

The Value and Path of English Picture Books in Primary School English Teaching

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Abstract: *Story picture book has multiple features which are necessary qualities of effective English reading material. Picture books have important value in English teaching in elementary school: First of all, English picture books are independently compiled, containing complete book information (such as cover, bottom cover, title page, author, illustration author, etc.), which can provide pupils with a complete reading experience and help them construct text concepts. Secondly, English picture books are rich in materials, and situations. With vivid plot, vivid language, it's close to pupils' daily life, and can provide them with rich imagination and space for thinking. Meanwhile, the vivid character characteristics, fascinating plots, and the cultural value implied in the picture books are all highly conducive to helping pupils perceive cultural differences, analyze and solve problems, and stimulate their internal reading motivation. That's exactly the reason why teachers would love to combine text books and English story picture books to broaden pupils' scopes and improve their multiple qualities. Based on Krashen's language input hypothesis and Piaget's cognitive development theory, and on the basis of clarifying relevant concepts, we summarize and put forward some suggestions on English picture book reading teaching in primary school, including English picture book teaching strategies and methods, basic teaching steps and principles, and makes a specific analysis and explanation of typical lesson examples in the middle grade of primary school, aiming at providing support and suggestions for English picture book teaching in primary schools.*

Keywords: *English Story Picture Books; Effective Teaching Methods and Approaches; Primary School English Instruction*

1. Introduction

1.1. Requirements of the Compulsory education English Program Standards

The English Curriculum Standard for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) outlines that the objectives of English language skills for third and fourth-grade primary school students are to “understand and read short stories with the assistance of pictures”. For fifth and sixth-grade primary school students, the objectives are to “be able to read original and simple picture stories that are comparable in difficulty to the textbook texts”. It can be seen that the combination of pictures and texts is very crucial at the primary school stage. The English picture book perfectly exemplifies this point. The colorful and vivid pictures are integrated with the words with a strong literary flavor, which makes it easy for children to be attracted by the vivid picture books and is in line with the physical and mental development of children.

1.2. English picture books can lead to good teaching results

English picture books not only help stimulate students' interest in reading but also enhance children's reading abilities. Mastering correct and scientific reading methods and skills is conducive to students' full, effective, and enjoyable reading experiences. Teachers can leverage the teaching advantages of picture books by skillfully integrating picture book instruction with classroom activities and consistently nurturing students' reading and learning potential, thereby improving their English literacy. English picture book teaching represents a high-quality resource that is well-suited for children's English learning. Primary school English teachers have attempted to apply English picture books in teaching practice and have demonstrated promising results.

2. The connotation and features of English picture book

2.1. The connotation of English story picture books

Picture book is a loanword. Just as its name implies that it's a kind of drawn books. It first appeared in Europe. It is an art of interweaving and merging words and pictures to depict stories, to express themes and attitudes. There are various types of picture books, for instance, baby picture book, concept picture book, story picture book and so on. Story picture book is the main type we concern in this article. Because of its bright colors and exquisite composition, English picture book has become the first choice for children's English reading. Children who have just come into contact with English are easily attracted by it, which greatly reduces children's resistance of learning English.^[1-2]

2.2. The features of English picture books

Story picture book has multiple features which are necessary qualities of effective English reading materials. That's exactly the reason why teachers would love to combine text books and English story picture books to broaden pupils' scopes and improve their multiple qualities.

2.2.1. Coherent and interesting storyline

With coherent and interesting storyline, English story picture book can easily attract the interest of primary school pupils and cultivate their reading motivations. In English picture book teaching process, teachers should inspire children's initiatives to read, to think and to explore, helping them to form a systematic view of the complete story. For instance, in *Rainbow Flower*, the author connects Niya's experiences with the action of making wishes to the seven color petals, and constantly creates problem scenarios to arouse pupils' curiosity.

2.2.2. Intuitive story presentation

Exquisite illustrations and thoughtful overall design make readers enjoy the joyful reading. A lot of picture reading enriches pupils' perceptual cognitions and experience, which promotes the improvement of students' understanding and their reading abilities. By observing the pictures, pupils can obtain multi-dimensional information. In the process of exchanging information with pictures, children experience the sense of reason brought by immersive reading.

2.2.3. Close to real life

The basic thinking type of primary school students is intuitive image thinking. The content of the stories is close to the students' real life, helping them transfer knowledge, ability and attitude to real learning and study. When they read *My Mom* by Anthony Browne, students can compare their mothers with the mother in the picture book and experience the infinite love they have received, expressing their love for their mothers at the same time.

