

BOOKS

a n d t h e

STORIES

THEY TELL

A brief discussion about book design

by Pam Arnold Pollack

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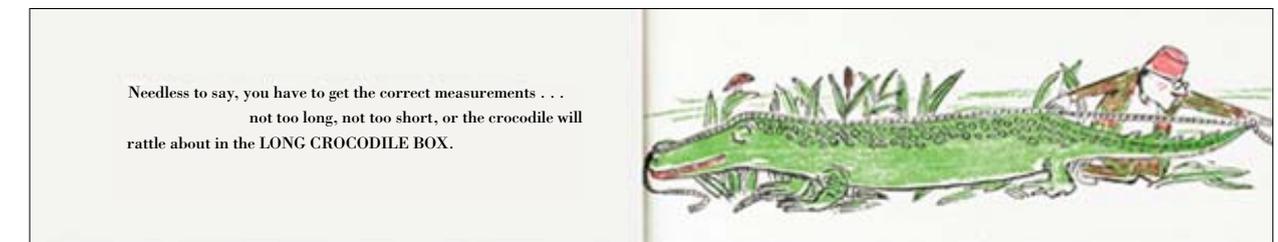
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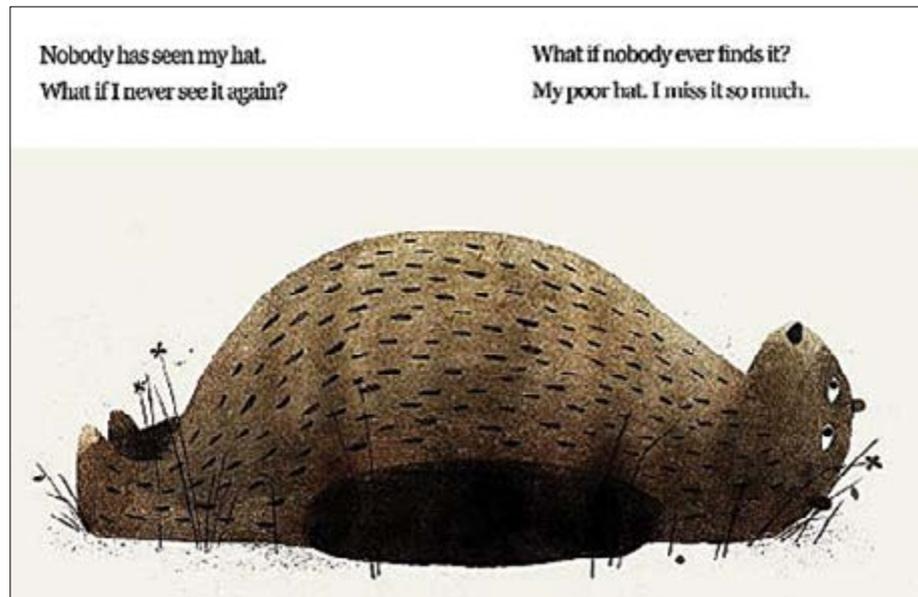
Once upon a time... Telling stories with books.

Everyone knows that the storybook is a form of communication. It tells a story....

But the story it tells isn't told with just pictures and words. The choices made about the paper, binding, layout, margins, typography, color, line weights, and shape and size of every book tell a story too. These choices communicate just as strongly as do the pictures and words on each page.

Think about the clues a reader gets about the story just from looking at a book and asking questions. Is the paper white and shiny or is it craft paper with rough edges? What size and shape is the book? Is it a very tall book or a long horizontal book?





Does it use a font or is it handwritten? If it does use a font, what kind of font is used? And if it's handwritten, what is the line quality? All these questions point to the fact that the best books use every means possible to tell their unique story. Each integrates many elements into one beautifully designed book. We will talk about how we can guide readers' responses to our stories through the use of design and how best to employ visual and tactile elements.

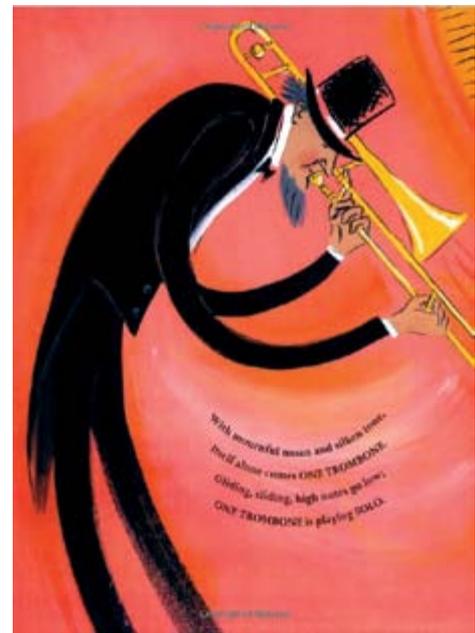
First, let's talk about the pages in a book.

You can look at a single page or you can look at a double-page spread. A double-page spread is a different shape from a single page. If your book is square, when you open it to reveal two pages, it becomes a horizontal rectangle. This double-page spread is bigger and thereby more dramatic than the single page. Can we use this drama to emphasize the most important or emotional parts of the story?

