

The Symbol and Implication of Jimmy's work

- The Starry Starry Night

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Abstract: This research is researching the symbol image in Jimmy's *The Starry Starry Night*. Jimmy always leads us to think about some current issue such as adolescent problems in his picture books, and bring to light the solutions to the readers after reading the chapters. He told the touching story to bring readers into his heart and thinking with simple words and interesting patterns. In addition, for the moving story and the creative painting style, the researcher was fascinated by the illustrations and the story plot of *The Starry Starry Night*. Therefore, in order to understand the picture has the same symbol meaning with the words or not. This research uses Method of Focus Group to discuss with four experts who have design background and pick out five pictures which are the most symbolized. Then, for understanding the connection between pictures and words, this research also uses Interview Methods to make ten readers analyze the five sample patterns without words in pretest and posttest. Consequently, in this study demonstrates the message that the clearer symbol which the pictures have, the more understanding the readers can get.

Key words: *The Starry Starry Night*, symbol, adolescent problems, Interview Methods, Focus Group

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background & Motivation

Jimmy Liao is a well-known Taiwanese illustrator as well as a picture book writer. The name Jimmy is his English first name which brought about his (phonetic) Chinese pen name, 幾米. In 1998, he started to create his picture books, from "Secrets In The Forest," "A Fish With A Smile," "Turn Left, Turn Right," "The Starry Starry Night," to "It Was Not A Long Long Time Ago" in 2012, there are thirty eight publications in total (Jimmy, 2004). Thousands of people love Jimmy's works and his books have been translated into dozens of languages and sold around the world. Some people called it Jimmy Phenomenon and took it as a target for the research as well.

Jimmy said in his interview, "The Starry Starry Night' is my most emotional project in recent years" (Sina Video, 2011). It tells that the two kids who lived in their own world met, acquainted each other, and cherished their relationship. The researcher was touched and fascinated by the illustrations and the story plot after reading "The Starry Starry Night," also curious about the symbol meaning of the illustrations has the same meaning with the words or not. Therefore, this research is discussing whether the picture can express the implications of the story without words.

1.2 Research Question

1. Analyze the illustrations of “The Starry Starry Night” to understand what the meaning of them.
2. Discuss whether the words of “The Starry Starry Night” have the same meaning with the patterns or not.
3. Discuss whether the illustrations of “The Starry Starry Night” can express the main idea of themselves without the supporting words.

1.3 Research Goal

Jimmy always told the touching story to bring readers into his heart with simple words and interesting patterns, and to light the solutions to the readers. Therefore, this research is researching the symbol image in “The Starry Starry Night” of Jimmy and trying to find out the connection with the words and patterns.

1.4 Limitation

Because of the numerous patterns in The Starry Starry Night, It’s too many to analyze each of them. Therefore, the two following limitations of this research are:

1. Take the five pictures as samples through The Focus Group method and analyzed then.
2. The “symbol” in this research tends to the perception from the ten respondents.

1.5 Definition

Symbol

“Symbol is the word ‘*symbolum*’ comes from the Latin, which refers to the token of abstract and single meaning” (Chen, 2007:86). It also mentioned in the Dictionary of World Culture Symbol “A symbol means intangible in a tangible metaphor...Resorting to emotional, abstract feeling of real life into meaningful imagery” (Feldmann, 2007:86). The symbol uses metaphor to show the abstract and the hidden meanings with the specific image or sign, so that audiences can interpret meanings of the picture through their own imagination.

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 The definition of story book

“Japanese called picture book as ‘Story Book’ which means the book with drawing. Story books emphasize on the interesting hand painted pictures, and that is different from the stiff and lack of temperature photographs” (Chi, 2003:13). Tu (2010) also mentioned “The main point of a story book is the story plots. It delivers the theme topic with lifelike pictures and compendious letters, which both have the value of literature and art”.

In summary, a successful story book can tell the touching story. Authors state stories with graphic illustrations and simple words to let readers savor and chew on the plot of stories. Then, the readers may understand and realize the author’s creation concept and the atmosphere the author made.

2.2 Problems of Adolescents

Problems of Adolescents which means the difficulties that the adolescent meet in their daily life, such as studies, occupations, and friendship, etc. Adolescence is in the period of physiological maturity but not into the adulthood yet. The young people who are in this age would be self-oriented. They might be disappointed and

frustrated when their goal is too hard to achieve, that is cognitive and emotional disorders which they would face the trouble with adaption easily (Yu, 2004).

To sum up, the period of adolescence is between a child and an adult. In the process of development to teenagers, they face the conversion in mood. They might encounter the so-called rebellious phase, and close their heart just like the youths in “The Starry Starry Night” of Jimmy. They are not good at external communication by this era of information explosion, people often chat through the Internet rather than face-to-face conversation. Moreover, for the tendency of low birth rate, children often feel lonely in their growing stage.

