a sign, or as Hall puts it “it is because a particular sound or word *stands for, symbolises or represents* a concept, that it can function, in language, as a sign and convey meaning” (2013: 11). The constructionists therefore propose a relationship between the forms of expression used by language (signifiers), and the mental concepts associated with them (signifieds). Signs are arranged into language systems and through these systems, we are able to produce meaning (Hall, 2013: 13).

Discourse

There are two variants of the constructionist approach – the semiotic approach, which is primarily influenced by de Saussure, and the discursive approach, which is shaped by the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault. In this section, I work from a poststructuralist

position and explore the Foucauldian insights into the productive nature of discourse. Represented worlds, such as those in picture books, can be conceptualised as spaces where discourses propose and validate particular ways of being in the material world. Picture books house imaginary worlds that children are invited to vicariously inhabit as they read and follow the narrative of the story. I am concerned with prevailing discourses about gender and its relationship to childhood which are inscribed, repeated and normalised by children's media.

Hall draws on Foucault to better understand the process of meaning-making in relation to the production of knowledge. Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse was born as a reaction to the structuralist approach, with an aim to understand how entire systems of thought (discourses) "represent" the world. Foucault defines discourse as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (1980: 32). Drawing on this, Hall (2013: 29) defines discourse as a collection of statements which provide a means of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular moment. Foucault's ordered system relies on a relationship between knowledge and power and a collection of rules regarding what is true and false – what is included and excluded. Foucault's theory of discourse is more concerned with the production of knowledge than with meaning-making: "Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect" (Hall, 2013: 29).

This conception of discourse is not a linguistic one; instead, it attempts to bridge the gap between what one says (language) and what one does (practice) (Hall, 2013: 29). Discourse defines and produces the objects of our knowledge, and governs the way a topic can be meaningfully discussed and reasoned (Hall, 2013: 29). Thus discourses constitute our knowledge, values and attitudes, and so have material effects through our actions on ourselves and on others. In Foucault's terms, discourses are productive, as all knowledge and power are created within discourses. The productive nature of discourse means that discourses define and produce the objects of our knowledge by constructing the topic and regulating the way it is talked about (Foucault, 1982); it produces particular kinds of knowledge or 'truth' and operates to produce a 'regime' of truth, for example, the "truth" pertaining to childhood.

At the same time, the discourse also simultaneously produces the subject of the discourse, in this case, the child (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013: 5). Discursive subjects are “figures who personify the particular forms of knowledge the discourse produces” (Hall, 2013: 40). We become discursive subjects by subjecting ourselves to the meanings and principles of the discourse (Hall, 2013: 40), and in consonance with the discourses that we encounter (for example as gendered beings), we train ourselves to act in specific ways (Prinsloo, 2003: 27). The discourse governs the choices we make as subjects, and thus governs our behaviour.

Elaborating on Foucault’s notion of the subject, Janks (2010, 34) maintains that, “in making choices, we draw on the discourses we inhabit, such that many of the ‘choices’ that we make are social choices that are learned and are often unconscious”. Subjects make these choices through the process of identification (Hall, 1996: 2; Hall, 2013: 312), which is constructed through recognition of common characteristics we share with a group or an individual. Through the process of identification, we construct our identities. The construction of identity involves

the production of self as an object in the world, the practices of self-construction, recognition and reflection, the relation to the rule, alongside the scrupulous attention to normative regulation, and the constraints of the rules without which no ‘subjectification’ is produced (Hall, 1996: 13).

As well as producing subjects, discourses produce subject-positions – what Hall calls “the place for the subject” (Hall, 2013: 40). The subject position is the place from which the knowledge and meaning that is particular to that specific discourse makes sense. However, Hall also notes that it is not inevitable that all persons within a particular period will become the subject of a particular discourse, and thus the bearers of its power and knowledge. Instead, subjects must locate themselves in the position from which the discourse makes the most sense, and thus become subjects by subjecting themselves to its meanings, power and regulation (Hall, 2013: 40). All discourses produce subject-positions, from which alone they make sense (Hall, 2013: 40). Subject-positions are validated by the discourses that produce them (Hall, 2013: 40; Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013: 5), and so “the subject is conceived as produced within discourse (for example as a girl or boy) and also subjected to it” (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013: 5).

As post-structuralists observe, nothing human is outside of discourse (Connell & Pearce, 2015: 83); or, as Hall expresses it, there is no meaning outside of discourse (Hall, 2013: 39). At the same time, meanings bear the traces of the social processes by which they were made. It so follows that in the subsequent section, I discuss gender and childhood – both of which are socially constructed through discourse. As childhood and gender are located as social constructions which are inscribed through practices of representation and lived social relations, the discourses of childhood and gender work to regulate the embodiment of subject positions in ways that are sometimes conflicting (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013: 5). As discourses, they are subject to change and herein lies the relevance of investigating the ways in which they are currently inscribed.

Part 2: Gender and childhood as social constructions

Every society has conventions which govern people's behaviour (Janks, 2010: 34). Children's picture books can be understood as a space in which different discourses propose and validate particular ways of being and behaving to their readers. Children's media is often didactic in nature so as to encourage children towards socially acceptable behaviour (Nodelman, 2005: 135). Because the intended audience of picture books is by definition inexperienced – as they are still in the process of learning how to think about the world, and how to see and understand themselves and others – picture books can be a significant means by which we integrate young children into the discourses of our culture (Nodelman, 2005: 131). Children take on the lessons they learn through the media they consume and learn to negotiate these media discourses within the discursive frames they have at their disposal.

Crucially, as with all cultural practices, discourses are not fixed, nor are they totally determining (Prinsloo, 2003: 27). While there may be hegemonic discourses, these are contested by a range of competing discourses that offer alternative ways of understanding the world. However, because we are constituted as subjects through the range of discourses we have at our disposal, media play a central role in this discursive work. Media are one of the institutions through which prevailing discourses (including those of childhood and gender) are regulated, normalised, and – in some instances – contested (Prinsloo, 2003: 27).

Gender

The world in which we live is gendered in many ways. Many languages are gendered, and most societies are organised according to a gender order. Thus, the media we consume and produce is reflective and representative of these gendered structures. Being labelled “a girl” or “a boy” can be one of the most important aspects of a child’s experience in the primary years of her or his life. Through interaction with parents and other children, as well as exposure to the gendered narratives represented in the media with which they are presented, a child learns very quickly what it means to be a girl or boy, and how to differentiate gendered behavioural patterns (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001; Lemish, 2008: 156).

This process of learning behavioural patterns is called socialisation. Socialisation is the process whereby individuals “are taught the skills, behaviour patterns, values, and motivations needed for competent functioning in the culture in which the child is growing up” (Maccoby, 2007:13). Socialisation is a life-long process which requires social interaction and results in the internalisation and attainment of rules, roles, norms and values in the social, personal and cognitive sphere (Handel, 2006). A child is born with ascribed statuses such as sex or race. However, throughout his or her life, a child will learn how to cooperate and interact in society, and this learning takes place through the process of socialisation. “Apart from family and school, the media form the most significant arena in which prevalent discourses of gender are made available to children, repeated and normalised. Connell reminds us that social institutions such as the media reproduce the relations of power that suffuse our societies” (Prinsloo & Boshoff, 2008).

Gender is a process of organising social life in a particular way (Connell, 1991: 140). Connell (1991) maintains that there are three ways in which gender is used to organise social life: gender as a social structure, gender regimes, and the gender order. As a social structure, gender places constraints on social practices. Connell defines the social structure as “a fundamental relationship that is not immediately present in social life but underlines the surface complexity of interactions and institutions” (1991: 93).

Gender is a unique kind of social structure, as it relates to biological differences. Gender can be defined as “the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes”

(Connell & Pearse, 2015: 11). Connell and Pearse aver that this definition has important consequences. Among them,

gender, like other social structures, is multidimensional. It is not just about identity, or just about work, or just about power, or just about sexuality, but about all of these things at once. Gender patterns may differ strikingly from one cultural context to another, and there are certainly very different ways of thinking about them. (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 12).

These social structures are sustained by the gender regimes and the gender order. Gender regimes are patterns in gender arrangements within institutions. Connell (1991) outlines three institutions: street, state and family. However, these regimes are a part of wider patterns that endure over time (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 73). These wider patterns are called the gender order. “The gender regimes of institutions usually correspond to the overall gender order, but may vary from it. Change often starts in one sector of society and takes time to seep into others” (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 73).

The gender order is a historically constructed pattern of power relations which – using the categories of man and woman – proposes different identities for masculine and feminine subjects respectively. Through interaction with parents and other children, as well as exposure to the gendered narratives represented in the media with which they are presented, children quickly learn what it means to be a girl or boy, and how to differentiate gendered behavioural patterns (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001; Hust & Brown, 2008). Through the process of socialisation, our gendered identities are formed gradually and incrementally over time (Lemish, 2008: 157). Children’s media can play an important role in the child’s perceptions of what it means to be male or female, and representations of gendered behaviour in children’s media can shape what we know and understand about ourselves and others (Hust & Brown, 2008: 98; Prinsloo, 2003; Prinsloo & Boshoff, 2008).

Both the gender regime of an institution and the gender order of an entire society take the form of social relationships (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 73). Social relationships are ways in which people, groups and organisations are linked and divided. The social relationships proposed by the gender order and gender regimes are what we refer to as ‘gender relations’. Here it is important to note that while gender relations involve the relationships between women and men, they also involve the relationships between men and men, as well as women and women. Gender relations are not enforced on members of a society, but rather are,

constituted in routine interaction. People engaging in everyday conduct – across the spectrum from conversation and housework to interaction styles and economic behaviour – are held accountable in terms of their presumed ‘sex category’ as man or woman (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 73).

Connell outlines three key structures of gender relations, which work as a useful framework for understanding and examining gender relations, and how – as a social structure – gender is able to shape and constrain social practices. These three key structures are: the division of labour, power, and cathexis. I will focus primarily on two of these structures: the division of labour and cathexis. Connell and Pearse (2015: 78) maintain that the sexual division of labour is common,

perhaps even universal, through recorded history. But while gender divisions are common, there is not exactly the same division in different cultures or at different points of time. The same task may be ‘women’s work’ in one context, and ‘men’s work’ in another.

The division of labour is a structure that has historically divided men and women into the public and private sectors respectively. In the private sector, women are seen as domestic and unwaged, while men – who are in the public sector – are waged. The division of labour is part of “a larger system, a gender-structured system of production, consumption and distribution” (Connell, 1991: 103). This organisation of labour associates economic benefits with men and not women, and even though more women have become equal earners outside the home, they still tend to do more work in the household as well. While the division of labour constantly being changed and challenged,

men and women continue to occupy different roles in society. Over the past 50 years, women have increased their participation in male-dominated roles, such as assuming more responsibility for the economic support of the family. In contrast, female-dominated domains have shown less change. Men have not assumed significantly greater responsibility for caretaking or household work, which continue to be performed disproportionately by women (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004: 374).

What Connell calls the structure of cathexis is a major element in any gender regime and gender order (Connell, 1991: 99). In keeping with Foucault’s understanding of structures as reflective of and able to reinforce dominant interests, cathexis is premised on the

acknowledgement of sexuality as socially constructed (Connell, 1991: 111; Maharaj, 1995: 60). Cathexis refers to the category of structures about sexuality (Maharaj, 1995: 61). While the structures within Connell's conception of cathexis can be used to understand many issues – such as the patterning of object-choice, socially structured antagonisms of gender, and heterosexuality and homosexuality – I use it here to understand family dynamics and the emotional relationships involved in child rearing (Connell, 1991: 97). A structural feature of cathexis is institutionalised heterosexuality, which plays a role in the construction of the 'ideal' or nuclear family (Maharaj, 1995: 63). These structures make way for ideas such as the father as 'the head of the household' (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 76). Connell and Pearse aver that "the power of husbands over wives, and fathers over daughters, is an important aspect of the structure of gender. This is still an accepted idea in much of the world" (Connell & Pearse, 2015: 76).

Patriarchy

Like all power relations, the gender order relies upon creating categories which are used to include and exclude (Connell, 1991). However, gender is a "social structure of a particular kind – it involves a specific relationship with bodies" (Connell, 2015: 11). Gender, then, is a structure of social relations that centres on reproductive differences between the members of a culture. The gender order makes use of the biological categories of 'male' and 'female' to determine the social actions of 'men' and 'women' (Connell, 1995: 137). Connell proposes that patriarchal societies are premised on masculine and feminine identities being distinct from one another. Patriarchal societies privilege a particular form of masculinity – hegemonic masculinity – which is constructed in relation to other subordinated masculinities, as well as various femininities. Hegemonic masculinity is complemented by what Connell refers to as emphasised femininity, which is defined by subordination to, and an orientation to fulfilling the interests and desires of, men (Connell, 1987: 183; Prinsloo, 2003: 28). The gender order proposes a gendered division according to binary oppositions where, for example, masculinity is constructed as powerful, physical and rational, and located in the public sphere (Connell, 1991: 122). Femininity is characterised as passive, dependent and emotional, and located primarily in the domestic or private domain (Connell, 1991: 122). It is important to note that expectations of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviours differ across different societies and cultures.