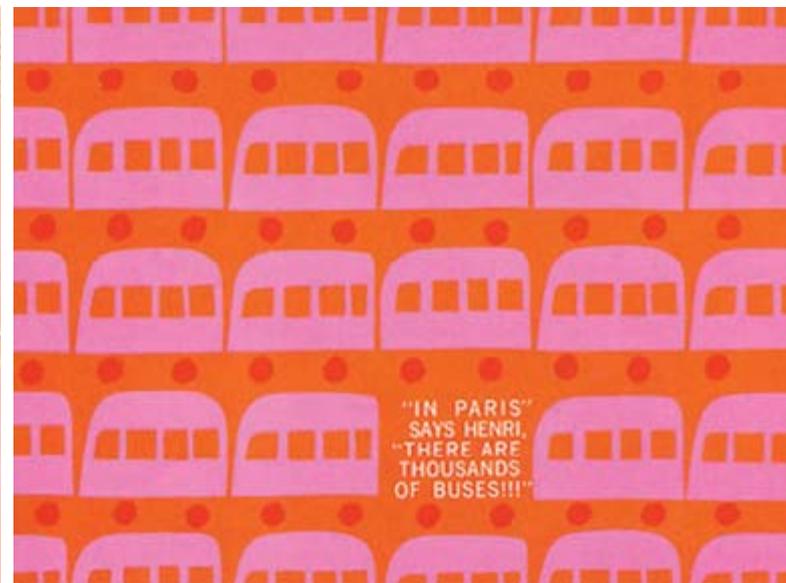
All storybooks have to allow space for the text but a great storybook will let the placement of that text help to tell the story. Look at the numbered books on pages 8 and 9.



1



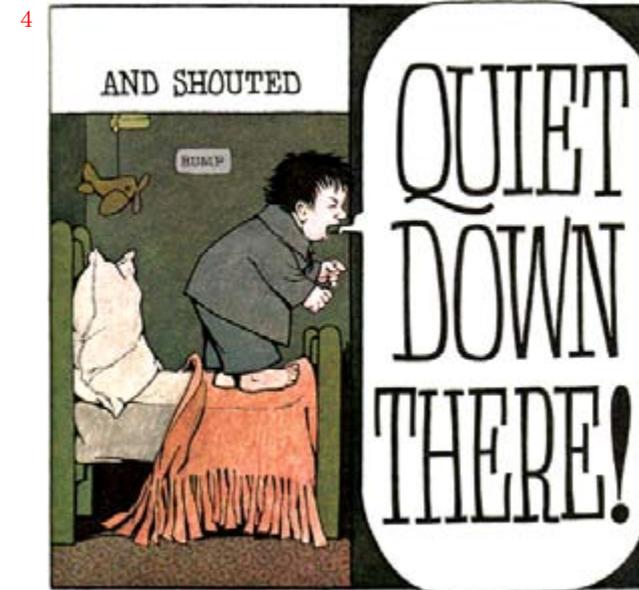
2



3

1. In this example the reader is made aware that Henri's walk is long and circuitous because the text takes a snake-like path.

2. Here, the designer chose to wrap the text around the shape of the musician's arm in curved lines. You can almost hear the rounded tones of the trombone in this example.



4

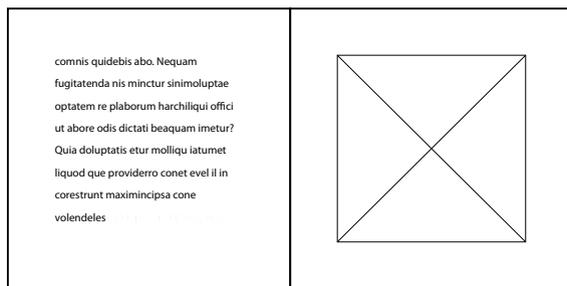
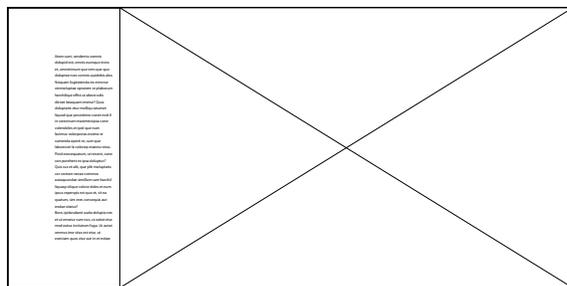
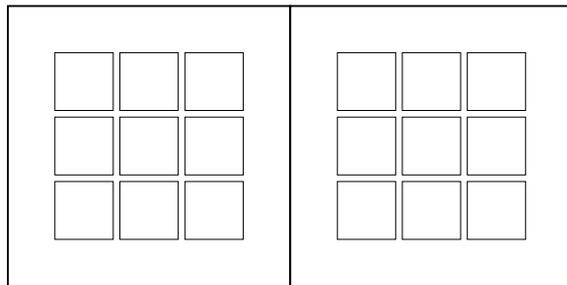
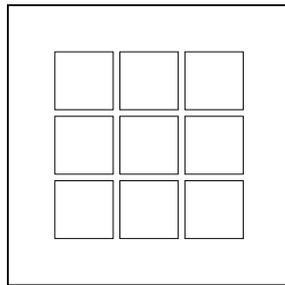
3. On this page you can feel the congested streets of Paris because the text is crowded into a busy page. The colors are also close in value and hue furthering the sense of constriction.