3. Methodology and Theories

3.1 Method of Focus Group

The Method of Focus Group is based on a group of people for their common interested topics, then discusses and brings out each other’s thoughts and feelings through interaction between members (Kuan, 2007:239-240).

This research is researching the pattern symbol of “The Starry Starry Night.” For the numerous patterns, it uses Method of Focus Group to do initial screening, discuss, and exchange advices with four experts who have design related background, and pick out the five most symbolized pictures which offer the testing sample for the next step of Interview Method.

3.2 Interview Methods

“Interview Method is based on visiting respondents for the specific purpose, then talking to and getting their viewpoints through the interviewing” (Kuan, 2007:125). It used the half-structure of Interview Method, and set a range for ten design background students, five of them are male and others are female. For their past learning experiences, they are sensitive to the color of pictures and difference of imagery. Expect that they can be able to describe a more in-depth insight, so choose the students majored in design as the target for Interview.

Firstly, the ten respondents must not read “The Starry Starry Night.” Before the Interviewing, tell them the purpose of this research, let them read the selected five pictures, and then lead them to describe what they think about and how they feel, which comes out the pretest. After that, let them read the story without pressure, and do the same questions as the posttest again to understand the connection between pictures and words.

4. Analysis

The Interview contents show the respondents’ descriptions of six questions, such as the role, mood, main colors, scenes, other symbolic objects and overall feelings in the illustrations. Here shows the analysis results which are arranged, so there are not displaying all six contents for each sample.



Figure 1: First sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Table 1: First sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Analysis items	Analysis Results of Pretest	Analysis Results of Posttest
Role	A family without affection	A family with less interaction
Mood	1. Feel cold and empty 2. Feel as usual	Unconcerned and not care about each other
Scenes	A restaurant with suspenseful atmosphere	A restaurant with emotionless atmosphere
Other symbolic objects	Cold soup, shark, murals, and chandeliers show that the relationship is not harmonious for this family	The same as the pretest

“I don’t know when to begin; it becomes quite quiet at home” (Jimmy, 2009). The story takes the girl as the first-person narrative. Unconsciously, her family became stranger without interaction and without concern. The symbolic objects are a lot in the first sample. From the people’s expression, behavior, and the tone, scene, and other accessories of the picture, the pattern gives the sense of alienation, which shows the consistent results between the pretest and the posttest.



Figure 2: Second sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Table 2: Second sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Analysis items	Analysis Results of Pretest	Analysis Results of Posttest
Main color	The contrasting color of green and red, represent the barriers between two of them	Green and black, show the wish of family accompanied and the desire for freedom

Other symbolic objects	Green bird, birdcage, and ornate decorations, show the daughter wants freedom	Bird, birdcage, fruit, and bow represent, imprisoned girl wants the freedom and gains more affection from families
Overall feelings	Lonely girl is ignored, unhappy feeling conveys to the audiences	Girl with a moody face, feel that she is imprisoned and has poor relationship with her father

“Daddy is always talking on the phone. It seems that each his phone call is important. Anyway, I have nothing to talk to him. Probably, he doesn’t know what to talk to me, either” (Jimmy, 2009). The girl’s father is always busy in his business. While giving his-considered good gifts or items to his daughter, he ignores that the most essential thing is to communicate with his child. In the second sample, it can express the girl’s loneliness, desire for free, and the poor relationship with parents through the symbolic colors. Therefore, the analysis result of pretest is consistent with the posttest.



Figure 3: Third sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Table 3: Third sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Analysis items	Analysis Results of Pretest	Analysis Results of Posttest
Role	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Red balloon, lonely 2. A reflection of a girl standing in front of the window, eager for the outside 	<p>Red balloon</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reflect the girl’s grandpa who passed away 2. Represent the hope 3. Show the girl doesn’t want to face the fact of her grandpa’s death
Mood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curious about the world out of window 2. Nervous and excited, desire for freedom 	Sad, and frustrated
Overall feelings	A lonely girl with an enthusiastic heart, desire for the outside	Depressed, lets people want to escape from the reality

In the third sample, the obvious symbolic objects are only the red balloon, the reflection, and faded trees, so that it’s difficult to analyze the implication from this picture. Besides, the pattern is connecting to the story which

tells that the death of grandpa impacted on the girl. “I really hope this is just a nightmare” (Jimmy, 2009). For this reason, the results in pretest are slightly different from the posttest. However, the contrasting color allows audiences for guessing what the girl’s mood is.