Prinsloo (2009: 207) explains that patriarchy is a discourse that,

also has its knowledge that counts as ‘truth’. Its initial premise is that biological sex differences result in different and unequal capacities for women and men. These differences are understood as essential or natural and, therefore, the idea of gender differences being the result of social or cultural processes is rejected as false. This concept of discourse includes not only ideas but the range of social practices that reinforce those ideas as knowledge or ‘truth’

For the investigation described in this thesis, I consider the ways in which girl and boy children are portrayed within a patriarchal frame – or otherwise, by drawing on an alternative gender discourse. For example, I will identify whether the children are primarily in the care of the mother, the father or depicted in the nuclear family – the institution that typifies the modern patriarchal grouping in capitalist cultures.

Learning Gender

People within a culture typically learn about gender roles and expectations in at least three ways. First, cultural expectations about gender are conceived of and distributed through gendered institutions such as family, workplaces, schools and media. These gendered institutions reflect the idea that gender is present in the process, practices, images and ideologies and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life (Connell, 1991: 120; Hust & Brown, 2008:99). The nuclear family, for example, is traditionally organised with different roles for the father and the mother, “and schools and workplaces tend to be run by men and have different expectations of what can be achieved by boys and girls and men and women” (Hust & Brown, 2008: 99). Media are also gendered institutions – “e.g. the decision-makers are more likely to be male than female” (Hust & Brown, 2008: 99) – and media are able to disseminate images and information reflective of the gendered discourses within the culture – “e.g. women are passive and submissive, males are active and dominant” (Hust & Brown, 2008: 100). A culture’s gendered discourses as reflected in these institutions are then reproduced through interactions between individuals and groups in a process sometimes referred to as “doing gender” (Hust & Brown, 2008: 100).

Stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity are perpetuated by the consistent gendered portrayals of men and women, boys and girls, in popular culture media. Repetitive and continuous gender images in the media consistently reinforce certain values and norms in children from a young age. Nodelman describes how the reinforcement of specific gendered

values can work implicitly in children's picture books when he describes an image in *Mr Gumpy's Outing*:

one of the children, the one with the long hair, wears a pink dress, while the other has short hair and wears shorts and a top. In terms of the behaviour of the actual children, both might be girls; but a repertoire of conventional visual codes would lead most viewers to assume that the child in shorts is male – just as we assume that trouser-wearing figures on signs signal men's washrooms, skirt-wearing figures women's washrooms (Nodelman, 2005: 132).

So the gendered narrative structures in children's picture books are able to replicate and reinforce normal and natural representations of the patriarchal gender order.

Children's media plays an important role in the child's perceptions of what it means to be male or female. Representations of gendered behaviour in children's media shapes what we know and understand about ourselves and others. "The ways in which particular forms of masculinity and femininity are framed and naturalised over time through story, contributing ultimately to the wider maintenance of the gender order" (Prinsloo & Boshoff, 2008).

The constructed nature of early childhood in this mediated world

"Children's literature and the conception of childhood are intrinsically linked, the former necessarily being the outcome of the authors' and illustrators' perception of their audience" (Abate, 2007: 6). Childhood as we understand it is a relatively modern concept, and the biological and social category it adopts only emerged toward the end of the 18th century (Kincaid, 1998; Prinsloo, 2003: 27; Prinsloo & Moletsane: 2013: 6). Kirkland defines childhood as a "mythical refuge from the angst of the modern era" (2017: 27). The notion of childhood draws on an ideal of the child as in a state of innocence and purity, and works from the understanding that the child ought to be protected from "premature exposure to the corruptions of society to have a chance of developing naturally" (Prinsloo, 2003: 27). Before this conception of childhood emerged in the West, children were seen as small-scale adults who entered their given social status at birth (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013: 3; Prinsloo, 2003: 27). For complex reasons related to the emergence of modernity in the western world, "childhood came to represent a refuge from the stresses of the adult modern world, a moment of simplicity, sanctuary and innocence from modern knowledge and understandings. The

result is a tendency for children's media to obfuscate its origins in modernity" (Kirkland, 2017: 263-264). In this discursive construct, the child is seen as uncorrupted and innocent.

However, when we accept childhood as socially constructed, it is also important to recognise that multiple constructions occur. Hunt maintains, "The notion of childhood changes from place to place, from time to time, and the history, definition, and study of childhood as a concept has burgeoned in recent years" (2005: 3). There is no one homogenous construction of childhood, and "those accounts that render childhood as homogeneous are structuralist in that they explain childhood in relation to larger social processes such as socialisation within specific settings" (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013: 5). As this study is informed by the poststructuralist position, it is important to recognise that because subjective identities are socially constructed and produced through discourse, they are therefore not fixed and are open to contestation (Prinsloo & Moletsane, 2013).

Like all media, children's picture books are able to reinforce or subvert social constructions. The characters in picture books represent "little men" and "little women" (Diekman & Murnen, 2004: 373) with whom child audiences can identify. Diekman and Murnen maintain that even if the worlds and characters in these books are fantastical,

even though stories may take place in chocolate factories or academies of wizardry, literary adventures educate children about what is expected and valued in the real world (2004: 373).

It follows, then, that in the following section, I critically discuss picture books and how the multimodal medium is able to convey meaning – as well as attitudes and values to its readers.

Part 3: How picture books work

Picture books are typically perceived to be "the province of the very young, or pre-literate child – a simple form that is beneath serious critical notice" (Nodelman, 2005: 134; Hunt, 2005: 1). However, beyond this surface understanding, they are multimodal texts that embody many codes, styles, textual and narrative devices, and intertextual references, and frequently push the boundaries of convention. The 'picture book' combines text and image to convey meaning in interesting ways, which I will critically discuss in the following section.

The process of meaning-making is an intricate process that depends on many larger units of analysis, such as narratives, statements, groups of images and discourses which operate across areas of knowledge and subjects. A reader's ability to make meaning of such texts is conditioned by what he or she already knows, and by the availability of that knowledge during the reading process (Hunt, 2005:7; Nodelman, 2005: 129). Janks illustrates this point, saying,

think for example of how much social and linguistic knowledge is necessary for a listener to interpret a remark as racist or sexist. What does the listener have to know about the meaning or choice of words, the pattern of intonation used, the sequence of information? What does the listener have to know about the speaker? What does the listener have to know about the structures of subordination in the society? What does the listener have to know about the social conventions and the context? What past experience and personal history does a listener have to bring to such a remark? How do listeners know how to combine their linguistic, personal and social knowledge? (Janks, 1998: 195).

We develop this linguistic, personal and social knowledge over time through our interactions with a range of texts and social institutions. This knowledge can be impacted by many different things, such as cultural and linguistic upbringing, and the kinds of media with which we come into contact throughout our lives. Young children are still undergoing the process of learning about and acquiring language as they use it (Hunt, 2005: 7) and are therefore "less able and less likely to critically evaluate media content, [so] its influence is potentially of greater consequence for them than it is for adults" (Whally & Chester, 1988: 89).

Children are often regarded as vulnerable and impressionable (Lemish, 2008: 153). However, despite still being in the process of developing the linguistic, personal and social knowledge, as Janks (1998:195) outlines, child readers are active makers of meaning, who use their shared codes to understand the media with which they are presented. While child audiences are capable of making meaning, it is important to note that young children's meaning-making abilities have limitations. For Lemish (2008: 154) these include:

limited information-processing capacity; difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality; tendency to centre attention on the intermediate and concrete; difficulty understanding causal relationships and transformations over time; as well as difficulty assuming others' point of view.

As children grow, they overcome these limitations as they continue to construct knowledge through their actions on the world through assimilation of new experiences and accommodation of existing ones (Lemish, 2008: 154). This attempt by Lemish to explain consciousness as the end product of socialisation is particularly useful in my discussion of media in the lives of young children.

As children are less able than adults to critically evaluate media content and representations, its influence is potentially of greater consequence for them than it is for adults (Greenberg & Mastro, 2008: 89). Children's books, and picture books in particular, are a primary media through which children become literate. The representations within these books are therefore an important way in which children learn their language and culture and come into contact with ways of thinking about their place in society. A picture book consists of a combination of visual images and verbal texts. Children are provided with such books on the assumption that pictures communicate meaning more naturally and more directly than words, and are therefore able to aid young readers in making sense of the written texts they accompany (Nodelman, 2005: 128). "[P]icture books are commonly assumed to be the province of the very young, or pre-literate child – a simple form that is beneath serious critical notice" (Nodelman, 2005: 128). However, closer examination reveals them as complex texts that embody many codes, styles, textual and narrative devices, and frequently push the boundaries of convention.

Children's picture books convey meaning through the use of two kinds of communication: visual and written (Nodelman, 2005: 128). In semiotic terms, we could say that picture books communicate by using two separate sets of sign forms: the iconic and the conventional (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 1). Iconic or representational signs are those in which the signifier and the signified are related by common qualities; that is, where the sign is a direct representation of the signified (Hall, 2013: 7) – for instance, a tree in a photograph has leaves that appear similar to those of a physical tree. Conventional or indexical signs on the other hand, "are based on an agreement among the bearers of a particular language – both spoken language and communications, such as gestures, dress code and emblems. For anyone outside the given community, conventional signs do not carry any meaning" (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 1). For instance, the word "tree" represents a physical tree in English, as opposed to the word "umthi" in isiXhosa. These signs have no clear relationship to the things to which they refer, or as Hall says "the meaning is constructed by the system of representation" (2013:7).

Images in picture books are complex iconic signs and the words in picture books are complex conventional signs (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008: 171; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 1). These two sign systems work together, as the two have different functions. The function of pictures (iconic signs) is to describe or represent, and the function of words (conventional signs) is primarily to narrate. The pictures ‘illustrate’ the text, meaning that their purpose is to show the reader what is meant by the words, so that the young reader can come to understand the world outside the book in terms of the images within it (Nodelman, 2005: 131). However, both the verbal text and the visual text have gaps in the way they convey meaning (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 2). Nikolajeva and Scott maintain that if the words and images in picture books were to fill each other’s gaps wholly, there would be nothing left for the reader’s imagination, and the reader would remain somewhat passive (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 17; Hunt, 2005: 6). However, as we have already established, child audiences are active participants in the process of meaning-making (Buckingham, 2008: 227).

As children learn, “they become not simply biological individuals but cultural subjects” (Hall, 2013: 8). Media can be powerful and influential in the way children learn about social norms and values: children model, imitate and adopt the behaviours that they observe in their social environment – this environment includes family, school, and media with which they are presented (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1977; Postman: 1979). Picture book stories, like most narratives, “forcefully guide readers into culturally acceptable ideas about who they are through the privileging of the point of view from which they report on the events they describe” (Nodelman, 2005:134). Such narratives offer children subject positions: in occupying them, they are provided with ways of understanding their own subjectivity – their selfhood or individuality. So the fictional representations of characters in children’s books have a powerful socialising effect on young children (Mumme & Fernald: 2003: 221), and identification with media characters can play a crucial role in the universalisation and internalisation of certain values. However, while picture books can certainly exist for fun, “they can never be said to exist without either a socialising or educational intention, or else without a specific orientation to who uses them” (Abate, 2007: 14; Stephens, 1992: 158).

Conclusion

This chapter reviews the literature that enables me to situate my analysis of Book Dash’s picture books within the context of representation as a signifying practice. I have discussed

the variants of the constructionist approach: the semiotic approach and the discursive approach, elaborating on how discourses work to produce subjects. I have also discussed the ways in which childhood and gender are constructed through discourse in order to understand how these constructions are represented, and thus reinforced or subverted through their representations in Book Dash's picture books. Finally, I discussed picture books as multimodal texts, and how they work to convey meaning to their audience.

Chapter Two

Methodology, methods and research design

In the previous chapter, we established that because children's picture books convey meaning through the use of two sign systems – written language and visual images – they constitute multimodal texts. Book Dash's picture books are also storybooks, so each book has a narrative structure. As Book Dash's picture books convey meaning through visual images, written language and narrative, the methodological framework used in my study is threefold. For the visual analysis portion of this study, I use visual social semiotics and the grammar of visual design (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) to aid me in unpacking how the visual elements of these picture books convey meaning to their audience. To understand how the written language in the books convey meaning, I draw on the elements of lexicalisation and patterns of transitivity in the books (Richardson, 2007; Halliday, 1985; Fairclough, 1989: 110; Janks, 1997). These two elements of Critical Discourse Analysis aid me in identifying patterns that emerge across the linguistic elements of the texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1990: 87; Janks, 1997: 335). To understand the meaning made through the narrative structure of the books, I draw on Todorov, Propp and Levi Strauss' respective narrative theories (Propp, 1968; Richardson, 2007; Prinsloo: 2009).

I present this chapter in two parts: In the first part of this chapter, I discuss this social research as a qualitative study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 28) which is located within Cultural Studies, and assumes the constructivist position that meaning is constructed in and through language (Hall, 2013: 1). In the second part of this chapter, I describe the three methods of analysis I use in this study: Visual social semiotics, elements of critical discourse analysis, and narrative theory.

Part 1: Qualitative methodology

Social researchers systematically collect and analyse data, and carefully assess the patterns within them in order to understand and explain social life and social reality. Social researchers commit to an ideal known as the epistemic imperative – which is the aim to generate “results and findings which are as valid and truthful as possible” (Babbie & Mouton,

2001: 8). There are two distinct approaches used by social researchers to generate truthful knowledge: quantitative and qualitative research.