4. In this example, without even reading the words, you know that the boy is screaming loudly.



5

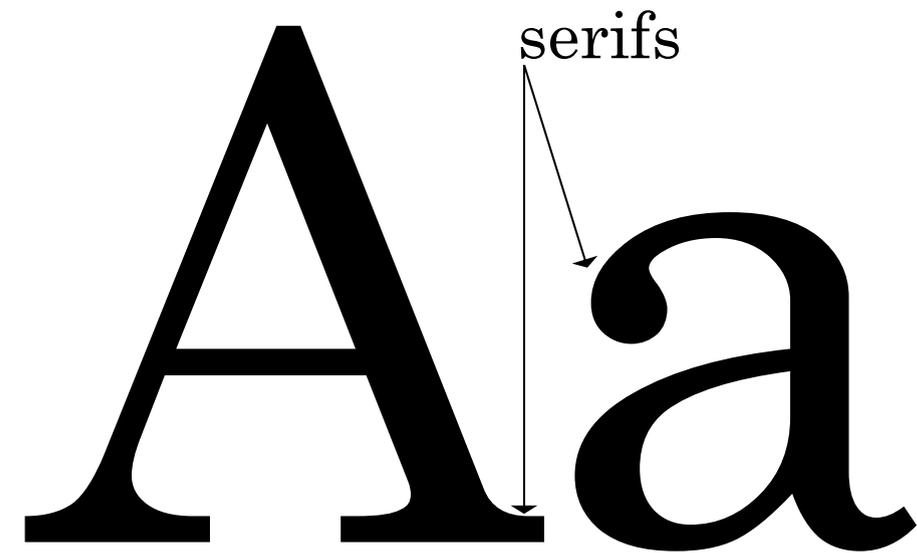
5. Here's a creative way of showing the length and size of words.



Some very basic information about page design...

Most published materials use a grid system to lay out pages. A grid is a kind of road map for the pages in a book. It helps to organize the information and create consistency, allowing readers to quickly process information. It consists of columns, gutters (the spaces between the columns), margins, and rows. Here's an example of a grid and a few ways it might be used.

Most importantly, the grid must serve the content of the book. You can create your own grids. Any of the areas in a grid can be combined. Images can “bleed” to the edges of the paper or fall within the grid lines. Text can flow through grid areas but must stay within the margins. Text can't be too close to the edge of the page and must not exceed the margin space because books need to be trimmed once they are bound. If the text is too close, you risk trimming it off. An interesting exercise might be to look at books and magazines and see if you can recreate their underlying grids.



A little talk about fonts and faces...

A font or typeface is one of the most expressive elements a book designer can use to further tell a story. A font always gives the reader a “hidden” message. Fonts are broken down into two basic categories: Serif and Sans Serif. Serif fonts have small decorative flourishes – “little feet” – attached at the end of strokes. Times Roman is the most commonly used serif font. Look at the example of a Serif font on the facing page.

Here are some words used to describe Serif fonts which are usually used in books and editorials – classic, beautiful, serious, legible, readable.

Sans Serif fonts are typefaces without, or *sans*, serifs. Helvetica is the most commonly used in print. Arial is the most common Sans Serif font used on the web.

Here are some words used to describe Sans Serif fonts – modern, casual, crisp, bold, informal, friendly, readable.

Choosing a font is basically subjective, or personal, and looking at fonts and their characteristics will help you decide which ones serve your story best.

TALL COLLEGE
Museum
OLD WEST
Whimsy



Even though this illustration by R.O. Blechman does not use a typeface, the line quality of his handwriting along with his wobbly drawing style increase your sense that his characters are nervous and insecure.

Look at some examples of fonts on the facing page and think about what they might communicate.

You might not want to use any of these fonts as text fonts. They work best as headline fonts. Some very basic examples of text fonts are on the following page.

Notice that each of the paragraphs in the examples uses a different typeface. Although these paragraphs all use the same *size* font, each face takes up a different amount of *space*. Every font size has a different “character count” - the amount of letters, numbers and symbols that can fit within a given column width.

The “dummy” text used on this page acts as a placeholder. It is written in Latin so that it will be unreadable to most people. Book designers use dummy text to indicate the font, size, line spacing and position where the text will be placed. This helps determine how much space the illustrator should allow for the actual text.

