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The Magic of Sharing Stories

Janice Bland

Children's Literature in English Language Education is an international journal with articles to date from colleagues based in twenty-nine countries worldwide: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, England, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UAE, USA, and Wales. This represents many different voices, ideological stances

and research interests. Throughout all articles, however, a genuine and mutual concern for the wellbeing of children and young adults shines through, including not only their language development but also the many related educational gains that children's literature in combination with language education can afford. These include social-emotional learning, critical literacy, perspective-taking, cognitive growth, visual literacy, and interculturality. Connected to this concern is the centrality of teacher education, which often features as an important research area for the authors of CLELE articles.

The sharing of stories seems to generate magic, helping children's horizons to shift, expand, and deepen. Listening to others' voices in diverse and distantly set stories strengthens children's evolving sense of self and emotional resilience, their multifaceted cultural and linguistic identities. Classroom reading time, like family reading time, strengthens bonds, while helping with the processing and even reframing of personal struggles. Frank Cottrell-Boyce, the UK's children's laureate from 2024 to 2026, spoke of his concern regarding a decline in children's reading in his final laureate lecture on 14 May 2026, which he titled 'The Kids Are Not Alright'. Cottrell-Boyce maintains that pessimism is a luxury the world cannot afford, and an increased focus on the joys of sharing stories could help redress an imbalance: 'Reading has become so bound up with attainment and literacy, that we've failed to get across the emotional benefits, the fact that it is fun and should be done for pleasure' (Loffhagen, 2026).

Three of the multifarious pleasures of children's literature that have potential to appeal to all age groups of young people are:

1. the magic and wonder experienced through immersive world-building,
2. the uplifting artistic narrative afforded by the interplay of words and images,
3. and the beauty of patterns – in rhythmic language, illustrations and genre.

The first pleasure begins already with preverbal children, who delight in diving into the world of favourite picturebooks. Losing this magic later, for whatever reason (such as lack of shared stories, lack of access to suitable books, or addiction to screens), is a calamity that will impact joyfulness and relaxation as well as educational attainment. The second pleasure refers to multimodal narratives such as picturebooks, comics and graphic novels. Illustrated sequential narratives are not new – some highly renowned historical examples are the 11th century *Bayeux Tapestry*, the 12th

century illustrated Japanese handscroll *Genji Monogatari Emaki*, the 16th century Persian *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp, and the 17th century *Orbis Pictus* by John Amos Comenius, a textbook designed for those children fortunate enough to be literate, published first in Latin and German and soon republished in many European languages. However, the ubiquity of multimodality is a hallmark of contemporary communication, and the discovery of how pictures and words dynamically interact can be insightful and highly motivating. The third pleasure refers to patterns, for instance in language and genre – intentional repetition can lead to the thrill of comprehension for language learners, and the predictability of different genres such as fairy tales or school stories aids understanding and delivers comfort.

The first article in this issue, 'Picturebook Illustrations and Fine Art: Intertextuality, Pedagogy and Practice' looks deeply into fine art allusions and references in picturebooks, also known as interpicturebook (the visual parallel of literary intertextuality). Author Teresa Fleta suggests multiple enriching strategies that can enhance deep looking and shared interpretation. In this way, 'treating picturebook illustrations not as decorative additions but as central texts for meaning-making', children will have the opportunity to experience pleasure in their visual, verbal, and creative skills.

The next contribution, 'A Focus on Multiliteracies: Multimodal Narratives and a Blog in English Teacher Education' focuses on guiding student teachers on how to support language learners towards a critical understanding of multimodality. The research conducted by author Michael Prusse indicates how teaching practices still tend to neglect critical visual literacy. Through the formation of a blog for the publication of student teachers' book and film reviews, Prusse has created an open access resource that offers critical awareness and inspiration to his student teachers, as well as to a worldwide audience, concerning the magic of sharing stories.

Barbara Katharina Reschenhofer's article follows, titled 'Ordinary Magic in the Classroom: Promoting Perspective-taking and Resilience through Challenging Picturebooks'. This paper is concerned with reading challenging picturebooks for the promotion of resilience and perspective-taking. Informed by research into bibliotherapy, the author outlines classroom tasks for picturebooks touching on difficult experiences like displacement and homelessness, in this way combining language learning with social-emotional growth and critical literacy development. The concept of 'ordinary magic' is discussed in this connection, meaning the resilience that can be

developed through sharing stories.

Aware of the importance of getting to know many different literary texts, in order to find the very one that might fit just that specific situation in a family or classroom, nearly every issue of CLELE features 'recommended reads'. The Recommended Reads this issue, introduced by Alyssa Lowery, are exemplars of graphic novels and comics for English language learning. As the contributors Federica Clementi, Mathilde Myrstad, Iria Seijas-Pérez, and Alyssa Lowery show, there is a great deal to consider concerning the meaning-making potential of these multimodal texts. However, the priority remains the magic of sharing the story.

Reference

Loffhagen, E. (2026, May 14). Frank Cottrell-Boyce calls for children's reading to be treated as a 'right', in final laureate lecture. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2026/may/14/frank-cottrell-boyce-calls-for-childrens-reading-to-be-treated-as-a-right-in-final-laureate-lecture>