

# The Construction of Children's Psychology through Picture Book Narratives-Focused on *Chi Dao de Li You* and *Chi Dao Da Wang*

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/16864>

DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v12-i2/16864

**Published Online:** 21 April 2023

## Abstract

Being late for school is one of the common problems children face in their daily lives. It can trigger anxiety and tension in children, which can have a negative impact on their mental health. Reading picture books can help children understand and express their emotions, which has positive significance for children's psychological relief. In order to explore the picture book narrative's understanding and attention to children's psychology, this paper focuses on two picture books with the theme of tardiness, *Chi Dao de Li You* (*The Reasons for Being Late*) and *Chi Dao Da Wang* (*King of Lateness*), and analyzes their characteristics in three aspects, namely, the selection of characters, image narrative art, and connotation expression, starting from the narrative characteristics of picture books. Research shows that picture books combine real life with fantasy to build a unique psychological world for children, and their restoration and understanding of children's psychological conditions alleviate their anxiety in facing stressful situations and establish correct problem-solving concepts. At the same time, parent-child reading can help adults better understand children's psychology and correctly guide children's behavior, which helps improve children's positive emotional development and maintain a good parent-child relationship.

**Keywords:** Image Narrative, Picture Books, Childhood Fantasy, Children's Psychology, Parent-Child Reading

## Introduction

Compared with written language, visual language has more impact on people, especially children. Based on the limitation of literacy and curiosity about new things, an excellent picture book with picture and text ensemble can quickly attract children's attention, and they will even repeat it dozens of times. Children's imagination is rich and exaggerated, especially younger children sometimes cannot even distinguish between imagination and reality and take imaginary scenarios as reality, which does not mean that he is lying, but is due to the confusion between imagination and reality caused by children's lack of knowledge and experience, which is characteristic of children's imagination development (Xue & Ma, 2018). At the same time, children are a group dominated by visual and image thinking, and visual content can help children better understand the story plot and theme, and the emotional

resonance brought by the story can have a positive impact on children's psychological development. Picture book narratives often involve various emotions and feelings, and the emotional and honest education between teachers and students is one of the things that children often have to face. In general, children have a special respect and attachment to their teachers, and when they face a situation which may not be accepted by their teachers, they are generally nervous and anxious, and will try to escape from the situation and the punishment it may bring. Imaginative and creative picture books are precisely what children love and need the most. Along with the visual impact of beautiful pictures and rich colors, picture books also have a positive effect on children's psychological constructs, giving them emotional support and psychological comfort.

Being late may be a problem that every school-age child has encountered, faced with the authority of teachers in children's minds, every child will feel uneasy about being late and be afraid of being punished by teachers. The relationship between teachers and students has become one of the most important social relationships of children. How the teacher will respond when faced with a child's tardiness, which may have a great impact on the child (Isa et al., 2017). This paper draws on two picture books on the theme of tardiness, the Chinese-translated picture book *Chi Dao Da Wang* (Burningham, 2010) and the native Chinese picture book *Chi Dao de Li You* (Yao, 2014), to explore how attention is paid to children's psychology in picture books.

The picture book *Chi Dao Da Wang* was written by John Burningham, a famous British picture book writer, in 1987. It won the best book of the year in 1989 by the American Magazine *the Horn Book* and was selected into the book *Picture Book for Children*, which selected 447 children's books in the world by Japan. It was introduced into China in 2010, published by Tomorrow Publishing House and translated by Dang Yingtai. The text referred to in this article is foreign translations into China. Another picture book, *Chi Dao de Li You*, is an original work of China, written by Yao Jia. In 2014, this picture book won the first prize of the fifth Hsin Yi Picture Book Award. Both books are related to tardiness, but they have brought us different feelings in terms of characters, picture styles, implied meanings and so on. Nodelman (2018) said in *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books that* "the nonverbal elements that create atmosphere or mood in a picture book cannot be separated. They are not something in individual pictures, but the dominant features of a book as a whole—such as the size and shape of the pictures (or picture book), the artist's choice of paints and style, the density of texture, and the qualities of colors, among others." A picture book consists of front cover, endpapers, title page, text, back cover, etc. The design of a picture book also includes folio, folding, arrangement of pictures and texts, etc. Its style can also be presented by the changes of elements such as colors, lines and perspectives (Yi, 2006), all of which can be called narrative techniques of picture books. The selection of the main character of a picture book largely determines its theme and tone, and the relationship between pictures and texts and the way they interact with each other is one of the most important expression relationships of picture books. At the same time, A good picture book also has functional connotations such as emotional comfort and moral education, which need to be presented by picture book narrative art. Therefore, this paper analyzes the narrative art of these two picture books from these three aspects and discusses how to penetrate into the real children's psychology, hoping to provide references for further respect and understanding of children's growth.