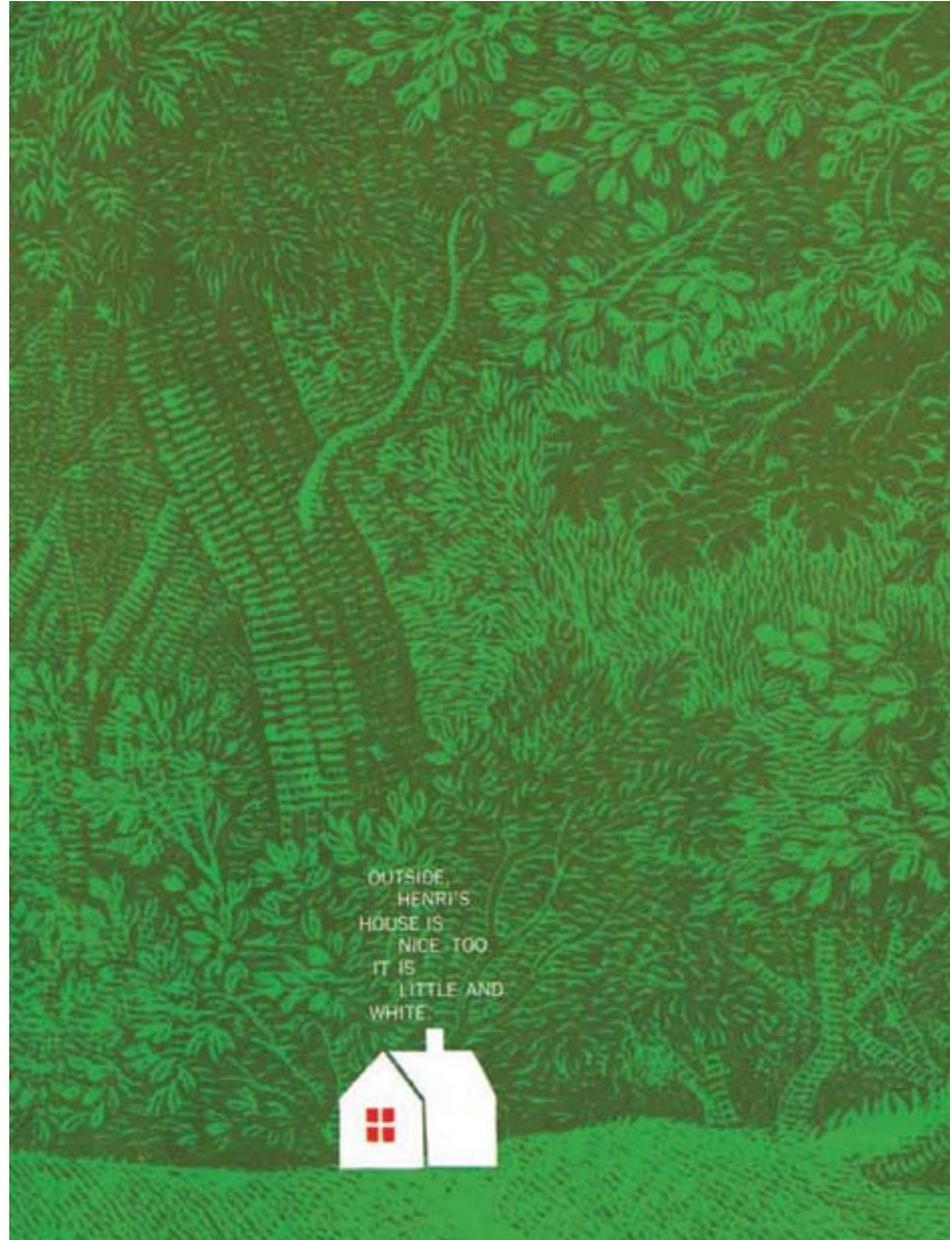
- 1 Escillabore nulpa volest erruntint.Cest, omnis et volo odisquo magna gnatiam endiate inciis que volor aciendant quam, sed molectatquae ent ilicat labo. Ut magnimo idenissit, sincimpos estium, volorporum as eium, sum nonse nulparum quia solupta consedigenim untendis volorem facid qui odit assitiant optium escipsuntem inistrumet molupta doloremorum harumquiatem harissitam sunt re ex etur?
- 2 Escillabore nulpa volest erruntint.Cest, omnis et volo odisquo magna gnatiam endiate inciis que volor aciendant quam, sed molectatquae ent ilicat labo. Ut magnimo idenissit, sincimpos estium, volorporum as eium, sum nonse nulparum quia solupta consedigenim untendis volorem facid qui odit assitiant optium escipsuntem inistrumet molupta doloremorum harumquiatem harissitam sunt re ex etur?
- 3 Escillabore nulpa volest erruntint.Cest, omnis et volo odisquo magna gnatiam endiate inciis que volor aciendant quam, sed molectatquae ent ilicat labo. Ut magnimo idenissit, sincimpos estium, volorporum as eium, sum nonse nulparum quia solupta consedigenim untendis volorem facid qui odit assitiant optium escipsuntem inistrumet molupta doloremorum harumquiatem harissitam sunt re ex etur?
- 4 Escillabore nulpa volest erruntint.Cest, omnis et volo odisquo magna gnatiam endiate inciis que volor aciendant quam, sed molectatquae ent ilicat labo. Ut magnimo idenissit, sincimpos estium, volorporum as eium, sum nonse nulparum quia solupta consedigenim untendis volorem facid qui odit assitiant optium escipsuntem inistrumet molupta doloremorum harumquiatem harissitam sunt re ex etur?