The research in this thesis is a qualitative analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 28). Qualitative research methodology is a way of studying our social reality that emphasises conducting detailed examinations of cases that arise in the natural flow of social life, with an attempt to present “authentic interpretations” of social life contextualised within specific social-historical circumstances (Neuman, 2007: 85). However, we can better understand this very basic definition by assessing qualitative research in terms of its underlying philosophical position. *Qualitative* methodology developed in reaction to positivism and quantitative methodology, and is informed by the *interpretivist* or phenomenological philosophical position. *Quantitative* methodology is informed by the philosophical position of *positivism*, which posits that “investigating the social and cultural world is no different in principle to investigating the natural world and the same basic procedures apply to both” (Deacon et al, 1999: 4). In contrast to positivism, the interpretivist tradition emphasises “that all human beings are engaged in the process of making sense of their (life) worlds. We continuously interpret, create and give meaning to, define, justify and rationalise our actions” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001a: 28). Therefore, according to this position, social researchers should take into account that actors within the social world are constantly constructing, deepening and changing the way that they interpret the world. By focusing on social actors, and their context, qualitative researchers aim to generate in-depth descriptions and understanding of the social world (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 270).

In contrast to the positivist approach – where the researcher believes that all knowledge about the social world is observable from the outside – interpretivist researchers believe that the epistemic imperative is best met when research is done ‘from the inside’. Interpretivist researchers are therefore committed to seeing the social world from the point of view of the actor due to the qualitative researcher’s “preference for a contextual understanding so that behaviour is to be understood in the context of meaning systems employed by a particular group or society” (Bryman, 1984: 78). A focus on the contextual interaction of the research subjects could limit the qualitative researcher’s potential to create research that can be generalised. However, because qualitative research is primarily concerned with answering ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions – in contrast to quantitative research’s focus on answering ‘what, where, when and who’ questions – this flaw is often overlooked.

The validity of qualitative research is sometimes questioned, “because it would not, and often could not, comply with the requirements set out by researchers from the quantitative paradigm” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001b: 274). Because of this, qualitative researchers conceptualise their own notion of objectivity by equating objectivity with trustworthiness, and asking the question, “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including him or herself) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to or worth taking account of?” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001b: 276). Trustworthiness is outlined by four prerequisites: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility asks whether the research is compatible with the lived experiences of the research subject, and this is accomplished when the researcher takes their findings back to the research subject to check the validity of the findings. Transferability refers to whether the findings can be applied to different contexts or to different research subjects. Dependability posits that a study should provide its reader with evidence to prove that if the study were to be repeated within a similar context, and with similar research subjects, it would yield similar findings. And finally, confirmability “is the degree to which findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001b: 277-278). By making use of these rules, qualitative researchers are able to make sure that their research and findings are in keeping with the epistemic imperative.

A strength of qualitative methodology is its focus on in-depth understanding and descriptions of social life, as well as its ability to answer how and why questions. It also focuses on understanding the social world within its specific social context, meaning that there is a much more thorough understanding of the social actor than in quantitative research. In order to establish an in-depth understanding and analysis of the picture books I am studying in this thesis, I use three qualitative methods of analysis: Visual Social Semiotics, Critical Discourse Analysis and Narrative Theory, which I will critically discuss in the following section.

Part 2: Methods of analysis

Visual Social Semiotics

“Thinking of picture books in semiotic terms is our most valuable tool in coming to understand them” (Nodelman, 2005: 131).

Multimodal texts, such as picture books, consist of a “tight coupling” of words, images and shapes in a unified unit of communication, and all three of these elements are involved in the reader’s process of meaning-making (Harrison, 2003: 46). For this reason, the primary methodological framework used in my analysis is visual social semiotics (Harrison, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Visual social semiotics is often applied to multimodal texts, and works on the understanding that an image is “not the result of a singular, isolated, creative activity, but is a social process. As such, its meaning is a negotiation between the producer and the viewer, reflecting their individual social/cultural/political beliefs, value and attitudes” (Harrison, 2003: 47). This approach was developed by Kress and van Leeuwen in their seminal work *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), which draws on Michael Halliday’s (1978) theories of textual and socio-linguistic analysis. Halliday’s work conceptualises language as a semiotic system, “not in the sense of a system of signs, but a systematic resource for meaning” (Halliday, 1985: 192).

Halliday’s theory of systemic functional grammar proposes that all semiotic systems must be able to perform three simultaneous tasks, or what he calls *metafunctions*. First, semiotic systems must have the ability to represent experiences or perceptions of the world; secondly they must have the ability to project relations (attitudes, feelings or judgements) between the producers and receivers of that sign; and thirdly, they must have the capacity to form organised, coherent complexes of signs or texts. The first – the function of creating representations – he calls the *ideational* metafunction; the second – the role that language plays in the creation of interactions between a text and the readers of that text – he calls the *interpersonal* metafunction; and the third – the mechanisms within the texts that bring together the first two metafunctions into a coherent text – he calls the *textual* metafunctions (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 140).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) adapted Halliday’s grammar, and developed a framework used to analyse visual texts. Their “Grammar of Visual Design” (1996) similarly outlines three meta-semiotic tasks – or metafunctions – that create meaning. These metafunctions are: the *representational* metafunction – what is being said; the *interactive* (also sometimes called the interpersonal) metafunction – the relationship between the creator of the text, the

represented participants¹, and the viewer of the text; and the *compositional* metafunction – how meaning is conveyed through the layout of the image. Harrison (2003) simplifies these metafunctions by identifying what each metafunction is asking: the representational asks, “What is this image about?” (50); the interpersonal metafunction asks, “How does the image engage the viewer?” (52); and the compositional metafunction asks, “How do the representational and interpersonal metafunctions relate into a meaningful whole?” (55).

Within each of these metafunctions, producers and viewers of visual texts use their *semiotic resources* to construct and interpret meaning (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 140). The term semiotic resource is a key concept in social semiotics, in fact van Leeuwen (2005: 3) describes it as the “actions and artefacts we use to communicate”. It is similar to the term *interpretive repertoire*, outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987: 139) when they refer to the ‘building blocks’ used by members of communities to produce and understand texts.

Any particular repertoire is constructed out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 172).

The term “interpretive repertoire” – which is similar to what social semioticians call “semiotic resources” – consists of signifiers that the readers or viewers of a text use to make sense of texts as they read them (van Leeuwen, 2005: 4). Social semioticians stress that the meanings attached to these semiotic resources are not fixed (similarly to the nature of codes, as discussed in the previous chapter), but are affected by their use. And while meanings are not permanent or inevitable, the field of possible meanings is often restricted (as established in the previous chapter’s unpacking of discourse and representation) because those who have cultural power are able to create and perpetuate the conventions of visible representation which tend to favour specific interpretations, readings, or decodings over others – thereby limiting the meaning potentials created by the use of certain semiotic resources (Hall, 2013: 29; Aiello, 2006: 90).

¹ ‘Represented participants’ is a semiotic term used to refer to the people, places and objects within an image (Harrison, 2003: 50) and I will be using it this way.

Social semiotics sees all visual texts as having been constructed to perform specific actions or “semiotic work” (Aiello, 2006: 90). Its main interest is thus to investigate how various textual strategies are harnessed to construct particular messages. The use of the term semiotic ‘resource’ rather than ‘code’ distinguishes it from conventional semiotics – which emphasises rules or conventions linking signs and meaning. Some forms of visual communication work according to strict rules and their meaning are therefore highly motivated. Traffic lights – for example – operate via established rules which allow little room for imaginative interpretation. However, in contrast, many forms of modern art are created with the intention to be interpreted and read in many different ways, as they allow for openness in reading. (Jewitt & Oyama, 2002: 134). Some readers of these images might attempt to interpret them by referencing rules and conventions, but this will depend on their “interpretive repertoires” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 139). The social semiotic perspective acknowledges that different cultural conventions apply in different contexts. By using the word ‘resource’ rather than ‘code’, social semioticians are able to account for “change and power imbalance in the visual signification process as defined by its two ends: representation (or, encoding) and interpretation (decoding)” (Aiello, 2006: 90). The word ‘resource’ is useful in the context of visual social semiotics, because it can be used when talking about the resources drawn on by both the producers and readers of texts.

Resources are also discursive – meaning that they are not natural but have, instead, developed over the course of history in order to prioritise specific interests and functions (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 136). Up to this point, I have discussed social semiotics in general as a system. From here, I will elaborate on it as a system of meaning-making and interpretation, with specific reference to the Book Dash books that I analyse in the following chapter. The analysis of the images within Book Dash’s books can be conducted using the visual social semiotic framework outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996).

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) draw on specific semiotic resources within each metafunction in order to create a range of meaning potentials. I will elaborate on each. First, the *representational metafunction* is in the first instance conveyed through the people, places and objects (represented participants) depicted in an image – with a specific focus on the manner in which they are depicted, and the relationships between them and other represented participants (Harrison, 2003: 50). This metafunction answers the question, “What is the picture about?” (Harrison, 2003: 50). It is important to note that images are space-based

semiotic environments, and the ‘syntax’ of the elements within an image are determined by where they are placed, and whether or not they are connected in any meaningful way – for example through lines (vectors), colour, shape and so on (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141; Harrison, 2003: 51). There are two basic structures within the representational metafunction. The first is where participants are related to one another in terms of unfolding action, events or processes (Harrison, 2003: 51). These kinds of relationships create narrative representation. In contrast, the second structure is conceptual representation, in which participants are not represented as doing something, but rather as “being something or meaning something or belonging to some category or having certain characteristics or components” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001: 141). It is possible for conceptual representations to be embedded within narrative processes, thus for the two structures to happen concurrently (Harrison, 2003: 52).

The second metafunction, *interactive meaning* – also sometimes referred to as *interpersonal meaning* – is concerned with the associations among the participants in the production and those viewing the image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 119). This metafunction answers the question, “How does the picture engage the viewer?” (Harrison, 2003: 53). Three main semiotic resources are used in the creation of symbolic relationships. First, spatial distances are related to emotions of social intimacy and distance, and in visual texts this is represented by the size of a person within a frame, and how close the represented participants seem to the viewer of the image. If people are depicted close-up, this creates the effect of a symbolic relationship of closeness and intimacy. Conversely, if we see people from a distance, the viewer of the image may feel that they relate to the represented participant more as a stranger. Second, contact refers to the manner in which the people within an image look at the viewer (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 123) explain that when the represented participants within an image look directly at the viewer, this creates a demand picture – that is, the represented participant symbolically demands some kind of relationship with the viewer. What exactly is being demanded is dependent upon facial expressions and gestures: for example, a person depicted looking down on the viewer could demand the viewer’s attention and respect.

The third semiotic resource – point of view – relates to the manner in which the frontal angle can be used to create a symbolic relationship and degree of viewer identification and involvement with the represented participants within visual texts. If the position of the reader

is looking up at an element in a composition, then that element has potential symbolic power over the viewer; in contrast, if they are positioned at a similar level to that element, then a sense of equality between them is evoked (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 146). Jewitt and Oyama note that these notions of power and involvement are not the fixed meanings of these angles within an image. Instead, they are simply “an attempt to describe a meaning potential, a field of possible meanings, which need to be activated by the producers and viewers of images” (2001: 135).

The *compositional metafunction* is the third metafunction outlined by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 181-229). The compositional metafunction answers the question, “How do the representational and interpersonal metafunctions relate to each other and integrate into a meaningful whole?” (Harrison, 2003: 55). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) suggest that four semiotic resources operate within this metafunction. First, the *placement* of the represented participants within an image affects their role in the compositions. Whether a represented participant is placed to the left or right, upper or lower portion, centre or margin of the image can invoke particular cultural meanings. For example, if a represented participant is positioned on the right of an image, they are often regarded as representing accepted knowledge or truth – something which is common sense. Represented participants on the left can be understood to depict an issue or a possible solution. Elements placed at the top of an image are seen as ideal, while those placed in the nether region of the image are seen as real or more down to earth (Harrison, 2003: 57). Represented participants in the centre of an image are often seen as the “nucleus of information to which surrounding elements are subservient” (Harrison, 2003: 57).

A second resource within this metafunction is *framing* – the way in which represented participants are framed can indicate whether they are understood to be part of a group, or given separate identities within a composition (Harrison, 2003: 58). Frame lines or dividing lines are the most obvious way of creating disconnection – but elements such as empty space, and contrasts created by the use of colour, form, and tonal value can also be used to create discontinuity within a visual text. Conversely, connection can be achieved by the exact use of the same elements to signal similarity as opposed to contrast.

Salience – a third semiotic resource – refers to the way that some elements are made more eye-catching than others. The most obvious ways that salience is used are size and

foregrounding. The larger a represented participant is, the more noticeable it will be. Similarly, components of the image which are placed in the foreground are likely to be more noticeable than those in the background. However, a designer or illustrator could also make use of similar techniques to create salience as those used to create framing. A designer or illustrator's use of sharpness of focus, tonal variation and contrasting colours are ways of manipulating the salience of various participants and can also be used to modify the salience of a large or foregrounded participant (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 183).

The final semiotic resource within the compositional metafunction is *modality* (Harrison, 2003: 588), which refers to whether an image feels valid or reliable. Images with a higher modality appear to be more real than those with lower modality. Markers of modality – which normally run along spectrums of possibility (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996:165) – include colour saturation, differentiation and modulation, contextualisation. Harrison posits that while some images may appear more realistic than others, the meaning constructed through a realistic image such as a photograph might not necessarily read as more valid or truthful to a viewers than an illustration.

