

The Department of Philology and Cultural Studies of the
Faculty of Letters - the Baia Mare University Centre of the
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca

organizes

THE 2ND BAI A MARE CONFERENCE ON LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG ADULTS, “**Storytelling through Images: the Role of
Visuals in Children’s and Young Adult Literature**”

June 12-14, 2024
Baia Mare, Romania

Keynote speakers:

Frank Serafini, Professor, Arizona State University

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Illustrations play a crucial role in children’s literature, enhancing the overall reading experience and contributing to the cognitive, emotional, and social development of young readers.

Philosophers, sociologists and aestheticians nowadays assert that we live in the age of **the image**, which means that television, cinema, video and computer screens tend to exceed and maybe even to replace Gutenberg-era’s printed materials. Visual communication is, of course, not a novelty: the gesture, mimica - but also different symbolic instances such as a fire lit on the heights of a mountain or a feather put on a certain position by the head of a tribe - all sent messages long before writing was used, the latter (i.e. the written system) being originally pictographic (see Egyptian hieroglyphs).

Throughout history, however, artists have worked to give shape to the harmonies they discovered in the visible world around. Without visual communication, the history of facts and culture, the preservation of the memory of mankind in documents, from the carved walls or slabs to the books written on a computer, would not be possible.

The image seems easier to understand than the word (which is more abstract); it is visible with the eyes and does not need to be translated from one language to another. After painting and sculpture, the silent, wordless film was hailed as a universal art. In English “I see” can also mean “I understand”. And yet what is seen cannot always be rendered exactly through words, just as the meaning of spoken or written language cannot be completely transposed into images. “Visual thinking,” as Paul Klee called it, is the oldest on the scale of human evolution.

With children, the first communication is through images. The child’s retina is assaulted by shapes and colors, which it registers irrationally, globally. When he gets his hands on something that leaves traces, the child releases emotions and tensions by scribbling everything he finds - walls, furniture, books. The passionate involvement, with all the being, in the child’s drawings, leads to unexpected achievements, often envied by mature people. “Genius is childhood rediscovered,” said Charles Baudelaire.

When addressing the role of illustrations in children’s literature one should have some key aspects in view. First, there is the *cognitive development* that cannot be denied. Illustrations, as far as Nodelman¹ is concerned, help children develop visual literacy skills by interpreting and understanding visual information alongside written text. Pictures support comprehension by providing visual cues that assist in understanding the narrative, especially for early readers (Hassett & Curwood, 2009)². For them, pictures are often their first exposure to storytelling. Visuals support language development by associating images with words, aiding in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. The second aspect is related to the *emotional engagement*, illustrations eliciting empathy and enhancing young readers’ emotional response to a story. They also contribute to the enjoyment of reading, making the experience more pleasurable. *Social development* and *cultural awareness* are also to be mentioned. Shared reading experiences of illustrated books can

¹ Nodelman, P. (1988). *Words about pictures: The narrative art of children's picture books*. University of Georgia Press.

² Hassett, D. D., & Curwood, J. S. (2009). “I’ll be the sun”: The allure of young children’s multimodal narratives. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 9(2), 191-214.

facilitate social interactions between children and caregivers (parents, teachers, educators), promoting bonding (Davenne, 2012)³, images being also able to introduce children to diverse cultures and perspectives, broadening their understanding of the world as well as promoting social understanding and tolerance (Styles, 2009)⁴.

Picture books often expose young readers to various artistic styles and elements, fostering an early appreciation for visual arts, while stimulating a child's own creativity and imaginative thinking. And, in addition to the previously mentioned aspects, there is also the motivational trigger which stresses the idea that illustrations attract reluctant readers and encourage a positive attitude towards the entire process, children, most of the time, choosing books based on the cover and images included through their pages.

It goes without saying that visuals in children's literature play a multifaceted role, combining elements of engagement, education, emotional connection, and cultural exposure to create a rich and immersive reading experience for young readers. Enhancing visual literacy skills is increasingly important in a world where visual communication is prevalent. As technology continues to advance, we can all agree that the importance of visual literacy in education and everyday life is likely to grow.

In order to address the complex issue of images in the literature for children and young adults, the organizers of this conference will try to suggest a few directions of debate:

- The relationship between text and image: completion or competition? Harmony or contrast?
- The children's book as a cultural challenge
- Comics between kitsch and art: The relationship between graphics and image in comics. Complementarity or redundancy? What is kitsch in comics? What can become art?
- Manga – Japanese comics. Causes of the success of this type of comics.
- Graphic novels and their aesthetic limits
- Aspects of video game graphics. What is aesthetic quality?

³ Davenne, C. (2012). Children's literature and social change: Some case studies from Barbara Lehman. In *Beyond Babar: The European Tradition in Children's Literature* (pp. 173-184). Scarecrow Press.

⁴ Styles, M. (2009). *The Stories We Tell: Cultural Differences in Storytelling and Storybooks*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

- The Dutch sculptor Ben Schasfoort said: “Visual communication should be taught in school as a second mother tongue.” (INSEA (The International Society for Education Through Art) Congress, Lisbon, 1994) Do you agree or disagree with this point of view?

Abstracts of no more than 150 words will be sent to Assistant Professor Luminita TODA - luminatatodea@yahoo.com by **March 25, 2024**. Accepted contributors will be notified by **April 10, 2024**.

Conference fees for onsite presentations: Romanian contributors - 200 RON; foreign contributors €60, to be paid upon arrival.

Conference fees for online presentations: Romanian contributors - 100 RON; foreign contributors €35, to be paid by May 30, 2023.

All details regarding accounts, accommodation, venue, etc. will be available on the conference site, starting with March 25.

The conference will offer an official opening dinner and free coffee breaks. Please let us know if you have any dietary preferences.

Those contributors who want to also enjoy a trip in our part of Northern Romania are asked to express their intention in an email sent to the organisers. The trip will include the Merry Cemetery in Săpânța, the Memorial of the Victims of Communism in Sighetu-Marmației, wooden churches in Maramureș County, the Village Museum in Sighetu Marmației, the Elie Wiesel memorial museum in Sighetu Marmației, sightseeing and traditional meals.