Although quite subtle, each font communicates a different message. The first paragraph is somewhat like a typewriter – indicating a connection to the writer. The second is very sophisticated and elegant. The third is open, rounded and friendly. And the final paragraph seems like an old – fashioned schoolbook.

Some other things to consider when using type are the line spacing, letter spacing, paragraph justification, and weights of the typefaces you use. To avoid illegibility, never use more than 2 or 3 fonts in any book, unless you are using the fonts as an illustration. Font weights are the relative heaviness of the stroke used in the font. Most fonts have Bold, Regular, and Light. Some have more variations on these weights. The more space you have between lines in a book, the easier it is for your eye to move from left to right and not lose your place. That is why many children’s books have more “leading” than adult books. Letter spacing can also be an expressive tool. Look at this example and think about what it says.

I kept walking and walking f o r e v e r .

Another thing to consider is which words you might emphasize in your story. You can do this by altering the font weight, size, color or placement.



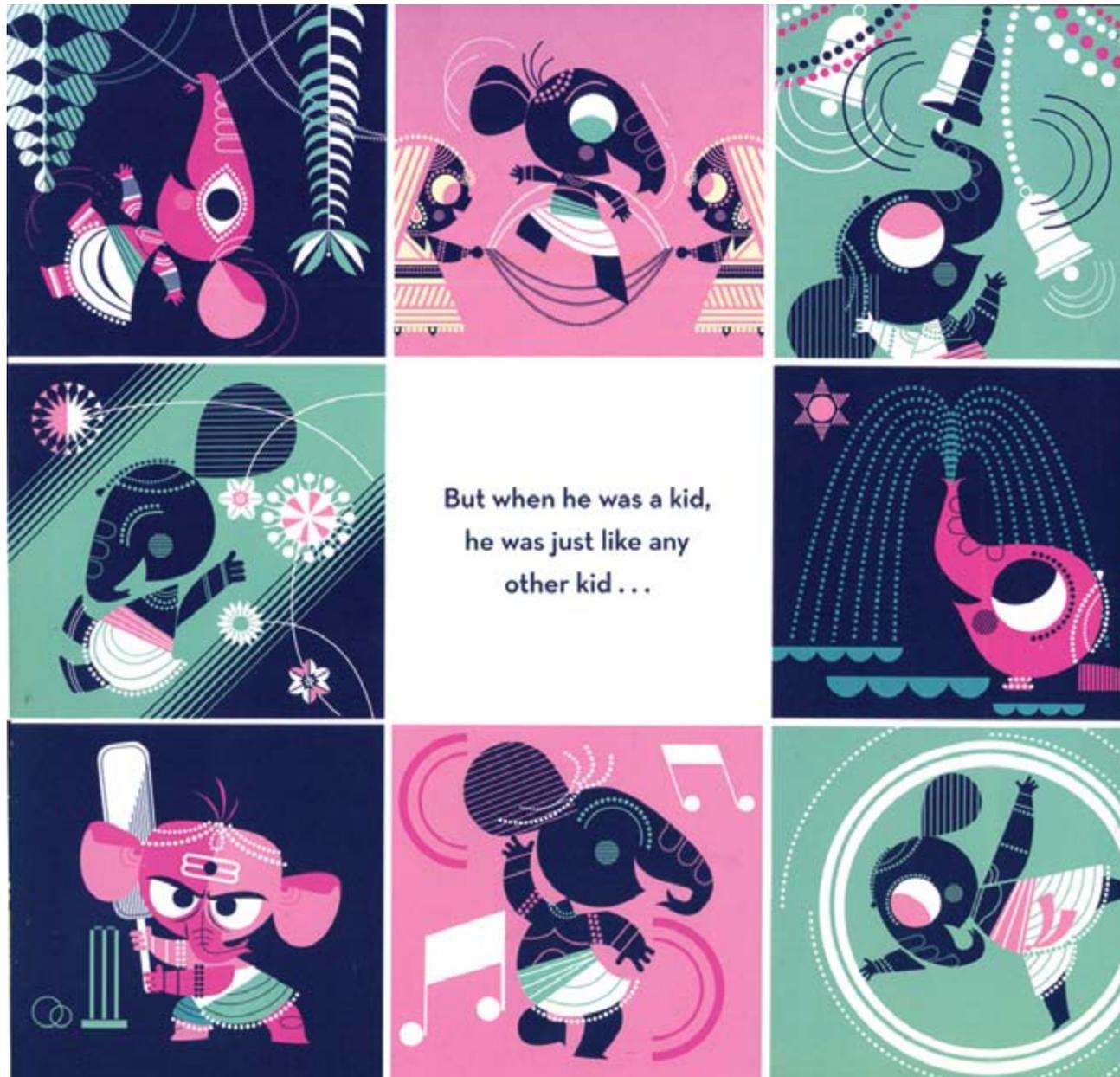
Look at the example below. You get the clear message that your appointment will be not last a second longer than 10 minutes.

