

**Elements of art and**

**Principles of design**

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To tell a story, a writer uses the elements of a story: plot, character, setting, theme, style and tone. Design is the structure of art, with the elements and principles unifying the different parts and giving the work visual order. The elements and principles are always used in combination and therefore work together to create a composition with good design.

Often teachers do not discuss illustrations in picture and chapter books because they don’t feel comfortable in their own knowledge about art. Illustrations may be referred to as “cute” rather than more expressive terms such as *luminous, expressive, comical, cheery* or *clever.* Many illustrators believe that referring to their art as “cute” is demeaning. So it is important for teachers and students to be competent readers of illustrations as well as text.

* Composition: The composition of an illustration refers to the arrangement of the visual elements in the picture. The artist decides on proportion, balance, harmony, and disharmony within the various elements to produce the desired visual impact. In good picture books, no single element of art exists apart from the others. Composition is important to the narrative quality of the picture as well as to its emotional impact. A very important concern of composition is the organization of the shapes. Grouping many large shapes may suggest stability, enclosure, or confinement, or perhaps awkwardness. On the other hand, lighter, delicate shapes more loosely grouped may suggest movement, grace, and freedom.

Elements of Art: The basic elements that are used by artists in creating works of art; they are used to create a good composition.

1. **Line** – It is so inevitably a part of every illustration that we forget its an element. Thick, thin, straight, jagged, short, repeated, blunt, choppy, long, curled, dark, light, soft, sharp, squiggly, tapered, fine, even and exaggerated are some of the types of lines used by artists to create illustrations and portray ideas. Horizontal lines suggest peace or relaxation while vertical lines indicate stability. Lines also assist the reader’s eye in navigating the page from side to side.
2. **Shape** – A line that encloses space creates a shape. Circles ovals, triangles, diamonds, rectangles, ad squares are found in nature and our world. Shapes can be two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Shapes with sharp edges and corners can evoke tension and movement. On the other hand, when shapes have the nongeometric curving forms found in nature, they can breath a sense of life into illustrations. The bigger the shape is in the picture, the more important it is.
3. **Color**–Color brings focus to the elements in a story. The artist’s choice of color, whether it is a limited palette or a fully saturated color, should depend on the theme and mood of the story. There are three properties of color – hue (the name of the color), Value (the light or dark of the color, also known as shades and tints), and intensity (refers to the brightness of the color). Illustrators can organize color by complementary (opposite on the wheel), analogous (colors next to each other) or tertiary (colors produced by mixing two secondary colors) Colors are thought of as warm and cool and often used as symbols.
4. **Texture**– The impression of how a pictured object feels is its texture. Textures may be rough or slick, firm or spongy, hard or soft, jagged or smooth. Texture gives a flat surface (the paper) the characteristics of a three-dimensional surface. Textual effects generally offer a greater sense of reality to a picture.
5. **Space**–Space is actually what draws our attention to objects on the page.

The lack of open space on a page may contribute to a claustrophobic or uneasy feeling or perhaps confusion or chaos. The generous use of space in a picture suggests quiet serenity, but it may also imply emptiness, loneliness, or isolation. Space can also create the illusion of distance.

1. **Perspective**–The artist may make us see and think about things in specific ways by illustrating events from a worm’s-eye view, a small child’s perspective, a bird’s-eye view, or an unreal angle. Most picture books give us the “middle shot”. We see few close-ups and few panoramic views. A picture book has only a limited number of “shots” (the typical picture book has approximately 32 pages) and the artist must compromise on the variety of perspectives.

**Principles of Design**: Standards or rules to be observed by artists in creating works of art; they are how to create a good composition.

1. **Unity (Harmony)** – visually pleasing agreement among the elements in a design. It is the feeling that everything in the work of art works together and looks like it

fits.

2. **Rhythm and Movement**– We in the west tend to identify most closely with objects on the left because we read books from left to right (Western texts). Thus, protagonists typically appear on the left and antagonists on the right. The reversal of the normal order of things may contribute to the apprehensive, unsettling feeling, as shown in surrealistic stories. The pictures create a starting and stopping pattern for which the text must accommodate. The movement is not continually forward; rather, we look at the pictures, then we read, then we look at the pictures again. Picture books are usually designed to make a natural pause between the turning of pages, so that some tension is set up that invites readers to turn the page.

3. **Tension**– Good picture books create a tension between what the words say and what the illustrations depict, resulting in our heightened interest and excitement. If the pictures do no more than mimic the words or vice versa, we soon lose our interest. Words and pictures generally work together in picture storybooks

4. **Balance** – distribution of visual weight and interest. Symmetrical (formal)

balance refers to using the exact same characteristics in the same position on

either side of the Illustration; like a mirror image. Asymmetrical (informal) is achieved by

using different but equally attracting features on either side of the illustration.

Radial Balance is when the elements radiate from the center.

5. **Proportion** – size relationships of one part to another part or to the whole.

6. **Page Layout**– Page layout refers to the placement of the pictures and the text on the page, also called composition. Most picture books are wider than they are high, which makes them especially suited to narrative illustration because this design gives the artist ample space to depict the setting around the characters, expanding the narrative quality of the pictures. On the other hand, books that are tall and narrow usually focus on character and diminish the setting. Medium-sized books are frequently more complex, whereas small books (easy to handle) and large books (eye-catching) are designed for very younger readers. The size and placement of illustrations is not a random process, but rather a carefully conceived plan that carries out the overall intent of the book.