The analytical framework I have described above provides researchers of visual texts with a systematic way of analysing those texts which is “effective in bringing out [their] hidden meanings” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2003: 154). However, on its own it does not offer all that is needed for the social interpretation of images children's picture books. Consequently, in order to answer the research question posed in this study – In what gendered ways do contemporary South African picture books produced by Book Dash in 2018 represent human characters, and how do we understand these representations in the context of South Africa's gender inequalities? – I draw on Foucault's notion of discourse (Hall, 1997: 44-51) and the method of critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis: Transitivity and Lexicalisation

In the previous chapter, I discussed discourse as a system of rules and practices for the construction of meaning – a set of representational codes (including a specific interpretive repertoire of concepts and tropes) used to construct particular forms of reality (Hall, 1997: 44; Prinsloo, 2009: 126). Foucault posited that knowledge and power are linked through discourses to maintain those versions of reality – how “knowledge was put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall,

1997: 47). Knowledge, then, is inextricably linked to power as it is employed for the prescription of social conduct (Hall, 1997: 46; Prinsloo: 2009: 127).

Foucault's interest in the relationship between knowledge and power provides us with a useful tool for analysing texts, namely critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is informed by Foucault's notion of discourse: a "critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice" (Janks, 1997: 329). It is a method of analysis which aims to explain the relationship between language, ideology and power by examining discourse in its material forms – ie texts (Janks, 1998: 195; Prinsloo, 2009: 126). Vital to CDA is the understanding that language is an active process, "it is always directed at doing something; and the way in which language achieved this activity is related to the context in which it is being used" (Richardson, 2007: 12). Texts are understood to be deliberate actions, and are the products of choices made by their producers, as well as the social contexts in which they are produced (Prinsloo, 2009: 126).

Similarly to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), Fairclough (1989, 1995) developed his approach to CDA by adapting some of the principles from Halliday's *Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1985). Fairclough's model for analysing texts that consists of three simultaneous functions, namely the *experiential*, *expressive* and *rational*. The *experiential* value of a text describes how the producer of that text "experiences the natural and social world" (Fairclough, 19889:112), and also accounts for the construction of systems of knowledge and truth. The *expressive* value looks as the construction of social identities and how the producer constructs reality in the text, and the *relational* value looks at the social relations represented in the text (Fairclough, 1989: 112). Fairclough outlines a series of key questions, which relate to linguistic texts, but can also be applied to multimodal texts (Fairclough, 1989: 110-111). To answer these questions, a researcher using CDA systematically examines: lexicalisation; patterns of transitivity; the use of active and passive voice; the use of nominalisation; choices of mood; choices of modality or polarity; the thematic structure of the text; the information focus; and cohesion devices (Janks, 1997: 335).

From Halliday's list of questions, I chose to focus on the elements of lexicalisation and transitivity. These two elements aid me in identifying patterns that emerge across the linguistic and visual elements of the texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1990: 87; Janks, 1997:

335). I chose to focus on these two elements because – of all the grammatical aspects I analysed – they yielded the most fruitful data.

Transitivity can be defined as,

A fundamental property of language is that it enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them ... Our most powerful conception of reality is that it consists of ‘goings-on’: of doing, happening, feeling, being. These goings on are sorted out in the semantic system of the language, and expressed through the grammar of the clause (Halliday, 1985: 335-336).

Transitivity aids researchers in describing the relationships between the represented participants and the roles they play in the processes described in texts (Richardson, 2007: 54), so “the study of transitivity is concerned with how actions are represented” (Mills, 1995: 143). The study of transitivity has to do with the choice of verbs that the producer of a text chooses to use. Richardson avers that “in producing texts there is a range of choices to be made, and every text which has been produced could have been produced differently” (2007: 54). By analysing the choice of verbs used by the producer of a text, one is able to identify various processes that are enacted by the represented participants, or done unto the represented participants. To do a transitivity analysis it is necessary to identify every verb and its associated process, and then to identify patterns in the use of these processes.

Halliday outlines six processes of transitivity to identify and analyse: material, verbal, mental, relational, behavioural or existential (Halliday, 1985; Janks, 1997, 335). Richardson narrows this down to four principle processes: *verbal*, *mental*, *relational* and *material* (2007: 54), which are the most useful in identifying which processes the Book Dash characters which I am analysing are represented performing. *Verbal* processes are represented by verbs such as speaking or shouting. *Mental* processes are represented by verbs such as thinking or deciding. *Relational* processes of being are represented by verbs such as have, see and be, and involve a represented participant as well as an attribute – for example: ‘I have x’; ‘You see y’. Finally, *material* processes are represented by verbs such as pushing or attacking, and can be categorised into two categories: transitive and intransitive.

Transitive material processes involve two or more represented participants – for example: ‘He waved at her’ – whereas intransitive processes involve only one represented participant –

for example: '*He waved*'. The producer of a text's choice of verb can affect the reader's understanding of the represented participants. In fact, Richardson states that "transitivity forms the basis of representation" (2007: 57). However, it is important that a textual analysis does not "overstate the effect that a choice from the transitivity system can have on textual meaning"(Richardson, 2007: 57). This is especially true of a multimodal text, in which meaning is derived from multiple representations.

In my use of CDA, I also draw on lexicalisation to understand how connoted and denoted meanings are articulated by the choice of words used to tell each story (Richardson, Janks, 2007: 333). The study of lexicalisation refers to the analysis of the choice of words in a text. While transitivity focuses solely on the choice of verbs, lexicalisation focuses on the choice of nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs (Richardson, 2007: 47). Richardson outlines two useful frames to applying lexicalisation to a text. The first is 'naming and reference', which has to do with how the identities of a represented participant are represented through the text. He elaborates on this by saying, "We all simultaneously possess a range of identities, roles and characteristics that could be used to describe us equally accurately but not with the same meaning" (2007: 49). Through this use of lexicalisation, producers of a text are able to produce 'us and them' binaries, or lean into certain connotations. The second frame proposed by Richardson is 'predication', which aids in analysing the representation of the values and characteristics of represented participants in a text. Richardson defines this as "the very basic process and result of linguistically assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events, actions and social phenomena" (2007: 52). Predication can also be used to create hero-villain binaries through their representation of characters. Another useful tool in understanding how these choices impact meaning is narrative analysis.

Narrative Theory

Narrative has been identified – alongside language – as one of the primary ways in which we make sense of the world (Prinsloo, 2009: 130). Throughout history, narratives have played a central role in children's lives, and "story is described as both a universal means of making sense of the world and as a vehicle for others to make sense of the world for us" (Prinsloo & Boshoff, 2008). The stories children encounter take place in socio-cultural landscapes, and are narrated in specific ways which can mean that some characters and scenarios are valued and included while others are excluded or made "other" (Prinsloo & Boshoff, 2008).

As gender is the primary concern of this study, in my analysis I pay particular attention to the roles played by the characters within Book Dash's books, in order to identify who *acts* and who is *supportive* (one of two binary oppositions inherent in Connell's gender order discussed in the previous chapter). To do so, I employ the character roles identified by Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp, which frequently inform narrative analyses. I combine Propp's method with two others – Levi-Strauss and Todorov. These three theories are structuralist in nature (Prinsloo, 2009: 130), and thus make visible the discursive characteristics within the texts I am studying.

Structuralist approaches to narrative can be either syntagmatic or paradigmatic. "The syntagmatic type of analysis identifies and describes the structure of the formal organisation of the text following the ... linear sequence of the narrative events", while "a paradigmatic type of analysis seeks to identify the deeper, latent patterns or organisation which underpin the story" (Prinsloo, 2009: 131). Making use of the three narrative theories I have selected gives me a holistic understanding of the narrative structures of Book Dash's books, as Todorov and Propp's theories are syntagmatic models of analysis, while Levi-Strauss's theory is paradigmatic. In combination, these three methods of narrative analysis enable a deeper analysis of texts than when used in isolation.

Todorov's narrative theory describes narrative as a causal transformation which unfolds over five stages, namely: a state of equilibrium at the outset, a disruption of this equilibrium by a form of action, the recognition of this disruption, an attempt to repair this disruption, and the restoration of a new equilibrium (Prinsloo, 2009: 132). It is important to note that the second state of equilibrium is never identical to the first, but is instead altered in some way. There are two central principles to Todorov's approach: causality and transformation (Prinsloo, 2009: 132). The causal principle means that all events in the narrative are in a "relationship of cause and effect: one action causes another" (Prinsloo, 2009: 132). Linked to this is transformation, which refers to the narrative's concern with aiming to rectify the disruption of equilibrium which sets the narrative in motion. Prinsloo (2009) notes that Todorov's theory is especially useful in the beginning stage of a narrative analysis, as the application of this narrative aids the researcher in understanding how the narrative has been structured in fairly simple terms.

Vladimir Propp's narrative theory also proposes a detailed breakdown of events that constitute a narrative (Prinsloo, 2009: 135). Propp's theory was developed in relation to folktales and fairy tales. However, in contrast to Todorov's five stages of narrative, Propp proposes 31 sequential possibilities for a narrative structure. These possibilities fall under six categories or stages: first, the stage of preparation; second that of complication; third, transference; fourth, struggle; fifth, return; and finally – sixth, recognition (Prinsloo, 2009: 127-128). Propp also proposes seven character roles: the hero, the donor, the helper, the princess, the dispatcher, the villain and the false hero. Each of these character roles function within a sphere of action, and have a specific purpose. The *hero's* action is a departure in search of something, and their purpose is to seek to restore equilibrium. The *donor* “gives or provides the hero a magical agent” (Prinsloo, 2009: 137), and their purpose is to provide the hero with the objects that will aid the hero in restoring equilibrium. The *helper* – as its name suggests – helps the hero to move the action of the narrative towards resolution, and this role's sphere of action includes rescuing the hero from pursuit, solving difficult tasks, or making good a lack. The *princess's* purpose is to lead the narrative to its climax, and is depicted as the hero's reward as an object of marriage (Prinsloo, 2009: 137). The *dispatcher* sends the hero on their mission. The *villain* causes harm to the hero or a member of the hero's family, and in doing so, blocks the action and complicates the narrative. The *false hero* – like the hero – departs on a quest and reacts to a donor, but makes unfounded claims, which results in their appearing to be good, but eventually being revealed as flawed.

Prinsloo (2009) points out that the two syntagmatic approaches I have outlined – those of Propp and Todorov – overlap in many ways, and are useful when used in tandem. However, in order to effectively perform a narrative analysis, I combine these two syntagmatic approaches with Levi-Strauss's paradigmatic approach. The combination of these three frames of analysis enables me to undertake a thorough discursive analysis in the following chapter.

Levi-Strauss's paradigmatic theory and approach to narrative analysis focuses more on the “underlying rules and codes that produce or construct meaning” (Prinsloo, 2009: 141) than on the surface content upon which syntagmatic approaches tend to focus. Levi-Strauss's primary focus was that of binary oppositions, which he identifies by analysing relations of similarity and difference between characters, settings and actions. “These unresolvable contradictions can be expressed as a tension that exists between two poles – for example, good and evil,

wealth and poverty, or male and female” (Prinsloo, 2009: 141). Levi-Strauss uses this method of analysis to identify the abstract generalisations which underpin the myths which he examined. Researchers employing this method are able to identify underlying tensions within the narrative by examining the oppositions. Applying the lens of binary oppositions to a text can aid the researcher in understanding who and what the producer of that text values and does not value. “The text thus rehearses shared schemas of understanding, and dominant discourses often appear as common-sense or as natural” (Prinsloo, 2009: 141).

Conclusion

Understanding and analysing how multimodal texts – such as picture books – make meaning requires a combination of methodological frameworks. To analyse Book Dash’s picture books, I have proposed the use of three frameworks: visual social semiotics, critical discourse analysis, and narrative theory. In the following chapter, I apply these methods of analysis to six picture books, in order to understand and critically analyse the gendered way in which Book Dash’s characters are represented.

Chapter 3

Analysis

In this chapter, I present my analysis of seven picture books produced by Book Dash, which were published in October of 2018. I noted in my introduction that gender-focused studies of South African children's picture books are relatively scarce. In order to grow the academic work on this subject, I draw on the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 1 and the research methods and methodology of visual social semiotics, critical discourse analysis and narrative theory presented in Chapter 2. The chapter is divided into two parts – the first is a broad description of the narrative structure within the seven picture books. In this section, I make use of Propp's character roles, which establishes a base understanding of how the writers, illustrators and designers of these books use a combination of image, text and narrative to create meaning potentials. In the second part of this chapter, I consider in detail the discursive patterns I have identified through my analysis of the picture book elements, related specifically to gender representation. It is the analysis of these patterns and discourses that make up the bulk of this chapter.

My analysis focuses on a sample of seven picture books produced by Book Dash. My process of selecting this sample was fairly simple. I wanted to analyse a selection of books that was small enough for the analysis to be contained within the confines of a master's thesis. As Book Dash's books are produced in events that take place every few months over a single day, I decided to analyse the books produced by Book Dash in October of 2018 – which was the most recent Book Dash event at the time that I undertook this research. Nine picture books were produced on this day, but two of the books were about animals, and as my research's focus was on gendered representations, I omitted these two books from my sample. This left me with a small sample of seven picture books. Prinsloo calls a small sample such as this a "snapshot", which is the "product of a deliberate action on the part of the person who, to continue the photographic metaphor, clicks the camera; it is not a 'window on the world' but is framed and focuses on what it aims to include within the frame" (2003: 26).