The doctor will see you for **exactly** 10 minutes.

The font face used should be consistent throughout the book. A dense and colorful illustration may be better served by a simple light typeface – which would add emphasis to the drawing where a simple, single-line illustration may be embellished by a more fanciful font. Contrast is an important tool when designing books. You can point the reader's attention where you most want it to go. You can do this by subordinating other elements on the page.

In the example on the facing page, notice how small and insignificant Henri's house seems. The small white type furthers this idea while contrasted against the deep rich green forest.

Typography is an art and there is much to know about it. When designing children's books, consider typography as an illustrative tool. It will add so much more to your books.



Using Images to their best advantage...

Images in books aren't always placed in the middle of the page. Sometimes illustrations are centered on the page. Other times they

bleed off the edges of the page or spread. Sometimes they are pushed to one side or the other. Sometimes they are small and sometimes they are large. Sometimes they have a large white margin around them and sometimes they have a small black frame. And sometimes they are grouped together to form comic book-like frames as on the facing page.

The images to the right communicate to us by the use of inventive framing and cropping. These consecutive pages tell the story of Henri's walk to Paris.

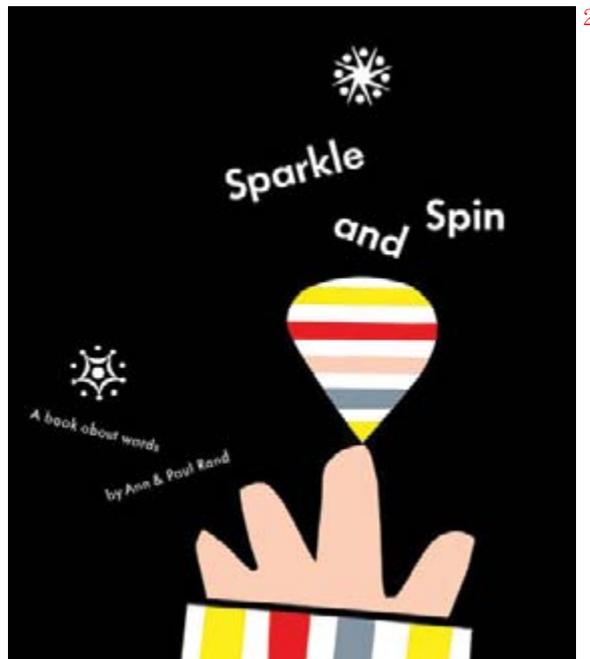
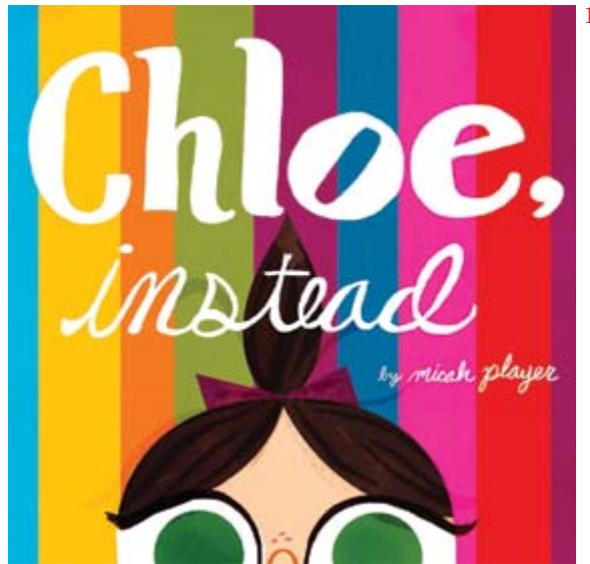
The story has begun before there is even a story to read.





A minute later, the others were awakened from their nap
by a piercing "*Brrrr! brrrr!*"
"Someone's got Benjy," Nora called. "Let's rescue him."

Compare the use of perspective in these two images. On the facing page, notice the use of cropping and how it creates perspective. How does it differ from the example above?



The Cover of a book is a billboard!

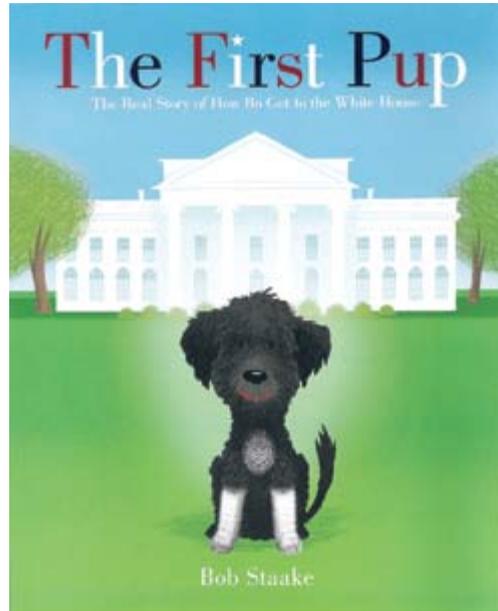
The cover of a picture book is a billboard. Not only is it a clue about the book's content but it is also an advertisement for the book - an advertisement that has to work from far away. Imagine a book displayed in a bookstore or in a library. Its cover should shout out from across the room and draw you over to pick it up. What might an author or designer use to grab your attention?