2.2.4. Simple sentences and repeated sentence patterns

Easy to read and easy to repeat, English story picture book brings students confidence to read by themselves and to obtain target language by constantly reading and repeating sentences. In *Rainbow Flowers*, every time Niya made a wish, she would say the same sentence "Fly, fly, little petals. Listen to me. Do with me." Pupils can repeat the sentence as if they are making a wish together with Niya.

3. The effective methods and strategies of English story picture book teaching

3.1. Set up systematic goals of English picture book teaching

3.1.1. Teaching goal problems in real teaching plans

Nowadays, many teachers merely consider English picture books as a type of teaching material, without realizing their true value. They focus too much on analyzing the target language, such as words and sentences, while overlooking the construction of an English language environment, the guidance of pupils' deep thinking, and the analysis of different cultural backgrounds. Inferior quality teaching has highly reduced the experience and feeling in English reading.

3.1.2. Pupils' roles in English picture book reading

Despite being a code-breaker, the roles of text participant, text analyst and text user are of utmost

importance. If we mainly focus on knowledge level, we may consider pupils as code-breakers and text analysts who can respond well to word, sentences and grammar. However, being a text participant requires them to have authentic interactions with the figures in the book, to feel what they feel and to experience what they experience. Being a text user asks them to use what they have got in real social interactions with others.

3.1.3. Study picture books, analyze learning situations and preset teaching goals

When studying the context and connotation of the story, we should consider three basic elements : “what” level—the topic and content of the story; “why” level—the writing purposes, emotions and value orientation of the writer; “how” level—language features, text structures of the story. By analyzing these three elements, not only can teachers understand key points in language learning level, but also helping them to set ability and cultural competence training goals in teaching plan design process.

3.1.4. Take Mimi the superhero for example, through studying text and illustrations of the story, we can analyze the detailed three elements.

“What” level—The main figure in the story is Mimi. The story describes a girl called Mimi who was a super fan of superhero and dreamed to be a superhero. However, she was mocked by her friends. One day, she saw smoke at school, and she rang the fire bell. Thanks for Mimi, everyone was safe in the end.

“Why” level—By describing story development progress, we would let pupils know that superheroes are not far from us. “A superhero is not who you are, but what you do.” If you have the ability to seek for help or do what you can do at your best to solve the problem, you are a superhero as well.

“How” level—Analyzing from text content, the storyline includes three parts: introducing the background information of Mimi’s superhero dream; describing the fact that Mimi wasn’t recognized by her friends as a superhero; telling the brave action Mimi did in fire emergency, in which she got understood.

From the perspective of language functions, the entire text employs the present tense and utilizes simple, easy-to-understand sentence structures. In terms of word usage, the target words of this story are “brave”, “strong”, and “super”, which are appropriate to describe Mimi’s good personalities.

3.1.5. Clarify the class position and set goals reasonably.

As setting teaching goals, teachers should consider the curriculum positioning, text features and pupils’ learning situations. In this lesson, we take picture books as the consolidation and expansion parts of teaching materials and teaching contents, and position the main goal as the understanding of stories rather than sentences learning. Based on the above analysis, the teaching goals of this lesson are as follows.

Comprehension Skills: Students will be able to understand the main idea of the story with the assistance of pictures and animation. They will be able to obtain the main idea and key information of the article through skimming, word searching, and other reading methods.

Prediction and Vocabulary Skills: Pupils will be able to predict the content of the story based on the provided pictures and their own experiences. They will understand the meanings of new vocabulary words such as “comic book”, “notebook” and “school bag”.

Oral Production and Retelling Skills: Students will be able to read the story with correct pronunciation and intonation. They will be able to retell the story using the blackboard writing or key pictures as a reference and perform the story in their own language.

Thematic Understanding: Students will understand the theme of the story, which is “Everything has two sides. You should learn to accept yourself.” Their understanding will be based on their comprehension of the story content.

Critical and Creative Thinking Skills: Students will be able to demonstrate logical thinking, critical thinking and innovative thinking in the process of prediction, questioning and discussion related to the story.

3.1.6. Steps of picture tour strategies

Step1: Warming up and leading in

Create problem situations according to pupils' existing knowledge and personal experience. Stimulate pupils' learning motivation and create a good reading psychological atmosphere.

