

## Conceptual Metaphors in Picturebooks: Evoking Empathy in an Identity Society

With apologies for a long and cumbersome title, the paper I propose starts by nuancing what we mean by the generally accepted truth that “children need to see themselves in books.” Although this proclamation has taken on a very specific meaning in what William Glasser (1972/2011) called an “identity society,” I explore what exactly children are looking for in their search for self-representation. What is required for children to feel represented and to have an empathic response to a picturebook—physical and material similarities to their embodied or environmental realities, or metaphoric expressions of emotions, desires, and abstract concepts? My hypothesis is that even very young children deploy “haptic vision” (Gumbrecht 2004) and experience strong empathic responses to well-made visual representations of what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson call orientational, structural, and ontological metaphors (all of which I will define with examples from picturebooks, noting which concepts seem to be the richest in evoking emotion and empathy) even when the characters don’t resemble them physically or mirror their situations or experiences. I will argue that this extensional capacity to engage with visually rendered conceptual metaphors is what enables children to empathize with characters across lines of visible differences, but that it is understudied and too often overlooked in ideological critiques of picturebook content as well as in discussions of visual literacy.