The process of reading a picture book could be represented by a hermeneutic circle, as whether the reader begins by reading the written language or visual image first, both elements

create “expectations for the other, which in turn provides new experiences and new expectations. The reader turns from verbal to visual and back again, in an ever-expanding concatenation of understanding” (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006: 2). In this analysis, I keep in mind that when reading multimodal texts such as picture books, readers see all the elements – written, visual and narrative – as a whole. This is key to analysing multimodal texts, especially when one intends to employ multiple methods of analysis, as becoming fixated on specific elements can skew one’s understanding of how meaning is encoded and decoded through these texts.

Part 1: General description and analysis

In this section of this chapter, I analyse seven picture books, each of which constitutes a multimodal text. Each also follows a linear narrative which is told through a combination of two sign systems; visual images and written language (Serafini, 2010: 85).

All books produced by Book Dash follow the same structure: they are square in dimension, and consist of a cover, a bookplate – a page containing the words “this book belongs to” and a space in which the book’s owner can write their name – and 24 pages on which the story (text and illustrations) is printed. Each of the books is designed to be read in full colour. The books’ covers depict the respective protagonist/s of each picture book, representing them through visual images which are placed in the bottom portion of the image, while the books’ titles are placed in the top portion of the image. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 164) propose that elements placed in the top portion of an image represent the *ideal*, and offer a sense of what might be imagined, while elements in the bottom portion of an image represent the *real* or factual – offering the viewer truth and information. The combination of real and ideal on these covers invites the readers of these books to enter various imagined worlds that are grounded in reality.

The seven books – *Auntie Boi’s Gift*, *The Great Cake Contest*, *I don’t want to go to sleep!*, *Dance, Mihlali!*, *What’s at the Park?*, *Mali’s Friend*, and *Let’s have an inside day* – all have child protagonists, and each of the books includes at least one parental figure, who forms a part of the narrative. The first step of my analysis is a narrative analysis of the seven books. I briefly describe and analyse the narrative structure of each book, focusing specifically on the roles assigned to each character according to Propp’s character roles, as locating the

characters within these roles aids me in identifying patterns in the gender roles and stereotypes represented. I begin by presenting a short summary of each book, and then outline the character roles embodied by the books' respective participants.

Auntie Boi's Gift (see Appendix A) chronicles a day trip embarked upon by two sisters – named Kopano and Rea – and their mother. In this tale, the family unit of three drive into Johannesburg to collect a package that the sisters have been sent by their Aunt Boi, who lives in Kenya. As they drive into the city, the girls speculate about what their gift might be, drawing inspiration from the various landmarks they pass. They arrive at the post office and sit on the floor to open their gift. To their surprise, the box does not contain any of the gifts that they thought they might receive, but instead, their Aunt Boi has sent them Maasai dolls from Kenya. The story ends with their mother taking a photograph of them and their new dolls to send to their aunt. The tale is illustrated using bright colours, which are accompanied by black sans-serif typography to tell the story.

This story centres around four characters: Kopano, Rea, their mother, and their Auntie Boi. I identified both Kopano and Rea as the heroes of the story according to Propp's character roles, as their function in the narrative is an embarkation on a quest in search of something – in their case, their aunt's gift. Their mother helps the two heroes to move the action of the narrative towards the resolution of acquiring the gift; I thus identified the mother character as occupying the helper role. I identify Aunt Boi – who is never depicted pictorially in the book – as occupying the donor role, because she “gives or provides the hero a magical agent” (Prinsloo, 2009: 137).

The Great Cake Contest (see Appendix B) tells the tale of Lucky – a boy who endeavours to win a cake baking contest which has come to town. Lucky comes up with many ideas for cakes he could bake to win the competition, but each time he comes up with an idea, a friend of his has already beat him to it. His mother, father and sister then help him bake a cake which is so big that it falls and covers everyone at the contest. However, once the judges eat their way out of the cake in which they have been covered, they declare Lucky the winner of the contest. This tale is illustrated using bright colours and hand-drawn illustrations, which are accompanied by black sans serif typography to tell the story.

In this story, I identify Lucky as the hero, and his mother, father and sister as his helpers. Lucky drives the narrative forward through his quest to win the contest. His three family members are the helpers in this story, as they help the hero to move the action of the narrative towards resolution by aiding him in solving the difficult task of deciding what cake to bake, and baking it. None of the family members are depicted pictorially in this book.

As the title suggests, *I don't want to go to sleep!* (see Appendix C) follows Nandi and her mother, as Nandi repeatedly tells her mother that she does not want to go to sleep. Her mother concedes to Nandi's pleas, and together they make up various imagined worlds, animals and scenarios for Nandi to visit until Nandi falls asleep; after which her mother tucks her into bed, where she is free to dream up any adventure she pleases. The tale is illustrated using bright colours, which are accompanied by black serif typography to tell the story.

In this tale, the protagonist Nandi occupies the role of villain in terms of Propp's character roles, because her action of not wanting to go to sleep puts a barrier in the way of her mother, who occupies the role of hero. The mother figure's quest as the hero is to move the action of the narrative towards resolution by rescuing Nandi from her obstinacy, eventually leading to a resolution of the conflict when Nandi falls asleep.

The book *Dance, Mihlali!* (see Appendix D) follows a young ballerina named Mihlali who has a big concert coming up but she is worried that she will forget her choreography. Despite her mother helping her practice, she does not feel confident about the performance. Her grandmother – who was a ballerina in her youth – sends her a gift, which she initially refuses to open. When she does open the gift, she finds that her grandmother has sent her a pair of ballet slippers. Encouraged by the gift, she practices and performs her dance perfectly at the concert, which her grandmother watches, complimenting Mihlali on her dancing. The tale is illustrated using bright colours, which are accompanied by black sans-serif typography to tell the story.

According to Propp's character roles, Mihlali takes on the role of hero, as she drives the narrative forward in her quest to do well at her dance performance. Her mother takes on the role of helper, as she moves the action of the narrative towards resolution by helping Mihlali overcome various obstacles. Mihlali's grandmother occupies the role of the donor, as her purpose in the narrative is to provide the hero with the objects that will aid the hero in

restoring equilibrium – in this case the pair of shoes that encourage Mihlali to practice for and succeed at the performance.

What's at the Park? (see Appendix E) is about a girl named Zoey, who lives with her grandmother. She and her grandmother visit the park every afternoon. Zoey is shy and her hearing is impaired, while her grandmother's sight is impaired. Zoey is very good at finding things – such as birds, bugs, flowers and tall trees – in the park. One day Zoey's grandmother can hear something in the park and sends Zoey to see what it is; Zoey finds a dog. After giving the dog a wash, Zoey and her grandmother feel they have found a new friend to play with at the park. The tale is illustrated using bright colours, which are accompanied by black sans-serif typography to tell the story.

In terms of Propp's character roles and functions, Zoey is the hero of this story, as she drives the narrative forward through her adventures in the park. Her grandmother is the helper, as she helps the hero to move the action of the narrative towards resolution – in this case by making good a lack as Zoey is hearing-impaired, while her grandmother is not.

Mali's Friend (see Appendix F) follows a shy boy named Mali, who lives with his grandmother and enjoys playing by himself, but not with other children. His grandmother encourages him to play with the children in his neighbourhood, but despite his best efforts, he does not enjoy himself. One day, Mali's neighbour Lesedi invites him to play with her, and they teach each other all sorts of new games. They become fast friends, and his grandmother is pleased. The tale is illustrated using bright colours, which are accompanied by black sans-serif typography to tell the story.

The titular character, Mali is the hero of this tale, in terms of Propp's character roles, as his quest to make friends drives the narrative forward. His grandmother, called 'Gogo' – the isiZulu word for grandmother – occupies the role of the dispatcher, whose function is to send the hero on their mission. And Lesedi plays the role of hero's helper, as she makes good a lack by inviting Mali to play with her, and ultimately becoming his friend, therefore aiding him in the completion of his quest.

Let's have an inside day (see Appendix G) is about two siblings whose names are not revealed. One rainy day, they spend the day inside, entertaining themselves by eating exciting

foods, dressing up like their father, playing fun games, and entertaining themselves around their home until nightfall, when they fall fast asleep, “because an inside day is a busy day.” The tale is illustrated using bright colours, which are accompanied by black sans-serif typography to tell the story.

In *Let's have an inside day*, the unnamed two children – depicted stereotypically as a boy (in a blue and green shorts and t-shirt outfit, with short hair) and girl child (in a purple dress with her hair styled in two puffs) – simultaneously occupy the role of hero, with their quest being to still have fun despite not being able to go outside. The father is merely mentioned as somebody the children dress up as, and not depicted pictorially through the illustrations, so I do not identify him as occupying any character role in this narrative. Locating the children's mother in a character role is difficult. My analysis places her in the role of villain, as she functions to block the actions of the story's heroes, and complicates the narrative.

Part 2: Gender discourse patterns in Book Dash books

Through the initial analysis detailed above, I identified various patterns which emerge across the narratives within the seven books I have studied. To get a more detailed understanding of how gender is represented through Book Dash's picture books, in this section of this chapter I pay particular attention to the roles played by the main characters. Specifically in this regard, I look to identify who acts and who is merely supportive (one of the binary oppositions outlined in Connell's gender order, discussed in Chapter 1), and I employ the character roles identified by Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp to this end (Prinsloo, 2009: 135). I thus consider the frequency with which male and female characters act in the role of hero, hero's helper, etc. As Propp focused on the various spheres of action the characters inhabit, his character roles provide a useful approach for analysing the sets of masculinities and femininities inscribed in these texts. I expand upon this narrative analysis by also using visual social semiotics and the elements of critical discourse analysis I outlined in my second chapter: lexicalisation and transitivity. The combination of these three methods of analysis aid me in generating in-depth descriptions and understandings of the gendered worlds represented in Book Dash's picture books (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 270).

Using Propp's character roles as a framework, I found that within the books I analysed, the characters fell neatly into five of the seven character roles outlined by Propp. Perhaps due to

the limited nature of these books – by this I mean that they are produced in a 12-hour period, and must fit a specific template – none of the characters in this sample fit Propp’s roles of false hero or princess. Some of the characters that fit the ‘family member’ role also fit the hero’s helper, dispatcher, villain and donor roles; and are tabulated below accordingly.

Table 1. Proppian character roles in this sample

Character Roles	Female Number (%)	Male Number (%)
Hero	6 (67%)	3 (33%)
Hero’s helper	6 (86%)	1 (14%)
Dispatcher	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
Donor	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Villain	2 (100%)	0 (0%)
Member of family	10 (91%)	1 (9%)

The first notable finding that this data reveals is that in this particular sample of Book Dash books, these fictional worlds are populated by more female than male characters. Global research regarding children’s picture books (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005: 146) has demonstrated an overall gender imbalance in favour of the representation of male characters in popular children’s picture books. Contrary to this global trend, the data from this sample demonstrated the opposite; as out of the total of 21 characters, 17 (77%) are female and 4 (23%) are male. In keeping with this imbalance in favour of female representation, it is also important to note that of the nine protagonists in these books, six (67%) are female and three (33%) are male; and of the 11 family members represented, 10 (91%) are female and only one (9%) is male.

Like all texts, children’s picture books are a product of the discourses within which they are produced, and are “enmeshed in the ideology of the culture that produced them, and the childlikeness they teach is merely what our culture views as natural in children” (Nodelman, 1999: 135). Similarly, their depiction of adult characters is also reflective of the discourse and cultural norms in which they are produced. When embarking upon this analysis, I had assumed that my findings would relate to the gendered representations of the child protagonists in these books. Instead, I identified patterns in the gendered depiction of the

adults and parental figures within these books, which I will critically discuss in the remainder of this chapter.

The Invisible Father

In this sample, male characters are underrepresented in the vital role of parent. Of the seven books, only two mention a father figure, and crucially, neither of these two books represent the father character visually through illustration. In noting the underrepresentation of father figures in these books, it is important to acknowledge that these books were produced within the context of South Africa's gender landscape, where many children grow up without a present father figure. As of 2017, more than 60% of biological fathers do not live with their children in South Africa (Makou, 2017; Stats SA, 2017).

Both of the books that include a father figure, include him only by mentioning him once through the sign system of written language, and not through the visual images in these texts. In *The Great Cake Contest*, the father figure is represented as helping the protagonist Lucky to bake his award-winning cake. Here I should mention that the mother and sister mentioned in this story are not depicted through visual imagery either. Lucky's parents and sister are depicted as occupying the role of 'helper' through the sentence, "Mama, Papa and his big sister Musa all put their heads together to help him enter the Great Cake Contest." A transitive analysis of this sentence revealed that these three characters are represented as doing a transitive material processes by actively helping Lucky. This sentence is placed on the left-hand side of a two-page spread, which consists of an illustration of two red curtains being pulled back slightly by five hands. The two curtains meet in the centerfold of the spread and appear to represent curtains on either side of a stage, indicating that the big reveal of Lucky's cake is to come on the following spread. The five hands pulling back the curtains make up the focal point of the image. The hands are all illustrated in the same style, and therefore none of them are stereotypically feminine or masculine, meaning there is no way to know which hands belong to Lucky's mother, father or sister.

Crucially, this single mention of the father figure in this book does not visually depict the father's actions as a helper. In contrast, mother figures who are depicted in other books in this sample are visually depicted as helpers multiple times. In *Dance, Mihlali!*, the mother figure is depicted helping Mhlali learn her dance moves, and doing typical parental tasks such as driving Mhlali home from dance practice. Kopano and Rea are driven around and

photographed by their mother in *Auntie Boi's Gift*, and Nandi is told fantastical stories and tucked into bed by her mother in *I don't want to go to sleep!*. By combining both sign systems and representing the parents in these books as active parent figures both visually and through written text, these parents are more vividly represented as being helpers, and therefore as actively being parents and doing the work of child-raising.