Step2: Narrating text concept

Lead the pupils to find out the information on the book cover: who the writer is, who drew the illustrations, and who translated the story. Pupils should have the consciousness to identify the people who worked on the book and establish an emotional connection with them. What's more, they can also look for their other works.

Step3: Picture tour

As we use this strategy, the core rule we should follow is that the picture tour process should around the main storyline. Continuously raise questions and guide pupils to read, to think, to learn and to have fun.

Step4: Conclusion and comments

Conclude what the pupils have read, seen, and thought, and guide them to make comments based on their own opinions. This is a good way to cultivate their language expression ability, summary and analysis skills, as well as self-reflection abilities.

Step5: Silent reading and reading aloud

Silent reading and reading aloud are both proper ways to get information from the story, which can provide students with a complete and sufficient reading experience and improve their reading fluency.

Step6: Internalization and performance

Internalizing the story means pupils can keep the story content in their mind deeply, and the main figure is vividly presented in the brain which leads them to think and act according to him or her. Teachers could invite pupils to act out the story to inspire their multiple senses.

3.1.7. A real example of picture tour strategy—the teaching design of *Mimi the superhero*

Step1: Warm up and lead in

Guide pupils to enjoy a song—*Superhero*, and lead them to talk about their understanding of superheroes.

Step2: Cover and title page reading

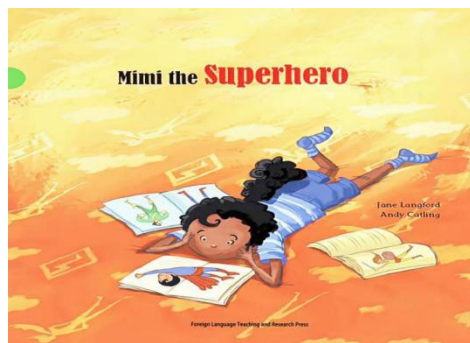


Figure 1 Book Cover of Mimi the Superhero

Guide pupils to observe the cover in order to know its text information (Figure 1): editor Wang Qiang, writer Jane Langford, illustrator Andy Catling. Through questioning, lead pupils to predict the story plot, and cultivate their reading ability of prereading prediction.

T: Today, we are going to know a new friend. Are you curious? First of all, let's look at the cover and answer my questions. What's the girl's name? What's the title? Does Mimi like reading comic books of superhero?

Step3: Picture tour

Guide the pupils to perceive the story, verify their initial predictions, and tease out the storyline. The second half of the story portrays Mimi's brave actions in saving everyone, marking the turning point and climax of the narrative. The sharing reading form of picture tour strategy could lead pupils to observe, to predict and to think.



Figure2 The picture of Mimi the superhero on page 11

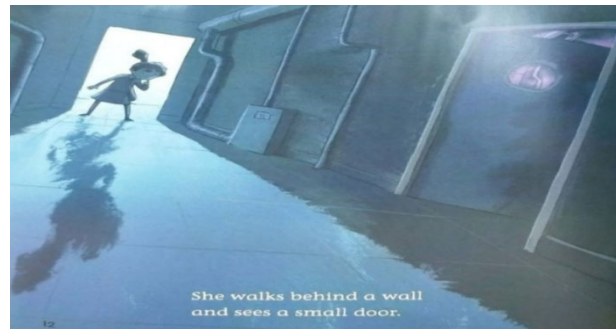


Figure3 The picture of Mimi the Superhero on page 12

T: Boys and girls, from the first part of the story, we know that Mimi loves superhero, and she has a dream of being a superhero herself. She drew herself as a superhero in the notebook and shared with her friends happily. What happened next? Who are they?

S: They are Mimi's friends.

T: What are they doing?

S: They are laughing. (Figure 2)

T: Why do they laugh?

Ss: They are laughing at Mimi.

S1: They don't think Mimi is brave, strong and super.

T: Where is Mimi? How does she feel?

Ss: She is in front of the girls.

S1: Maybe she is sad.

S2: She is not happy.

S3: She wants to hide.

T: Why does she feel sad?

S1: Her friends don't think she is a superhero.

S2: Her friends are not nice to her.

T: Look at this picture. Where is Mimi now?

Ss: She is behind the wall. (Figure 3)

T: Is there anybody around her?

Ss: No, there isn't.

T: Why is Mimi there?

Ss: Because she wants to hide.

T: What does Mimi see? What would happen next?

S1: She sees a door.

S2: Maybe she wants to go to the door.

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In the process of picture tour, students not only learn new language knowledge, but also have a clearer understanding of the story plot and better control of the characters' psychology, to develop the reading process into the process of teachers and pupils exploring the meaning of the topic together.