**Use an appropriate main character image to get close to children's psychology**

Limited by children's cognitive ability, they may not have full reading ability yet, so the character design of children's picture books should be simple and easy to understand, and the behavior and language of the characters should match the cognitive level of children. Children often learn to express their emotions and understand others' emotions through characters, so characters need to have rich emotional expressions so that children can feel the emotional changes and inner world of the characters. At the same time, in order to be close to children's psychology, character images should generally have relatability and unique personality characteristics, children prefer to interact with cute images, the characters' cuteness and relatability are more easily accepted by children, and the characters' distinctive personality characteristics can make the characters more three-dimensional and interesting, so that children can have more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the characters.

*Chi Dao de Li You* describes a story about a little pig who went to school in a hurry because he overslept and got up late. When he arrived at the classroom door, he was afraid to enter, thinking about how to make up reasons to cheat the teacher. The author depicts a naive pig image, with big ears, round eyes, chubby body, sad face, and struggling for the reason of being late, which is very consistent with the image of cute children. Animals are often used as protagonists in picture books, because in children's eyes, any object can be alive and can carry out all kinds of activities like human beings. Such an image of a pig adds a lot of intimacy to readers. Although the teacher, another character of the story, did not show up, at the end, the pig told the teacher that his reason for being late was that he got up late, and the teacher's reaction showed that he should be an amiable teacher, who treated students with tolerance and love. Similarly, from the color tone of the whole picture book, we can see that the warm color of yellow and brown is used by the author, which gives people the feeling of warmth and love, and it fits well with the theme of the story it expresses. When children read this picture book, the cute piggy image is easier for children to be self-represented and get involved in the story, and the funny and warm atmosphere will also relieve the tension and anxiety in children's mind.

*Chi Dao Da Wang* tells an absurd story full of fantasy. The original English title of the book is *John Patrick Norman McHennessy- the Boy who is Always Late*, its protagonist is a little boy who has a long name, which translates into Chinese as “约翰派克罗门麦肯席”, this is the author a full of highlights of the humorous design, read the long string of funny name has made the children happy. Its overall picture is rather gloomy, and the features of the little boy are rather vague. The scenery on the way to school is depicted by abstract methods, and rich colors are used for comparison before and after the development of the story. The first day on the way to school was a dark black and gray background, as if it was still dawn before leaving for school, the next few days used a variety of different shades of orange, blue and green, gray and pink, gold and silver, respectively, to create an empty, unpredictable environment, which gives people a sense of detachment from reality (As shown in Figure 1). The role of the teacher is exaggerated. He is dressed in a bachelor's uniform, and he is tall, with prominent facial features, protruding eyeballs and a long and pointed nose, his hands is almost as big as the table, give a person a strong sense of pressure, this also suggests the authority of the teacher. The whole book style is repression mixed with absurd and bizarre sense of humor. Each experience on the way to school can be seen as a strange journey, the young protagonist encountered crocodiles, lions, floods, these in normal circumstances on the way to school impossible to meet. children who love fantasy can follow the adventures of the small protagonist in the book to release their wild imagination again and again, regardless



of whether it is true or not, the more exaggerated the author's descriptions, the more satisfying the fantasy experience the child is likely to have. But at the end of each journey there is a frightening and upsetting teacher waiting to retrieve the child's wild imagination. The teacher does not believe the child's reasons for being late at all and punishes him in various ways. So when it is the teacher's turn at the end to say that he has been caught by the gorilla, the child no longer believes the teacher's words, which is a great pleasure for the child reader.