The other book in this sample that includes a father figure is *Let's have an inside day!* – which chronicles two siblings endeavouring to entertain themselves indoors on a rainy day. Similarly to *The Great Cake Contest*, in this book, the father is also not represented through visual imagery, but is merely mentioned in the list of activities in which the child protagonists partake as they entertain themselves. The father is mentioned once in this story in the sentence, “A dress up like dad and pictures day.” This mention of the father figure represents him as an aspirational – although absent – figure. The sentence in which he is mentioned appears on a two-page spread in which the text is placed on the left-hand page and the illustration on the right. The illustration consists of a drawing of two Polaroid-style pictures. The larger Polaroid-style picture depicts both siblings playing dress-up in their father's clothes – a suit and tie, as well as glasses and a drawn-on moustache. The two represented participants are depicted grinning so broadly that their eyes are squeezed shut. The smaller Polaroid-style picture depicts one of the siblings' little ankles sticking out of their father's oversized shoes. The illustration of a child in big shoes could be a reference to the common saying “having big shoes to fill”, which means taking on the position of somebody who has done that job well. Alluding to this common expression through this illustration suggests that the children regard their father highly. This works in combination with them dressing up like their father, as children often use the act of imitation as an expression of admiration. In terms of Kress and Van Leeuwen's interpersonal metafunction (Harrison, 2003: 53), both of the represented participants in this image engender strong viewer involvement with the image, as the image has a fairly high visual demand – with the represented participants looking forward at the viewer despite their eyes being squeezed shut. They are also depicted at a close personal distance, at a frontal horizontal angle and a medium vertical angle. By using these feature processes, the viewer of this image is encouraged to feel that they are similarly positioned to the represented participants.

In contrast to *The Great Cake Contest*, the children's mother in *Let's have an inside day!* is depicted through visual image, as well as through text. However, while the father figure is

represented as aspirational, the mother figure is represented as a disciplinarian, and in terms of Propp's character roles, as the villain. The mother is represented through the sentence, "But whisper when we pass mama's room." This sentence is placed on the right-hand page of a two-page spread. On the left-hand page, the mother figure is depicted through illustration, peering at the children from a dark doorway. Only half of the mother figure's face is depicted. The children are represented creeping past their mother's room. They are placed at the bottom of the right-hand page. Only the children's heads are visible, and the girl-child holds her index finger to her lips in the universal symbol for 'silence'. The placement of the figures indicates the power relationship between the mother and the siblings. In terms of the representational metafunction of visual social semiotics, a narrative structure is created by the reaction process of the mother's eyeline, which creates a vector of motion between the mother and her children. Her eyeline, looking down on the children from above, establishes the interpersonal metafunction's vertical perspective where the represented participant looking downwards has more power than the represented participants upon whom she is looking. In chapter one, the literature I reviewed on childhood as a social construct established that in the discourse through which the books in this sample were created, adults have more power than children. However, while adults always have more power than children, in this story, the mother figure's power appears to make her children fear her, while the father figure's power makes him somebody the children aspire to be.

The depictions of the mother and father figures in *Let's have an inside day!* could also reinforce the gendered division of labour, in which men are the breadwinners of the family unit and work in the public sphere, while women work in the private sphere, also known as the home. When the children are depicted dressing up as their father, they don suits and lace-up shoes – markers of working in a corporate setting and earning money – which indicates that the father figure financially supports the family in this tale. The mother, conversely, is represented as being at home during the day, and is represented as a disciplinarian. So in this tale, the father is represented as occupying a role in the public sphere, while the mother is represented occupying a role in the private sphere. Jobs in the public sphere are generally assumed to have a greater status and to be more valuable than those in the private sphere (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004: 375). By linking status and value to masculinity, such representations, of men with greater status than women, can justify gender inequality.

Single mothers, single grandmothers

However, regardless of this suggested status of the father in *Let's have an inside day!*, all seven books make reference to a female parent figure. While the protagonists in *The Great Cake Contest* and *Let's have an inside day!* are raised by a mother and a father, the protagonists of the remainder of the books in this sample are raised solely by female parent figures. In three of the books – *Dance, Mhlali!*, *Auntie Boi's Gift*, and *I don't want to go to sleep!* – the protagonists are represented as being raised by their mothers, and no father figure is mentioned. Notably, all of the child protagonists in the three aforementioned books are female. In two of the books – *Mali's Friend* and *What's at the park?* – the protagonists are raised by their grandmothers. Here it is useful to acknowledge that most racial and cultural groups in South Africa have long-standing beliefs concerning gender roles, based mostly on the premise that men are deserving of more power than women (Magubane, 2004). The gendered division of labour often means that child-rearing falls almost solely on the shoulders of mothers and female relatives.

Single mother households are fairly common in South Africa, as according to the South African Race Relations Institute, 40% of South African mothers are single parents, which is considerably more than the average of 15% in the developed world (Bertelsmann, 2019). I noted earlier that in the books in which the protagonists are depicted as being raised solely by their mothers – *Dance, Mhlali!*, *Auntie Boi's Gift*, and *I don't want to go to sleep!* – the mothers are represented as actively raising their children through visual image, written language and narrative structure. In two of these books, the mothers occupy the Proppian character role of helper. These two books – *Auntie Boi's Gift* and *Dance, Mhlali!* – are similar as in both books, the protagonists receive gifts from a female family member, respectively: Kopano and Rea receive Maasai dolls from their aunt, and Mhlali receives a pair of ballet slippers from her grandmother.

In Proppian terms, Mhlali's pair of ballet slippers is a "magical agent" given to her by the donor in the narrative. This is illustrated by Mhlali's character being depicted pictorially as being unhappy and concerned until she opens the slippers. The illustrator has drawn Mhlali with a furrowed brow and an eyeline that looks down towards the bottom of the page, making her appear sad, but once she has opened the gift, her mouth turns up into a smile, and her brows arch high on her forehead, to depict the happiness brought to her by the gift from her grandmother. With this gift, and the happiness it brings her, Mhlali is able to practice for her

performance. Mihlali is pictorially represented as idolising her grandmother in the last illustration in the book, as she stands proudly, with her face beaming up at her grandmother, and her eyes squeezed shut as her grandmother gives her a compliment. She is depicted as only being as tall as her grandmother's hip. This is coupled with Mihlali's upward gaze – which in terms of the vertical angle feature process of the interpersonal metafunction indicates that Mihlali has less power than her grandmother, and could represent Mihlali viewing her grandmother as an aspirational figure. This depiction of an aspirational female adult character contrasts the gendered representations of adult figures in *Let's have an inside day!* and *The Great Cake Contest*.

Auntie Boi's Gift also provides aspirational female adult characters, in the form of the mother character and the aunt. Similarly to the grandmother in *Dance, Mhlali!*, the aunt figure in *Auntie Boi's Gift* occupies the Proppian role of donor. Here it is important to consider that a nurturing extended family is an important part of black South African cultural discourse. Janks (1998: 202) states that, “the idea that a ‘small family unit’ is better is part of a western middle-class value system,” and elaborated on this by saying that in African value systems, revolve around “extended not nuclear families and where children provide wealth and security in one's old age.” However, none of the books in this sample depict male extended family members as part of the protagonists' lives. Instead, only mothers and female relatives (aunts and grandmothers) are portrayed as affectionate nurturers: as Proppian helpers and donors.

In the other book that depicts only a mother doing the work of raising the child protagonist – *I don't want to go to sleep!* – the mother figure does not occupy the role of the helper, as in the two books mentioned above, but instead occupies the role of hero. The protagonist in this book – Nandi – occupies the Proppian role of the villain, as she blocks the action of the narrative by refusing to go to sleep, and therefore complicates the narrative. The mother character's quest as the hero is to navigate the narrative towards resolution by convincing Nandi to fall asleep, which she eventually does. The designer of the book uses typography to distinguish between the mother's voice of reason, and Nandi's naughty eagerness to stay awake. The mother's voice is written in a simple serif font, that is light in weight and always runs horizontally, from left to right. Comparatively, Nandi's pleas are designed in a bolder typeface that is heavier in weight, and is arranged either in an arch, a wave, or diagonally at various angles. Typically, typefaces are set to run from left to right, and horizontally. By

setting Nandi's words in different typographic styles, the type aids in representing Nandi as disruptive. The mother's words, set in a more standard type, feel calm and reasonable. With this calm and reason, the mother figure comes across as patient and caring – a few markers of a nurturing parent figure. While Nandi's actions are misbehaviour, the mother character is never depicted as angry, but rather as concerned.

In this book, the mother is often pictorially depicted peering through Nandi's doorway, in a similar depiction to the illustration of the mother figure in *Let's have an inside day!*. However, in *I don't want to go to sleep!*, the doorway from which the mother is peering is a warm yellow tone, while in *Let's have an inside day!*, the doorway is coloured black. In *I don't want to go to sleep!*, the use of yellow, which is a warm primary colour, creates a feeling of warmth. The yellow doorway suggests to the reader that in Nandi's room – which is coloured purple, the complimentary colour to yellow in the colour wheel – the light has been switched off, while there is a light on outside her room. This light shines into Nandi's room, casting a golden glow onto Nandi. These elements evoke a feeling of warmth from Nandi's mother. Comparatively, the mother figure in *Let's have an inside day!* is framed by a black doorway. Earlier, I established that the mother in *Let's have an inside day!* is a villain in terms of Propp's character roles. By using black – which is not a colour, but is the absence of all colour – in that context, the illustrator further strengthens the notion in that narrative that the mother is a disciplinarian, while the father is an aspirational figure. But by using yellow in *I don't want to go to sleep!*, the illustrator frames the mother figure much more positively, ultimately strengthening her representation as the hero and caregiver within this tale.

While many children are raised solely by their mothers in South Africa, there are also many children who are raised by their grandmothers, as “Black grandparents in the contemporary family often play a pivotal role in raising their grandchildren and giving parental support. On the one hand, Black parents, regardless of gender, view grandmothers as a primary source of support, relying on them more frequently than anyone else” (Mtshali, 2015: 75). Both *Mali's Friend* and *What's at the park?* depict their protagonists as being raised by their respective grandmothers. It is important to note that, “Grandchild care takes different forms. There are grandparents who assume full care without a parent in the household (custodial grandmothers) and those grandmothers who assist their adult children by housing parent and child (co-parenting grandmothers)” (Mtshali, 2015: 75). In these two books, the

grandmothers fall into the category of ‘custodial grandmother’, as no other parental figure is depicted in these books. Both books represent the grandmother figure through visual images, written language, and narrative structure. In terms of Proppian character roles, Mali’s grandmother assumes the role of dispatcher, while Zoey’s grandmother assumes the role of helper.

Anderson and Hamilton maintain that representations of parental roles in children’s books are able to influence the socialisation of both children and their parents, saying: “one variable that stands in the way of gender equality in parents is the gender socialisation of children and parents that perpetuates the divisions of household labour” (2005: 145). By depicting mothers and grandmothers as the sole parental figures in 72% of these books, Book Dash’s books could reinforce the patriarchal systems that expect women to do the majority of the house work and normalise their ascribed role in child-rearing.

Girl children in Book Dash’s imagined worlds

Historically, girl characters have seldom been represented as the heroes within literature in general, and children’s picture books in particular. Common feminine stereotypes such as the damsel in distress, or the Proppian role of princess, contribute to patriarchal discourses that disempower women. As children’s picture books often play a part in the socialisation of children, representations of women and girl children in these roles could work to perpetuate these norms. “Previous studies reveal the reinforcement of gender stereotypes by picture books children read during the formative years. In these books, boys tend to be portrayed as active leaders, and girls as passive followers. Women and girls are underrepresented. Men often exhibit career skills, and women perform traditional tasks in the home” (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005: 145). I found that some of Book Dash’s representations of its girl child protagonists work to challenge the patriarchal discourses through which they are produced, while others appear to strengthen these discourses.

In this sample, women and girl characters are not underrepresented, but instead 77% of the characters in these books are female characters. And while the adult women characters in this sample perform actions that Anderson and Hamilton (2005: 145) would classify as “traditional tasks in the home” – such as being the primary caregiver, disciplining the children, tucking them into bed, feeding them, etc – some of the girl child protagonists challenge gender stereotypes. The representation of girl children in this sample poses a

challenge to the default of having male protagonist characters (Anderson & Hamilton, 146). Positive and abundant representation of female characters in books has shown to have a positive effect on the identity formation of female readers, as “characters in books become gender role models; non-sexist books have been shown to have desirable influences on the self-concept, attitude and behaviour of children” (Anderson & Hamilton, 146). The represented worlds in children’s picture books can be understood as a space in which different discourses propose and validate particular ways of being to their young readers. Some of the books in this sample represent their girl child protagonists as representative of many different ways of being; as dancers, dreamers, adventurers, and game-players.

