

# Investigation of the Quality of Illustrated Books Illustration for Children Aged 3 to 5 (Grade A) in Iran

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**Abstract.** The aim of this study is to investigate how illustration in picture books is carried out, and further to show the quality development of this matter from past to the present time. The hypothesis states that this age group (grade A), though deserve due attention, have been ignored by Iranian illustrators. The reason for this inattention could probably be due to visual artists' lack of interest in illustrations for this age group. The findings of this study showed that the Iranian contemporary illustrations originate from the experiences of previous Iranian illustrators who were influenced by the European style and synthesized it with folk, ethnic, and traditional characteristics. In spite of all the efforts made, the children aged 3 to 5 are somehow overlooked by the writers and illustrators. The reason for weakness and shortage of the picture books in Iran could be because of illustrators' lack of interest. This study is the kind of applied research and the research library with books, documents and pictures.

**Keywords:** Illustration of Iran, Children Grade- A in Iran, Picture Book.

## 1. Introduction

In the world of illustration, there has been an incident in the children's world making them a part of a formation of a world which entails moving perspectives for human's future, without them realizing it. Nowadays, illustration, with its continuous rush, has made an inhomogeneous and tumultuous world; it has separated from its intact nature and today's human-made illustrations have not been able to fill the unknown psychological gap of his world. "Picture books are ubiquitous in young children's lives and are assumed to support children's acquisition of information about the world" (Tare, Chiong, Ganea, Deloache, 2010: 395).

Investigating different types of children's books, especially Group- A ones, in Iran shows a lack of attention to the books of this age group (3-5). Although significant changes is seen in the Iran's illustration art in recent decades, weaknesses and shortcomings of Group-A children picture books is sensible. Unfortunately this age group has not received enough attention from artists and publishers of children books. Considering the studies which have been carried out in Iran, this subject has not been of illustrators' and researchers' favor and in order to prove some scientific and literary realities, some studies in this course are pointed out here.

Sutherland and Hearne (1984) quoted by Norton (1999), in a study show that illustrations are of great importance in picture books. Some of pictorial books, without having any word, influence children just like the written ones and children respond to them." Most of the books for Group A children are illustrated; but, not all illustrated books are pictorial books. Perry Nodelman (1988), in a research on children's picture books has come to a conclusion that "picture books transfer information or tell a story using picture strips containing little text or none". P. W. Loye, emphasizes the role of age and experience in the reactions of Group A children to the picture books (Norton, 1999). Most of the young children's first reaction to picture books is mainly physical. Songür Dag (2010), in a study states that "Illustrated children books are very efficient in shaping the mind and imaginations of the children. They introduce the daily life to them. While parents are reading the book, children correlate the text to the illustrations on it. It is commonly agreed that aesthetics and suitability of illustrations of pre-school children books are as important as the text".

## 2. Picture Books: Concept and Characteristics

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Picture books are those in which the illustrations are designed in a way that make up an inseparable part of the text and a combination of text and illustrations convey a single concept. The goal of picture books is presenting illustrations enabling children without the reading ability to directly understand the concepts of the book. This kind of book is usually useful for pre-school children. Ozturk (2011) quoting Celia (1988), depicts the picture story books as, “the books where illustration has a great importance and which are created for the children aged 0-7 years and also which can cover almost every subject”. Sutherland (1997) quoting Norton (1999), has more suggestions for the evaluation of young children’s picture books: “picture books particular to young children should be short, simple and understandable. They should contain few concepts, and if the concepts are unfamiliar they should not go beyond the understanding of the child”.

The objectives of illustration and creating picture books for Grade- A children can be mentioned as follows: helping the 3-5 year old children understand concepts as much as possible, penetrating child’s mind and willing to continue this perpetuation, helping the recording of the subject in child’s mind, adding to the child’s knowledge, recognition, awareness and general information, reinforcing artistic inclinations of the child, facilitating the learning of the Grade- A children in different fields, properties, impacts and their correct usage, replacing the verbal language with illustrative one for Grade- A children, establishing an effective emotional-intellectual relationship between the young child reader and the characters of the book, increasing the expanse and growth of the depth of child’s thoughts, imaginations, dreams, and positive ambitions.