Figure 1. Pages from *Chi Dao Da Wang* when the boy goes to school (in chronological order)

Although both picture books are about the same theme, the different characterizations can convey different emotions and atmospheres, which can also lead to their different story styles. The choice of characters has a wonderful effect on the expression of the story, and picture books are better at expressing this than general text books, because pictures can give children the most intuitive impressions, and they act directly on children's vision without too much textual description, and present children with a continuous picture that can be felt and seen. At the same time, children's picture books have exaggerated characteristics, such as the teacher's exaggerated hands and close-up expressions in *Chi Dao Da Wang*, etc. This exaggerated artistic treatment gives children a special visual experience and leaves a psychological implication of being oppressed and difficult to resist.

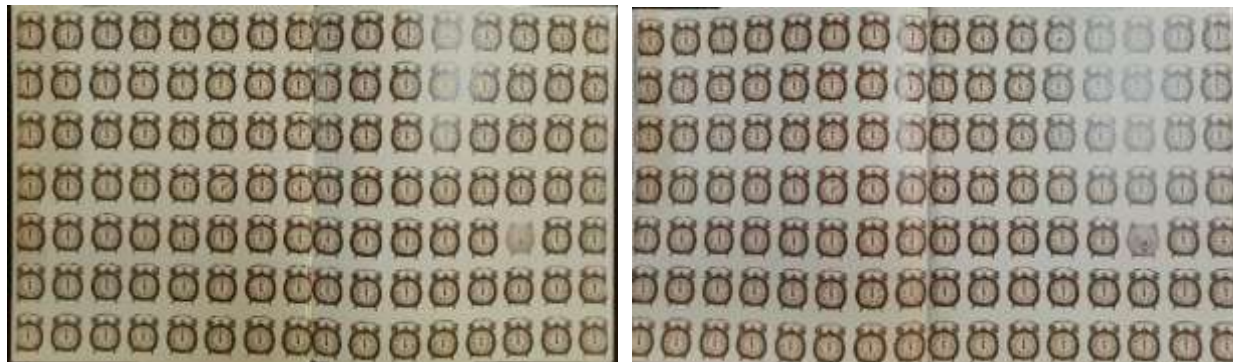
Through the analysis of the portrayal of the main characters in these two books, the piglet in *Chi Dao de Li You* is more easily understood and accepted by younger children, while the boy in *Chi Dao Da Wang* is less distinctive and more obscure, so it is more suitable for older children to experience the loss of being suppressed by authority and the pleasure of successfully confronting it.

### Analysis of Image Narrative Techniques

Both *Chi Dao de Li You* and *Chi Dao Da Wang* have a graphic relationship that is complementary to the text with pictures. The author of *Chi Dao de Li You* arranged a lot of details in the picture and provided some hints on the basis of supplementing the words. Start with the front-page, between the neatly arranged rows of alarm clocks there is a piggy's butt, and the piggy's butt is the same shape as the alarm clock, which requires careful observation to find. What is the relationship between the pig and the alarm clock? This arrangement leaves room for readers' imagination (As shown in Figure 2). Followed by a small picture on the title page, you can see books scattered all over the bed and a little pig's foot exposed under the quilt on the bed. It can't help but remind readers whether the pig lying in bed was reading too late, so it couldn't get up early in the morning. In the back text, you can see all kinds of expressions of this piggy, such as the expression of fear and panic when it is woken up by the alarm clock, the expression of standing in the corridor with its eyes wide open and trying to find a way, the expression of joy when it has figured out a way, the expression of disappointed when the solution was denied, the expression of languid and rack its brains, these expressions give us a vivid and cute image of a pig. The endpaper is still full of rows of alarm clocks with a piggy in the middle, unlike the front-page, the piggy is facing the readers head-on this time. Does this mean that the pig has been woken up by the alarm clock, or that he can now face up to his mistake? Each reader is open to his own interpretation (As shown in Figure 2). The author's depiction of the scene is also very realistic. In the scene of the pig running to the school, the author uses an empty playground to describe an empty and very quiet school, in which the flagpole, football gate, teaching building, school gate, etc. all only have shadows, and the small figure of the pig is also accompanied only by his shadow, which makes people feel quieter. When it comes to the door of the classroom, the scenes in the corridor of the school are also depicted with many details. For example, the slogans on the wall are "early" and "time is life, time is speed", etc., which echo the theme of the story, implying that we should not be late for school. These are all things that are not described in the text and shown to readers by pictures. In terms of words, the author also uses some special changes to correspond to the content of the story. For example, at the beginning of the story, the pig's reaction after being woken up by the alarm clock is "Ah ... no! I'm late! " The words are getting bigger and bigger, and it seems that they are about to fly, which makes