There are lots of tools available to designers. Let's look at a few.

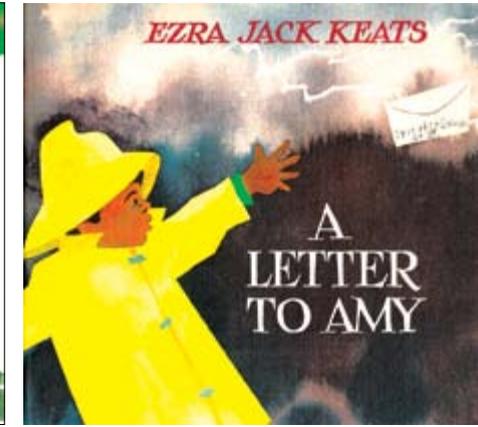
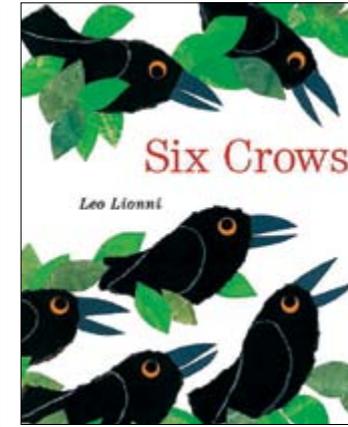
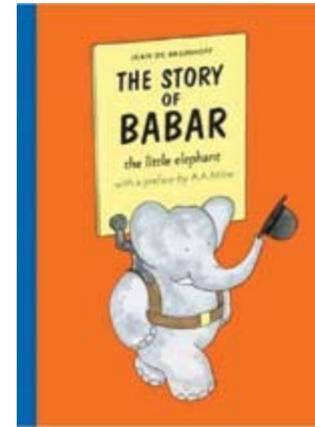
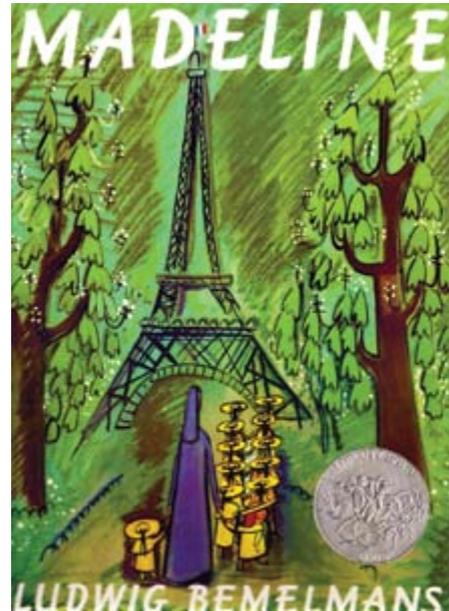
On the facing page, the cover of *Chloe Instead* uses bright colors to attract your attention. The type is large and white so that it stands out against the striped background. The cropping of the image is arresting - it makes us curious about the part that's missing. The overall design is simple and strong. A very complex image can't be understood from far away.

The cover of *Sparkle and Spin*, published first, employs the same concepts as the example above. It is interesting to note that the covers were designed over 50 years apart.

3



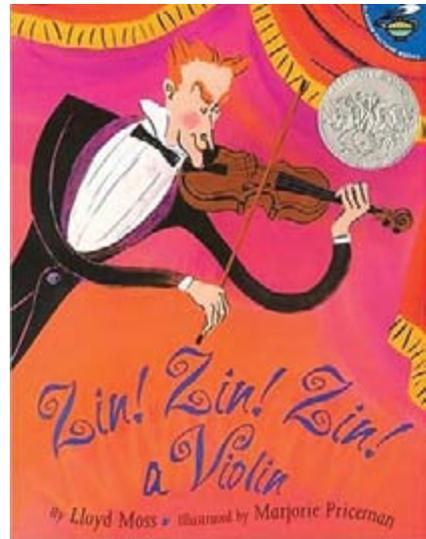
4



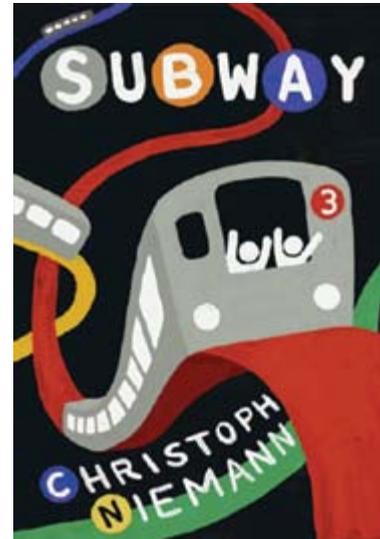
The covers above are all bold and use simple images. The titles clearly stand out. Note that warm, bright colors attract attention. In each of these examples the artist has created a visual frame for the titles.