In *I don’t want to go to sleep!*, Nandi – who is the villain of this tale, and also its protagonist – embarks upon various adventures by means of her and her mother’s imaginations. This is represented through illustrations of the two characters sitting in Nandi’s bed while the imagined worlds materialise around them. The four imagined scenarios that they dream up are: meeting an imaginary beast in a jungle; filling Nandi’s pockets with stardust in space; dancing under the ocean with a squid; and building Nandi a pair of butterfly wings in order for her to fly. Through the words and images in this story, female protagonist Nandi embarks upon imagined adventures, most of which are not stereotypically feminine. These adventures begin with Nandi’s mother asking her, “Do you *want* an adventure?” and at the start of each new adventure, Nandi begins her sentence with, “I *want* ...”. In terms of transitivity, the verb *want* is a relational process, and indicates Nandi’s relationship with the world in which she lives. In her real life, the world is a place where she does ordinary things like being tucked into bed by her mother – which she repeatedly tells her mother she *does not want* to do. However, in her imagined or ideal life, she does extraordinary things that she *does want* to do. By depicting Nandi as a protagonist with a vivid imagination, who is able to use the power of her imagination to escape her mundane reality, Nandi is depicted as a thinker, and an embodiment of liberating mental process. At the end of the story, the reader is invited to “draw your dreams here” – to take up Nandi’s subject position, thus encouraging the readers of this tale to be thinkers and dreamers like her.

However, this sample also depicts girl children in more stereotypically feminine roles. Two examples of this are *What’s at the park?* and *Dance, Mhlali!* The protagonist, Zoey, and her grandmother in *What’s at the park?* are both depicted as having disabilities – impaired hearing and sight respectively. Both characters help each other by embodying the sense the

other is missing. Representation of disabilities is rare in literature of any kind, so in the case of this book, its attempt to be diverse is commendable; however the book also depicts decidedly conservative feminine subjectivities. Zoey is well-behaved, obedient and companionable – which are stereotypically feminine traits. She is depicted as being caring and nurturing, as she cares for her grandmother and the stray dog she finds. Her grandmother allows her to explore a little bit, but Zoey never strays too far in order to be able to assist her grandmother. The book has a low modality – as most of the books in this sample do. By having very simple depictions of backgrounds, the two characters are depicted in a big green park which is devoid of any other human life, so nothing appears threatening. This makes for a landscape in which Zoey and her grandmother are able to act as observers and curators of a pliable nature: bugs and a dog. The lack of background human characters might be an intentional decision on the part of the illustrator, as the two disabled characters are vulnerable, and this depiction makes them appear safe in a context that might otherwise feel dangerous. However, the low modality in many of these books – which can often make characters and narratives feel decontextualised – is probably due to the time constraint in which Book Dash's illustrators have to create the books.

In *Dance, Mihlali!*, the hero of the tale is the titular Mihlali, who is a ballet dancer. Ballet is a feminine dance form, which stresses that its dancers are graceful and elegant – which are stereotypically feminine attributes. Mihlali's quest as the hero of this story is to succeed at her dance performance, which requires her to overcome her lack of confidence. Mihlali's lack of confidence is depicted pictorially through the vectors created by her eyeline in the first few spreads: she looks down at the ground, or out the window of a car, and her brows are furrowed. Mihlali only begins to gain confidence once she received the gift of shoes from her grandmother. She initially refuses the shoes – this is represented by the vector between her hand and the gift. Until she opens this gift, she dresses in a relatively ungendered way – in a blue t-shirt with either pink shorts or yellow three-quarter length pants. Once she opens the gift, and begins to wear the shoes, her dress sense changes: she wears a pink dress, and then a tutu. The pictorial depiction of Mihlali's learning to be confident is represented through a change from a more gender neutral dress sense, to a more feminine one, which accompanies her becoming a better ballerina – for which she learns to embody feminine attributes such as gracefulness. Mihlali only seems to become more confident once she has learned to be more feminine. She is also disciplined and coaxed into learning this femininity by her mother. This coaxing could be interpreted as kind, caring and supportive – such as with the transitive

material process of helping when the mother smilingly says, “I’ll help you practice at home.” However, the mother’s coaxing and discipline could also be interpreted as an embodiment of patriarchal discourses, because by being obedient to her mother’s rules such as, “Mihlali must rest,” Mihlali’s character bolsters the patriarchal ideal that girls do what they are told. The message of obedience is also supported by the visual imagery in the book. For instance, the illustration of Mihlali and her mother driving in their car (in the second two-page spread of the book), represents Mihlali as much smaller – and therefore less powerful – than her mother. Mihlali is also positioned very far from her mother, who is the focal point of this illustration. This use of size and proportion encourages the reader to sympathise both with the mother and Mihlali. The mother’s approach to encourage certain behaviours in Mihlali is ultimately validated at the close of this story, when Mihlali succeeds at the dance performance. Readers sympathise with this because the mother character is simply doing what society expects of her in child-rearing, but in doing so she upholds patriarchal value systems, and socialises Mihlali accordingly.

While this sample depicted more girl child protagonists than boy child protagonists, these representations of girl children often reflected the patriarchal discourses through which they were produced. However, while some girl child characters such as Mihlali – of *Dance, Mihlali!* – and Zoey – of *What’s at the park?* – are depicted as being compliant with authority, Nandi – of *I don’t want to go to sleep!* – is very clear about what she wants and will do anything to make that happen. This sample is thus representative of depictions of girl children that work both for and against various patriarchal ideals and discourses.

Boy children in Book Dash’s imagined worlds

In tandem with girl children being represented as hero-protagonists in this sample, the two books in which the protagonist heroes are boys provide unique representations of boy children. In *Mali’s Friend*, the titular character Mali is depicted as a shy boy who enjoys playing on his own, but not with other children. His grandmother encourages him to play games with other children, but he does not enjoy them. Crucially, the games Mali attempts to play with the other children are all sports – they all involve a ball of some kind. When he finally does make a friend, the games they play together are not sporty: they make mud pies, play a traditional South African game called ingedo, and fly paper aeroplanes. Typically, boys are represented as sporty, adventurous types, but this book works to subvert that stereotype. Mali’s new friend, Lesedi, is a girl child who appears to be much more outgoing

than Mali. Her Proppian role as the helper in this narrative helps Mali out of his comfort zone.

The other boy child protagonist is Lucky in *The Great Cake Contest*. In this story, Lucky bakes a cake to enter into a cake-baking competition. Cooking in general, and baking in particular, are tropes typically represented within the division of labour as woman's jobs. A boy child being represented as "so happy that the Great Cake Contest is in town" and actively competing against his boy and girl child peers, could present a challenge to this gender stereotype. However, this depiction of a boy child as a baker is different to perhaps a depiction of a boy child who helps cook his family's weeknight dinner – which is a domestic action that takes place in the private sphere. Instead, this depiction of a boy child baker revolves around a public competition. Competitions are typically understood to be masculine in orientation, and competitions typically take place in the public sphere – a realm dominated by men. Lucky is also depicted as being slightly mischievous by baking a cake so big that it topples over and covers the judges in a sea of icing. While providing a comedic moment, this conclusion also could deflect from the possibility that Lucky's baking of this particular cake is a feminine pursuit, as the pictorial depictions of the cakes baked by girl characters throughout the book are neat and contrast markedly with Lucky's. By winning the contest despite making a big mess, Lucky's boyish subjectivity is validated. However, a depiction of a boy child baking is rare and could be interpreted as a challenge to the patriarchal stereotype that kitchen work is women's work. Society is often more tolerant of girls taking on more typically masculine than they are of boys who take on more feminine roles.

The representations of boy children in typically feminine roles is interesting because as the world has become more gender equitable, these changes have typically centred around women and girls taking on masculine characteristics and roles, while men and boys seldom adopt feminine characteristics (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004: 374). Studies of 'non-sexist' children's books found that "although girls were shown to possess masculine traits, boys were not shown to possess feminine traits" (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004: 374). Through the representation of the boy child protagonists in these books, Book Dash adds to the grown body of work that challenges this asymmetric dimension to gender equity.

Conclusion

Diekman and Murnen claim that how much a picture book “includes female characters reflects the value that is accorded to women and girls” (Diekman & Murnen, 2004: 375). The abundance of female characters represented in this sample appear to be more in line with value placed on women by the South African constitution, but not in real life – in my introduction I noted that South Africa is far from the gender-equal paradise articulated by its constitution. In contrast to South Africa’s indomitably patriarchal society, these books contribute to discourses which value women and girls.

My analysis of this sample revealed that while the gendered representation of several of the characters in these seven books work to subvert some gender stereotypes, in many ways the books are also representative of characters whose depictions could work to uphold patriarchal values and discourses. What is interesting is that some of the depictions of girl and boy child characters in these books work to subvert gender stereotypes, while the depiction of parent figures continue to uphold adult female characters in traditional caretaking roles, which reinforce the feminine ideal and in doing so, continue to value the inequalities that currently characterise the gender order. So, while the depictions of parent figures in this sample are representative of the patriarchal structures in South Africa, the depictions of girl children are not.

Conclusion

Book Dash's picture books are published with the intention of validating the identities of South African children of all racial, cultural and language groups. However, while their aim is to create books that are representative of many races, this representation happens through gendered characters. Through this thesis, I have analysed how these picture books communicate gender norms, with the intention of answering the question, "In what gendered ways do contemporary South African picture books produced by Book Dash in 2018 represent human characters, and how do we understand these representations in the context of South Africa's gender inequalities?"

The books that any culture offers its children generally reflect and perpetuate existing cultural conditions and discourses (Diekmann & Murnen, 2004: 382). In Chapter Two, I discussed childhood and gender as social constructions, which are created through discourse. As picture books are created within the prevalent discourses of gender and childhood, it is natural in a South African context that Book Dash's picture books are reflective of patriarchy. I noted in the conclusion of Chapter Three that the characters depicted in gender normative roles are the adults in the stories, while both boy and girl children are often depicted as occupying roles that are not conventionally gender normative. And although the books I analysed are much more representative of girl and boy children occupying roles that are not gender normative, their parents are depicted as largely occupying gender normative roles. These dichotomous representations are interesting to me because all children grow up into adults. So, these representations could work to validate gender normative behaviour by depicting boys and girls as equal, but men and women as unequal. By doing so, the books could do a disservice to their child readers by failing to show them the many possibilities for the people they can become as adults.

It is natural for books to be representative of the discourses in which they are produced. I also think that it is essential to acknowledge that gender-equal values are not the only values that are important to teach children, and picture books in which traditional gender roles are represented often teach worthwhile lessons to their readers about bravery, friendship, kinship and other important human characteristics. Furthermore, limiting what children read solely to gender-equal models may not be the best way to counter sexist discourses, as in real life,

children will undoubtedly encounter gender prejudices. Educating children that these constructs exist – and how to work against them – could prove to be a more useful tool than simply ignoring them. And while my analysis focuses solely on gender inequality, studies of portrayals of other biases in children’s picture books – such as classism and racism – deserve academic attention as well.

It is worth mentioning that the contexts depicted within Book Dash’s books are not the norm. Book Dash aims to create books that represent South African children, and validate their identities, stating that “those who really need the uplifting power of books from a young age rarely see themselves or their languages represented” (Book Dash, 2019: 2). Despite this being one of their goals, the contexts depicted in the pages of these books – and therefore the identities validated by the books – are not representative of the majority of South African children. South Africa continues to be shaped by the legacy of Apartheid, as more than 55% of South African live below the poverty line (Gous, 2018). Paradoxically, the contexts of these stories mainly pertain to middle class life in the suburbs, as the child characters attend ballet lessons, receive gifts, drive in cars, spend days in a safe park, and sleep in single bedrooms. In some cases, books depicting a middle class life have quite high modality – for example *Antie Boi’s Gift* – and these middle class identities are therefore validated and endorsed through normalisation. The gendered subjectivities within these books are consistent with these spaces and contexts.

Book Dash’s publishing model was developed in response to a demand for quality children’s picture books written and published by South Africans for local children, and they do this well. Their books are visually-stimulating, well planned, short and punchy and usually house a sweet story or a fun adventure, with a child protagonist and sundry supporting characters. Their aim – to add to the growing number of South African picture books that represent a variety of racial, cultural and language groups – is important in a post-colonial, post-apartheid context. However, while their aim for “diverse representation” has meant that children of a variety of racial, cultural and language groups are represented in these books, and many books depict boys and girls as occupying a diverse range of roles, they do not do so in their representations of adult characters. While a diverse representation of the adult characters in their books is not Book Dash’s primary focus, these patterns in gender representation could impact the identity formation of their boy and girl child readers by perpetuating aspects of the gendered division of labour.

In 2018, I volunteered as an illustrator for Book Dash. Their model is slick and smooth, and works effectively. When I was accepted as a Book Dash volunteer, I was placed in a group with a writer and designer, and we were all sent a document outlining how to go about writing a 'good storybook' (REACH Project, 2017: 10). This included a statement about the importance of the diverse representation of gender roles in picture books, but Book Dash themselves did not stress the importance of this. If Book Dash wanted to place an emphasis on countering these gender normative patterns in future Book Dash events, they could include a document focusing specifically on how to represent a more gender-equal society in the pages of their books. For now, the work they do works to diversify and counter many other discourses.

The South African constitution views men and women as equal, but "discourses do not simply evaporate with policy changes; resiliently, they continue to reinforce attitudes" (Prinsloo, 2003: 34). The patriarchal discourses that have shaped South Africa for centuries continue to do so, and they are able to do so subtly through many mediums including children's picture books. Without an awareness of how these discourses are able to function through texts such as picture books, the encoders and decoders of these books could continue to perpetuate patriarchal discourses. My feeling from having researched and written this thesis is that the academic understanding of picture books must be made more accessible to writers and illustrators, because no real change can come from a master's thesis on the topic. Challenges to hegemonic discourses must come from those who encode these books, and in turn, those who decode them.