people immediately feel that the pig's mood is getting more and more tense. In the back, the pig imagines the picture of turning off the alarm clocks and eating breakfast hard, the words are getting smaller and smaller, which means that the pig become less and less confident, knowing that he is lying, so he dares not go on. Finally, the teacher asked him why he was late, the words of pig's answer are also getting smaller and smaller. It can be seen that the pig



realized his mistake and was a little embarrassed. The vivid changes of these words also provide pictures for readers' minds, which generally constitute a warm and loving story. It is worth noting that one of the books scattered on the ground in the picture on the title page is *Chi Dao Da Wang*, perhaps because the themes of these two picture books are similar, or perhaps the author is paying tribute to the classic works of the world's picture book masters. These unexpected small designs add interest to reading.

Figure2. Contrast of the front-page and endpaper in *Chi Dao de Li You*

*Chi Dao de Li You* is a straightforward description of children's psychology, with the main part of the book devoted to the psychological activities of the piglet, and it resonates very well with people. Like many children, this chubby little piggy loves to sleep, eat dessert, imagine, procrastinate, and be timid. The story starts from the nervous mood of the children after being late, so that the readers, not only children but also adults, can't help but think of their own experience of being late as children, because this is the common experience of people's childhood life, the anxious mood, the apprehension when walking into the quiet school, the fear and nervousness when facing the teacher, completely replicates the mood of everyone when being late as children. With this realistic emotional experience and padding, the final ending is both surprising and convincing, making children understand that "honesty is the best reason".

In contrast, the narrative style of *Chi Dao Da Wang* is rather obscure and abstract. Open the book, the first thing that caught my eye was the front-page, filled with lines of words "I can't tell lies about crocodile and I can't lose my gloves." After reading the story, we know that the teacher punished the little boy by copying that. However, if we look carefully, all the "lost" words have been written as "go" since the ninth line (because “丢” and “去” are very similar in Chinese), which may mean that this kind of punishing homework has little significance. Children may not know what they are writing, but just appease the teacher. Then look at the text. The story adopts a circular pattern. The little boy was late for school three times, each time because of some incredible reasons. Although we can see from the pictures that the situation he said happened, the author didn't give an answer whether it really happened or what he imagined, and his teacher didn't believe him. On the one hand, the reason for his disbelief may be that the teacher's thinking is too rigid, he can't imagine what happened to the little boy. On the other hand, it may be that the teacher is unwilling to consider whether

what the child said is true from the child's point of view, but only denies these incredible things from the adult's point of view and puts pressure on the boy as a teacher. However, the little boy has to be punished again and again because of the authority of the teacher. By the fourth time, the author broke this cycle. This time, nothing happened to the boy on his way to school, and he arrived at school safely. However, unexpectedly, this time, the teacher met with a situation, and like the boy, an incredible strange thing happened. And the reaction the boy gave seemed reasonable when the teacher asked the boy for help: "John Patrick Norman McHennessy! I've been caught by a furry gorilla on the roof, you have to find a way to get me down!" The boy no longer believes what the teacher says, telling him, "Teacher, there's no such thing as a furry gorilla around here!" This ending echoes everything that happened earlier.