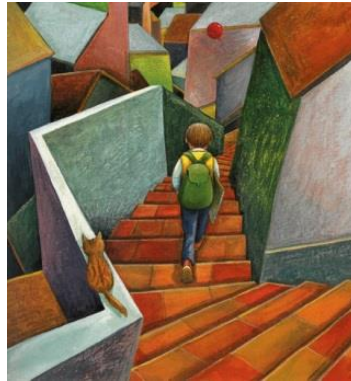


Figure 4: Fourth sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Table 4: Fourth sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Analysis items	Analysis Results of Pretest	Analysis Results of Posttest
Mood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Depressed 2. Peaceful 3. Excited to chase the dream 	Independent and adventurous
Scenes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Winding street 2. Unknown direction 3. A place with bright and free 	The winding shows the boy’s roundabout
Overall feelings	<p>Complicated background expresses the complex thought of the boy.</p> <p>Cannot read his feelings from his back.</p> <p>Maybe he is ready to start his adventure, or there is something disturbed him.</p>	<p>The mazy background brings out the independent boy, who is not afraid of moving forward to an unknown place, but it also shows his loneliness from the back of him.</p>

“He always refused the help from others. Seems that he will feel much better while leaving the crowd” (Jimmy, 2009). The boy always alone, maybe he is not good at communication, which develops his independence. In the picture of fourth sample, every respondent talked about his isolated and independent. It’s not totally the same results in the pretest and the post one but is similarly. Hence, the result in the pretest is consistent with the posttest.

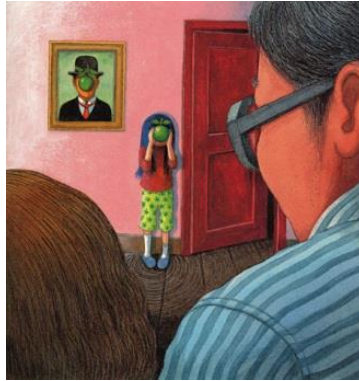


Figure 5: Fifth sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Table 5: Fifth sample in ‘The Starry Starry Night’

Analysis items	Analysis Results of Pretest	Analysis Results of Posttest
Role	The girl 1. Funny 2. Be in the warm family occasion 3. Escape from something 4. Refuse to communicate with parents	A family 1. Seems they are discussing something 2. Daughter refuse to communicate with the parents
Mood	1. She wants to get attention, and doesn't want to be ignored 2. Be blamed, she is pale with fear	The contradiction between avoiding the fighting and attracting parents' attention
Main color	Warm color of red and pink, emphasize that the family is still warm	Warm color of red, the warm family is the appearance, that is not the truth
Overall feelings	A painting on the wall 1. Girl imitates the painting, wanting to escape from the reality 2. Some respondents thought that is the father's picture	Girl imitates the famous painting, wanting to escape from parents' quarrel, but there are two respondents thought that is grandpa's picture
Overall feelings	1. The girl is to amuse her parents, wanting to relax the atmosphere 2. The girl attracts her parents' attention to let them know her thought 3. The girl acts like this is to avoid blaming	She imitates the painting to do a silent protest. Doesn't want to know why her parent always fight, she wants to escape from the boredom space as soon as possible

“I don't want to know more about the matter between them” (Jimmy, 2009). In the fifth sample, it expresses that the girl cannot tolerate the long term fighting between her parents. Therefore, she imitates the painting of Magritte, The Son of Man, to express her protest. Actually, there is a debate that respondents cannot state the behavior of silent protest if they haven't read the story. Instead, they only tell the fact that the girl wants to escape in the pretest. Consequently, the result for the pretest and posttest are different.

All in all, the results of the posttest for five samples are the same as the story “The Starry Starry Night”. Therefore, it compare to the pretest.

5. Conclusions

According to the above all research questions, the preliminary results in this research shows that if the symbolism is clear, it can make audiences understand the meaning and conception clearly. Every picture in “The Starry Starry Night” has its represented symbolic items which can be animals, colors, natural scenes, and so on. All in all, the items symbolize the disturbance in the adolescence that the youths meet pressure for living, education, and relationship in. Therefore, Jimmy drew this book and expected to resonate with the adolescents.

In the five picked out sample, firstly, there are three of them (the first, second and fourth) with rich symbolic information. Therefore, the results of pretest and posttest are the same in that three sample. For the audiences learned what the author expressed from the roles’ expression, bold color, scenes, and other objects. Besides, the third sample offered a few details for readers and who can read the story through their imagination. However, readers can guess what the original idea from the contrasting color. Finally, the fifth sample has deep implication, which is difficult to get resonance with readers and easy to get misunderstanding, so the result of pretest and posttest are different in the fifth sample. In the five examples, there are four fifths patterns have the same meaning with the words, which shows that they can express the main idea of themselves without the supporting words. In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the clearer symbol which the pictures have, the more understanding the readers can get.

6. References and Citations

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