On the previous page, cover examples 3 and 4 both evoke a place. In 3 the use of red, white and blue along with the stars are nice allusions to our flag – and relate to the setting of the book.

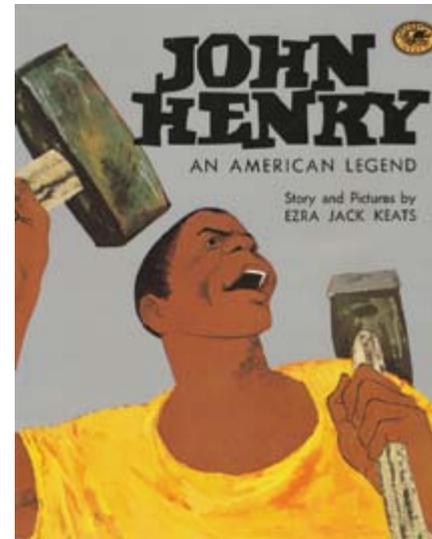
Cover examples 5 and 6 employ the use of curvy lines - one to indicate the fluid movement of melody and the other to indicate the subway's path. The cover title of 5 is decorative and handwritten. The cover of *Subway* makes an allusion to subway signage and employs the use of depth and perspective effectively. The powerful physical strength of the title character in 7, *John Henry*, is reflected in the use of the blocky letters and the bold golden shirt color.



5



6



7



The cover to the left is another good example of the illustrative quality of line. The horizontal nature of traveling along a road is exaggerated by the use of yellow. The horizontal layout indicates the length of the road. The tiny buildings in the background create perspective. The little arrow under the author's name is a charming detail indicating the direction of the road but also inviting the reader to open the book.

Make it neat and sweet: a discussion of production values.

When artists create work to be hung on walls, we often frame that work. The frame is an indication that we are separating it from the wall it hangs on and setting a value to the artwork. We're saying, "This is special and we want you to look at it."

When we go to a job interview we want to present ourselves in the best possible light. We think carefully about our appearance and how we will conduct ourselves in order to be taken seriously. Similarly, we want people to look at our books and take them seriously; we need to

show that we've taken great care to create these books and that we are proud of them. Storybooks ARE special and should be taken seriously. Whenever students present books to be judged, what should be evident is not only the quality of the *content* of the book, but also the quality of the *presentation*.

What does this mean? The pages should be clean and neat. The edges should be squared off and as professional looking as possible. There should be no visible sign of erasures or hesitancy in the work - and no spelling errors or sloppiness of any kind. Accomplishing this may be more difficult with younger students, but the concept should be addressed. When you make something that shows care, people take it seriously.



List of the books used to illustrate this text.

Pages 4 and 30:
Louie's Search
by Ezra Jack Keats
[New York]: Four Winds, ©1980.

Page 5:
Crocodile Tears
by André François
London: Faber and Faber, 1955.

Pages, 6, 8, 18, 21, and 22:
Henri's Walk to Paris
by Leonore Klein; Saul Bass
New York: Universe, 2012.

Page 6:
I Want My Hat Back
by J Klassen
Somerville, Mass.: Candlewick
Press, 2011.

Pages 8 and 26:
Zin! Zin! Zin!: A Violin
by Lloyd Moss; Marjorie
Priceman; Paul Zakris; Simon
and Schuster, inc.
[New York]: Simon & Schuster
Books for Young Readers,
©1995.

Page 9:
In the Night Kitchen
by Maurice Sendak
[New York]: Harper & Row,
1970.

Pages 9 and 24:
Sparkle and Spin: A book about
words
by Ann Rand; Paul Rand; Fritz
Eichenberg;
Harcourt Brace & Company.
New York: Harcourt, Brace and
Co., ©1957.

Page 15:
Talking Lines
by R.O. Blechman
Montreal, Quebec: Drawn and
Quarterly, November 2009.

Page 20:
Ganesha's Sweet Tooth
by Sanjay Patel; Emily Haynes
San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle
Books, 2012.

Page 23:
Nora's Duck
by Satomi Ichikawa
New York: Philomel Books, 1991.

Page 24:
Chloe, Instead
by Micah Player
San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle
Books, ©2012.

Page 26:
The First Pup : The Real Story of
How Bo Got to the White House
by Bob Staake
New York: Feiwel and Friends,
2010.

Page 26:
Madeline
by Ludwig Bemelmans
New York: Viking Press, ©1967.

Page 26:
Subway
by Christoph Niemann
New York: Greenwillow Books,
©2010.

Page 26:
John Henry
by Ezra Jack Keats
Pantheon Books, ©1965

Page 27:
The Story of Babar, The Little
Elephant
by Jean de Brunhoff; Merle Haas
New York: Random House,
[2002], ©1933.

Page 27:
Six Crows
by Leo Lionni
New York: Knopf, ©1988.

Page 27:
A Letter to Amy
by Ezra Jack Keats
New York : Harper & Row,
©1968.

Page 28:
Along a Long Road
by Frank Viva
New York: Little, Brown, 2011.