Step 4: Listen and imitate

Pupils listen to the recorder and imitate the pronunciation, forming a whole idea of the story.

Step 5: Internalization and performance

After listening and imitating the pronunciation, pupils engage in role-playing, story retelling, creative performance, and feedback discussions to internalize the story, deepen their understanding of characters and plot, and develop their speaking, acting, creativity, teamwork, and public speaking skills, all while enhancing their appreciation for the narrative.

3.2. Jigsaw reading strategy

3.2.1. Connotation and meanings of jigsaw reading

Jigsaw is a type of jigsaw puzzle, which is a way of reading by piecing together fragmented parts into a complete picture. It's good for pupils' memory, analytical reasoning ability and hands-on ability.

Jigsaw reading is a kind of teaching method which combines the concept and ways of jigsaw with English reading process. We professionally translate it as "complementary" reading.

3.2.2. Steps of jigsaw reading strategies

Step 1: Separate the stories

Separate the story into several relatively independent fragments and make cards according to story fragments.

Step 2: Dividing pupils into groups

Each group holds whole story content cards, with each member in charge of different fragment or each group has different story fragment and the whole class work together to read.

Step 3: Group discussion

Group work to jigsaw complete and logical stories. Pupils cooperate and interact in groups.

Step 4: Expert group

If the story is especially hard to understand, pupils can form expert groups to make things right.

3.2.3. A real example of using jigsaw reading strategy

In the first half of the story, it describes Mimi's dream of being a superhero, and she drew herself as a superhero in her notebook. What's more, as she showed the book to her friends, instead of praising her, they mocked at her. Mimi was deeply sad.

In this part, the story plot is quite simple and the sentence structures are generally repetitive. We can use jigsaw reading strategy in real teaching situation.

Separate the stories: Each pupil is going to read two pages.

Dividing pupils into groups: four pupils in one group.

Group discussion: Discuss and communicate within groups and complete the mind map together. (Figure 4)

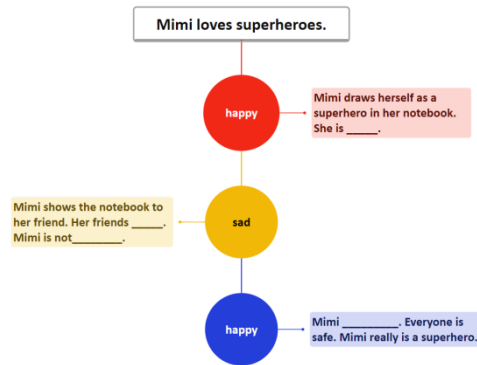


Figure4 The Mind Map of Mimi the Superhero

3.3. Sustained silent reading

3.3.1. Connotation and meanings of sustained silent reading

A person's mental development history is his reading history. The spiritual realm of a nation depends on how many people keep books in their mind. [3]

Sustained silent reading is a kind of reading activity of letting pupils read silently at a fixed time in a day. In the activity, pupils choose and change books independently, not only do they have undisturbed reading hours but also great opportunities to observe teachers to demonstrate good reading habits. Meanwhile, they don't have to take tests or writing reading reports according to the reading content.

Often with SSR, reading becomes enjoyable for students who follow their particular interest in selecting books, rather than having to read assigned books. Reading comprehension with SSR often has an improvement. "Readers don't have to pay as much attention to the pronunciation of every single word when they read silently, so they can concentrate on reading for understanding." writes Karen LoBello, in "The Advantages of Sustained Silent Reading".

Usually, when reading in context, students can find out unfamiliar words and remember their meanings in combination with the context. And by reading different styles of works, their own writing skills are intuitively influenced and improved.

Reading is the cornerstone of life and a way to connect with the world. Children who love reading are going to embrace more beautiful life. In No.56 classroom, students' reading ability is measured by "how much laughter they make when reading" and "how many tears they leave". These children will read in their whole lifetime, and read for their own lives. [4]

3.3.2. Steps of sustained silent reading strategy

Make sure that pupils have reading materials which they are interested in and is with appropriate difficulty. Choosing appropriate reading materials is the guarantee of effective reading.

Step 1: Set English reading rooms and reading corners for pupils. In special places with appropriate atmosphere, they can be more concentrate on reading.

Step 2: Create books borrowing and management system. In order to manage books borrowing process smoothly, systematic management must be set up to make it happen.