### **3. Evaluating Group- A Children Picture Books in Iran**

Studying Iran’s picture books through history is a good way of evaluating these books. The emergence of the illustration children books in Iran should be investigated in the constitutional period; picture educational books which were being used in old-fashioned schools before this period included books for adults and for some reasons children had to use the same illustrated books. Illustration of children books bore some changes in the eighties and nineties after the revolution; at first a realistic view, a reference to the bereaved community, and being simple was seen and after that professional view of some Iranian artists and illustrators led to the creation of more creative works. With the start of the twenty-first century, the third and fourth generation of children books’ illustrators entered the field of illustration in Iran. However, after studying and investigating the works of the third generation, not being affected by the works of their previous generation and even influencing the next generation of illustrators is perspicuous. Fourth-generation illustrators include hardworking artists who started their career at the early the nineties and haven’t stopped their efforts. Artists of this generation pursued illustration as hard as their previous generations; but, having more comprehensive approaches with a tendency towards abstraction and even using vast computer facilities, they created more creative and attractive works. Of course, besides the above-mentioned works of the successful illustrators of children books there also have been works of poor quality and so called commercial (market) ones. These works are free of visual and literary quality and do not develop the thinking and cognition of the child. These works are usually created under the effect of the images of big animation companies (like Walt Disney & etc.); and, sometimes using cliché images create completely commercial and apparently attractive books. At first glance these books find a petty place among the addressees and for the lack of creativity in creating the illustration and atmosphere, ultimately are put aside. Studies on the illustration quality of these books and their relation with children show that children are not very interested in these illustrations, and that they do not help the children’s imagination and growth. Children even may enjoy reading this kind of books and the reason is merely to recall the animation characters and the atmosphere of the animated cartoon. “Schwartz, one of the German researchers in children's literature, believes that Walt Disney School has had a major role in reinforcement of stereotyping children's picture books. Although it is undeniable that Walt Disney and its followers have enriched the era with their creativity and innovation in the field of game and entertainment, but the negative effect of Walt Disney’s and its followers’ work on picture books around the world should not be ignored” (Azab Daftari, 2005, 209). Although Walt Disney School has had its stereotype effect on children's picture books, but at least in many countries it is presented with good quality illustrations and technique; but, unfortunately these books are not of good quality in Iran, and because they end up expensive or because of hasty preparation, the quality of

these books has declined. Publishers' regard of these books is purely economic and giving income and returning the investment is the most important concern of publishers of such books. An irresponsible publisher publishes the book in a wide circulation without recognizing the literary and visual values of the book. (Fig.1).



Source: Storybook

Fig. 1: Illustration from the book “cinderella 2”.

“Illustrations in children's picture books can be original and creative like other forms of art such as painting and sculpture, and they shouldn't be looked at them as business art” (Ramachandran, 1989). Poor and stereotypical illustrations of market books cause the addressee not to attempt to relate colors, text and imagination. The element of picture in market books is dead and since the spirit of movement and being alive is absent in them, they take the ultimate pleasure and the intellectual growth away from children and limit the essential visual and intellectual teachings.

### 3.1. Studying Few Group-A Children Picture Books in Iran

According to what was mentioned above, we came to the conclusion that because of the lack of interest of the artists of the visual art field in recent decades in the illustration of Group-A illustrated books, most of the children books' illustrations are not of high quality. The lack of enough attention on behalf of the experts, authorities, instructors and even publishers of children books to the children of this age group, are among the main reasons. Unfortunately, the lack of attention of successful children books' publishers to this age group has led to the increase in the publishing and distribution of catchpenny and empty-of-artistic quality illustrated books. Consequently, except for a few works by well-known artists, no valuable illustrated book particular to Group-A children has been illustrated. Although in recent decades with the establishment of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults and child protection councils and associations, new actions have been taken on this matter. With a glancing view, we will find out that toy, conceptual, counting, alphabet and other types of books for this age group, which have not been illustrated by well-known illustrators, are not always of high value and the number of valuable works for this age group (mostly wordless pictorial books) are very limited and few. The storyline in most of the picture books illustrated by young illustrators for 3-5 year old children is so vague and obscure that the child cannot put the story together and becomes frustrated. Most of these books are poor in expressing the concepts and unable to have a positive impact on the child's cognition and growth. But in recent decade illustrators and publishers of children books are paying more attention to this age group. Meanwhile, Iranian illustrators, by creating some picture books, were able to earn a spot in international illustration field and festivals.

Regarding the short age of picture books, in their modern concept, in Iran few picture books for this age group, each from a generation of Iranian illustrators, are randomly chosen, studied, reviewed and evaluated. These books are chosen from works of well-known illustrators and analyzed regarding epistemology characteristics of these children, in order to make it clear that with all the weaknesses in illustrating Group A children illustrated books in Iran there are still some committed illustrators that have created valuable works, although limited in number.