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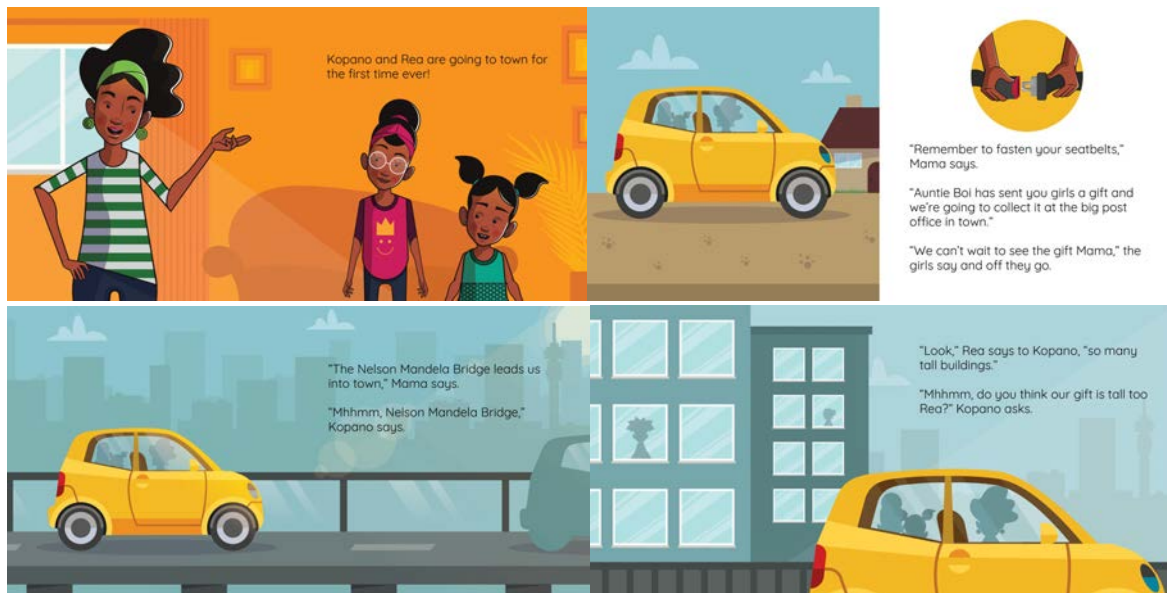
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Appendices

Appendix A

Images from the Book Dash book, *Auntie Boi's Gift*.

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/auntie-bois-gift-by-baeletsi-tsatsi-ndumiso-nyoni-and-bianca-wiesner/>



"Look," Kopano says to Rea, "so many fruits and vegetables."

"Mhhmm, do you think our gift tastes yummy?" Rea asks Kopano.



"Look," Rea says to Kopano, "traditional clothes!"

"Mhhmm, do you think Auntie Boi bought us traditional clothes?" Kopano asks.



"Wow, it's like one big party," Kopano and Rea say.

"Maybe your gift sings a loud song," Mama says smiling.

"Mhhmm, we love loud songs," the girls say.



"Do you think it's tall like the buildings we saw?" Rea asks.

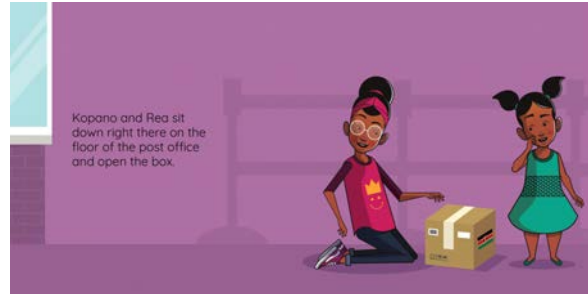
"No," Kopano says. Rea takes the box and smells it.

"Do you think it tastes yummy like the fruit and veg we saw?"

"No," Rea says.

Kopano shakes the box again. "It doesn't make a loud noise like the speakers we passed."

"And I don't think it's traditional clothes either," Rea says.



"Those are Maasai dolls," Mama says to the girls.

"Maasai dolls from Kenya," Kopano says.

"We love these dolls!" Rea says.



Mama takes a picture of the girls and sends it to Auntie Boi.

Appendix B

Images from the Book Dash book, *The Great Cake Contest*.

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/the-great-cake-contest-by-nompumelelo-mdluli-lebohang-masango-and-amanda-van-der-walt/>

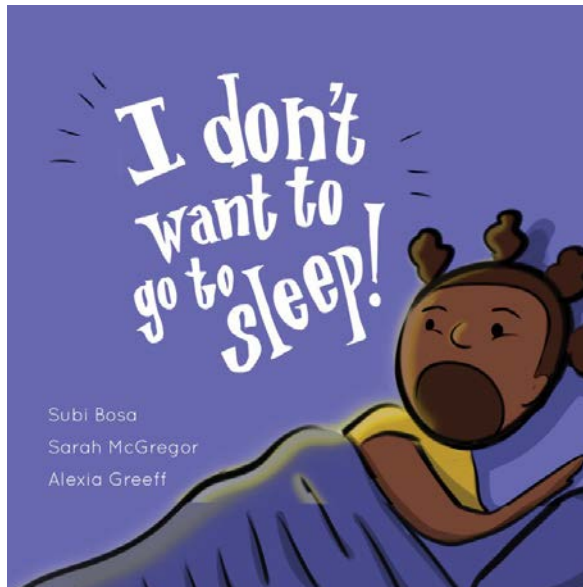




Appendix C

Images from the Book Dash book, *I don't want to go to sleep!*

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/i-dont-want-to-go-to-sleep-by-subi-bosa-sarah-mcgregor-and-alexia-greeff/>

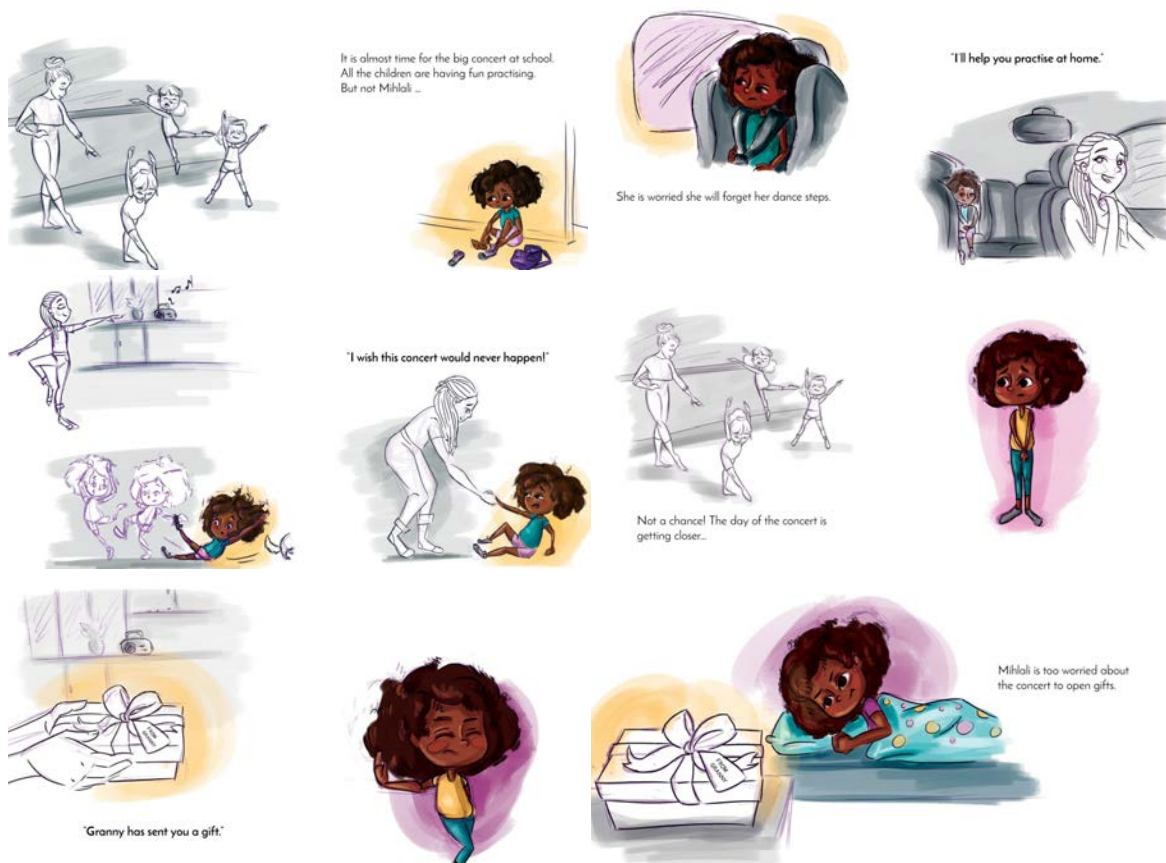
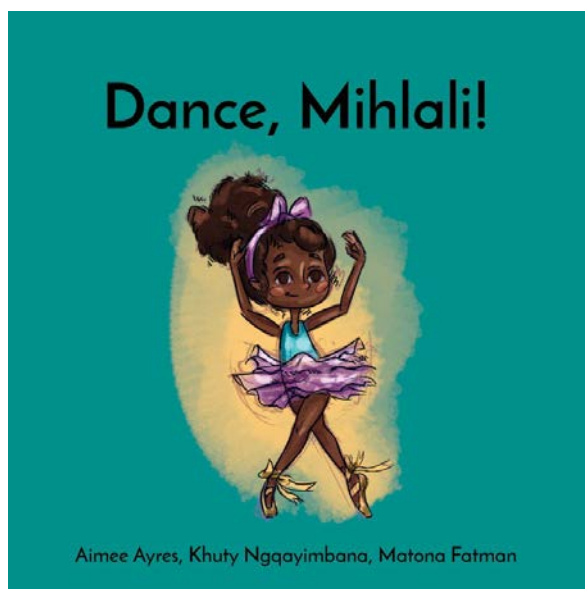




Appendix D

Images from the Book Dash book, *Dance, Mhlali!*

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/dance-mhlali-by-aimee-ayres-khuty-ngqayimbana-and-matona-fatman/>





Perhaps she should take a look inside.



What great dancing shoes from Granny!



Granny was the best dancer ever.



Mihlali practises and practises at school...

And at home!



And she dances in her dreams.



Mihlali must rest.

The big concert is tomorrow.



It's concert day. Mihlali does her dance just right. What great fun!

And surprise! Granny has even come to watch Mihlali dance.

"I danced just like you, Granny."



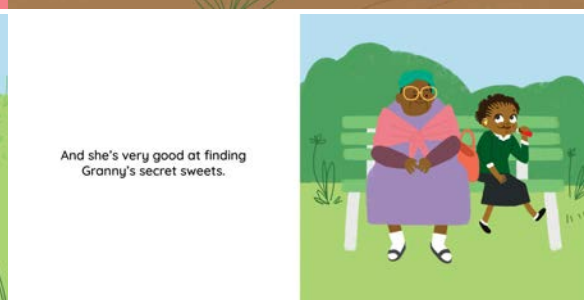
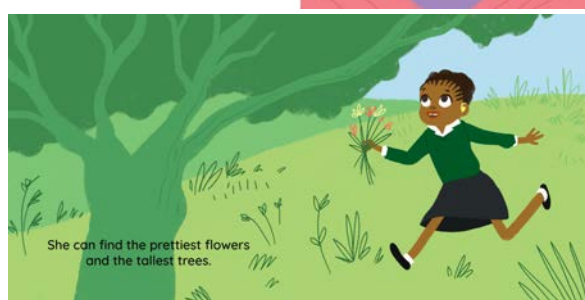
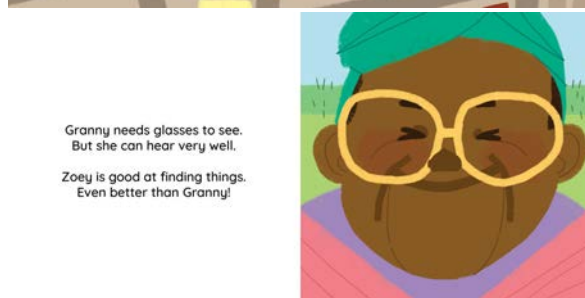
"You were amazing!
You are the best dancer I've ever seen."



Appendix E

Images from the Book Dash book, *What's at the park?*

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/whats-at-the-park-by-jess-jardim-wedepohl-and-david-mann/>





Appendix F

Images from the Book Dash book, *Mali's Friend*.

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/malis-friend-by-rujeko-moyo-ellen-heydenrych-and-rj-palmer/>

Rujeko Moyo

Ellen Heydenrych

RJ Palmer

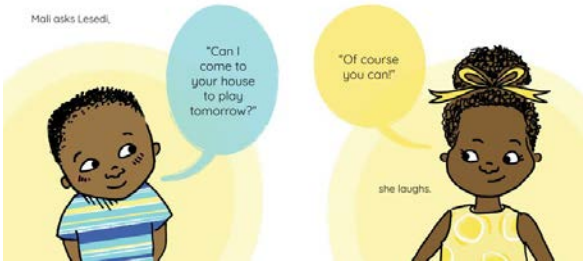




Mali then shows Lesedi how to make a paper plane.

They go all around the house swooshing their planes.

Oh! They laugh a lot!



The next morning, after gobbling down his porridge, Mali takes out his wire car.



Appendix G

Images from the Book Dash book, *Let's have an inside day.*

Accessed at: <https://bookdash.org/books/lets-have-an-inside-day-by-alicia-van-zyl-lerato-mbange-ni-and-rendani-nemakhavhani/>