Step 3: Reading time setting: 5—7 mins for pupils; before class or after morning reading period; after lunch period.

3.3.3. The principles of SSR

a) The teacher and each pupil should read silently. It's necessary to avoid disturbing others and self-reflection.

b) 20 minutes principle. Reading time should be limited to around 20 minutes in order to keep mind relatively concentrated.

c) Teacher records and feedback principle. While carrying on SSR, teachers should observe pupils' reading behavior, evaluate reading effects invisibly, reflect and improve drawbacks. [5]

d) Enhance ritual sense. It aims to let pupils prepare carefully, and to build a nice reading

atmosphere environmentally.

- e) Do not need the pupils to submit reading report of any forms.^[6]
- f) Carry on the activity in the whole class or group to create a group reading atmosphere.
- g) Insist on SSR activity for at least half a year.

3.3.4. Sources of English reading material

All kinds of graded reading materials, for example, oxford reading tree series, Li Sheng graded reading series, X Plan, Big Cat English, ect.

Teachers' self-made reading materials, such as English newspapers, excellent text in old teaching materials.

3.4. Reading circles strategy

3.4.1. Connotation and purpose of reading circles strategy

Reading circle is an activity of reading, sharing and discussion led by pupils groups. In most cases, it is also called "literary circle".^[7]

Specifically, as a reading teaching task, pupils are usually divided into different groups, and each group member plays different roles. First, read the text independently, complete the roles assumed, fill in the role sheet, and then have a group discussion. Usual roles in reading circle strategies include: discussion leader, summarizer, cultural collector, connector, word master and passage person. We could know from the names of the roles, each member concerns different parts of the text on the basis of overall understanding, including language, culture, conclusion, analyzation and evaluation.^[8]

3.4.2. Steps of reading circle strategy

Approach the English picture book, and form a basic perception of it. Leading in process design is the key step in reading teaching, aiming to activate existing cognition, and to motivate the active learning experience of the pupils.

Step 1: Go deep into picture books and communicate independently.

Lateral communication and teasing out the storyline. Based on the preview and silent reading work pupils did before class, teachers organize the first communication and sharing within a group, in which process pupils take their own role task and share study products. For instance, the word master explains key and difficult words and phrases through pictures and performances; the prophet teases out the story plot and predicts the follow up development.

Vertical communication and thinking outburst. In order to make the scope of reading sharing not only limited to the group, teachers grouped the "reading circle" roles, and the same roles were concentrated in the same group. After regrouping, teacher makes requests to each role: Reading team leader collects questions from all groups and designs other reading tasks, for example, filling blanks, reading performances; word master collects different words and phrases, meanwhile, optimizes the way of words explaining; connectors would collect different reading perceptions of different people and understand the story connotation deeply; the prophet shares and collects the story endings of different groups.

Step 2: The second sharing and deep analysis in groups

Pupils go back to their original group, sharing learning products with group members for the second time. Read silently and finish the reading task designed by the team leader; the word master explains key words and phrases, and shares new ways of explaining words; the connector shares reading notes and leads group members to think further; the prophet shares story continuation, and team members create the most creative and logical ending.

3.4.3. Get out of the picture book and sublime emotion

- a) Retelling the Plot

Choose a representative from each team, and finish the story solitaire according to the tips to reappear the whole story. Retelling is a challenging oral practice, which requires students to understand the content of the story and master the new words. Therefore, teachers could help them to retell through keywords, mind map and text structure.

b) Ending a deduction and gaining a learning experience

Each group displays rehearsed story ending in turns, and votes for the best script group and the best performance group. In this process, not only can pupils enhance oral English ability, but also integrate into their unique experience and understanding of the story. Pupils' creativity and initiative has been fully developed during the process.

3.4.4. Experience sharing and deeply thinking

Teachers invite their pupils to share reading experience, and ask questions purposefully and timely. Timely questions can motivate pupils to think actively, and open their mind, to dig deep information of the text under teachers' guidance. For example, concerning of Mimi's bravery behavior, teacher could ask "What will you do, if you are in the same situation? Will you be as brave as Mimi?" Compare Mimi with themselves to think further, and to generate the idea of learning from Mimi.

4. Conclusions

English picture book teaching is a quality resource for children's English learning. Primary school English teachers have already tried to apply English picture books to their teaching practice and have shown good prospects. In the context of modernization of education, it is expected that more elementary school English teaching can absorb the advantages of picture teaching and continuously improve the nurturing value of picture book teaching.

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