### 3.2. Investigation and General Evaluation of the Illustrations of the Book “A is the Beginning of Alphabet”

“A is the Beginning of Alphabet” is illustrated by Nouroddin Zarinkelk and published by Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in 1986, which is an Alphabet Book teaching alphabet to Group A children employing a simple text (verse) along with illustrations. Zarinkelk has not tried to write verses for children, rather, with a simple and creative view, familiarizes them with letters and animals through a verse. Apart from literary view of the verse, the illustrations have created poetic events

using Akolin technique, the creation of which was affected by the poetic feelings of the illustrator (Figure 2). Zarinkelk is influenced by the properties of Nonsense verses and has written simple and pleasant verses using parody in children verses; using bright colors and transparent reticulation of colors, he created pleasant illustrations which enjoy childish and playful humor in the layout and the combination of visual elements. This book includes text, illustrations and very effective white reading in pages which lead to a better communication of child's eyes and mind with the shape and the depiction of letters and illustrations. The artist has created attractive illustrations by creatively drawing the lines of a notebook and balancing them with other visual and written elements. Colors take a lively and magical function and with the aid of illustrator's creativity and ability fill the book with an incredible atmosphere. It enjoys a completely Iranian flavor and it seems as if the reticulations created in illustrations make the creature on the page move and come alive. The only weakness seen in this book related to the author is the difficulty in showing the some nouns to the pre-school interlocutor. "Alphabet books have helped children to indentify sounds, letters and familiar objects for years. Objects illustrated in the alphabet books are the ones which are easy for the young child to recognize and which do not have more than one proper name" (Norton, 2004, 45).



Source: Storybook

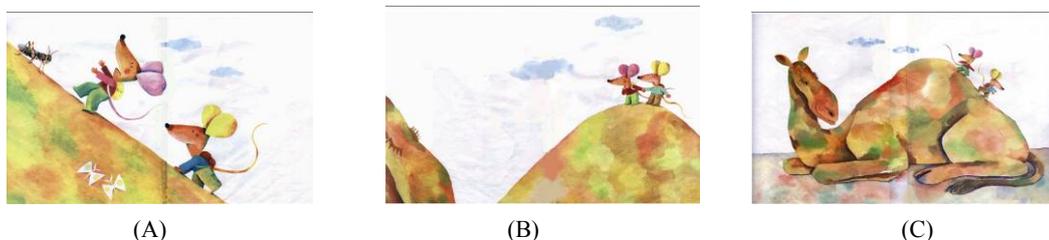
Fig.2: Pictures A & B, two illustrations from the book "A is the Beginning of Alphabet", illustrator: Zarinkelk.

### 3.3. General Evaluation of the Illustrations of the Book "Little Mousie, Where Are You?"

"Little Mousie, Where Are You?" is one the wordless illustrated books for Group A children, illustrated by Ali Khodai and published by Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in 2002. Compared to his other books, Khhodai has a new and creative view in "Little Mouse, Where Are You?" Through a pictorial game between two mice, he reinforces the exploration spirit in children (Figure 3).

Modernism has come to the aid of the author and has made him an illustrator who uses his thoughts in constructing text and designing a book. In the story, two mice clime up a hill, following grasshoppers and butterflies with childish behavior and colors. In an explorative search, they find out what they were walking on was in fact a hump of an asleep camel. The book ends with the mice's amazement and returns in the last illustration and leaves a smile on the child's face. The happy ending gives happiness to the children.

Although, some similarities can be seen with the "seven moles" by Ed Yang, the famous Chinese illustrator, in showing the playfulness of the mice and an elephant and exploring the mysterious world by the young mice. The illustrator's care and sensitivity to the pre-school children's interests is evident and using bright colors, simple abstraction, having a young child's view, the existence of playfulness in characterization, some kind of a childish humor, and simple forms are proves of the point.



Source: Storybook

Fig. 3: Pictures A, B & C, three illustrations of the book "Little Mousie, Where Are You?"

## 4. Conclusions

By studying the topic “the Investigation of the quality of picture book illustrations for children aged 3 to 5 (Group A)” the following were concluded: A). Whatever to investigate the illustration of Group-A children in Iran concerns the recent two decades. In a few recent years, considerable achievements have been made by the Iranian illustrators. B) After investigating the Group-A illustrated books in Iran we found out that illustrated books for Group-A children in Iran are very few, and the existing ones fall into two groups of commercial and artistic, and that the number of commercial illustrated books which are empty of any artistic and literary quality, is more than the ones with appropriate artistic quality. Unfortunately, the lack of attention of successful children books’ publishers to this age group has led to the increase in the publishing and distribution of commercial illustrated books. Although few, but the illustrations of some high-quality illustrated books, for their technical abilities, creativity and innovation, and idea and performance, can be compared with the prominent European works in this field. Although, considering the history of illustrating picture books, Europeans were able to gain a prominent position; in other words, they have more experience and works in this age group and have gave them more thought.

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