Figure3. Full of pages of self-criticism in *Chi Dao Da Wang* front-page

In the text, the author also adopts a circular structure. The first sentence of the story is "John Patrick Norman McHennessy walks to school", and it becomes "John Patrick Norman McHennessy walks to school in a hurry" on the second, third and fourth days. It can be seen that with the first day's lateness, McHennessy may be afraid of being late again in the next few days, and he is even more anxious on his way to school. However, after a special situation happened to the teacher on the fourth day, he was no longer in a hurry on the fifth day, and the last sentence of the story became "John Patrick Norman McHennessy walks to school". Although the first and last sentences of the text are the same, we can see the difference through the images on the first and last pages. In the first picture, the author uses a large grayish tone, a dim sky and the little boy's listless expression, and the dejected beginning hints at the depression of this story, while in the last picture, also on the way to school, the sky takes on a warm gray color, with some white and pink mixed in, and the tone becomes much brighter and softer. The author uses this change in color to render the boy's cheerfulness after overcoming his teacher, and a bit more leisurely on his way to school. This shows that picture books, compared to ordinary text books, can use pictures to explain the direction of the story, giving children a stronger visual impact, the ability to observe details and imagination. The faces of the two main characters in this book are not as clearly and vividly drawn as the piglet in *Chi Dao de Li You*, and the lines are messy. As the author John Burningham said: "It doesn't matter whether a person, an animal or anything is like it. What matters is that the mental mood can be expressed, and the charm of a picture will come naturally". The book has almost

no direct description of the main character's psychology, and the short sentences of text are all about the scenario in which the story takes place. Through the color changes in the pictures, the size and movement of the characters change, and the outline of the lines to suggest the process of the child's inner self from repression to release. Only when adults believe in children unconditionally and stand on their side can they really get inside their hearts. There is no doubt that author John Burningham does exactly that, always using pictures to speak the child's mind and build bridges between adults and children. The seemingly unbelievable story requires one's imagination to read it. The author ultimately uses the reversal ending to empower the children, and this ending that gives the children a favorable position is exactly what the children need inside.

### **The Connotation Expression behind the Story**

*Chi Dao de Li You* has a finishing touch at the end. After telling the teacher that he was late because he got up late and entered the classroom, Piggy breathed a sigh of relief and thought, "So this is the best reason." What is the best reason? It is obviously that it told the teacher honestly why he was late. "Honesty" is a good quality that we educate our children to develop from an early age, and the ending of picture books obviously teaches children to be honest. This picture book has a certain educational significance. After the children read the funny imagination of Piggy, it will return to reality of parents are concerned about the theme of honesty education, which parents are concerned about. Japanese picture book expert Matsui (2013) said, "Picture books have no 'use' for young children, not for learning things, but for feeling happy. Moreover, the more interesting a picture book is, the more deeply its content will remain in children's memory". But such an interesting work, which combines funny and educational significance, is just right.

Though *Chi Dao Da Wang* is also about tardiness, it also portrays the real distance between adults and children. The two characters in the story are in a teacher-student relationship, and it uses that relationship to suggest the issue of trust between people, as well as understanding and respect between adults and children (Fang, 2011). The expression of the little boy in the book is very vague from beginning to end, and the characters are very weak, while the teacher has many different expressions and movements. His big black robe, pointer in his hand, expression of bared teeth and furious movements can show his grumpy, impatient and oppressive feeling, and then we can feel that this is a relationship dominated by teachers (adults), in which children are weak and helpless. At the same time, children are full of fantasy. In adults' opinion, the absurd plot is impossible. Adults punish children because of their lack of trust in children and relying on their own authority. However, based on the "child-oriented" position, the author has preference for weak children, so a turning ending is arranged at the end of the story. An absurd thing happened to the teacher who didn't trust children. He was caught on the roof by a gorilla, the smiling face of the gorilla seemed to announce that it had avenged the child (Qi, 2010). This picture book, using the theme of lateness, actually expresses dissatisfaction with the confinement of children's imagination by adults, and with adults suppressing and punishing children through authority. Through this fantastical narrative, picture books allow children to exercise their imagination and creativity more freely, thus promoting their cognitive development and thinking skills. Imagine if the teacher responds with understanding and respect when confronted with the child's statement, it is more likely to produce a person who is imaginative and creative. Literary creation requires imagination, so does natural science research. Imagination is a prerequisite for creativity, an important ability that needs to be cared for by adults. This book is suitable



for children, and more importantly, for teachers and parents (Qin, 2017: 35). Adults can reflect from it whether they are also as bossy and strong and simple as the teacher in the book. Has children's nature been protected? Have children's demands been listened to? All are things that adults need to reflect on.

The author's creative idea can actually be seen from his experience. John Burningham was born in 1936 in the UK, and his childhood was during World War II. He wandered around with his father, doing odd jobs for a living. This wandering life gave him a chance to get close to nature and enjoy a free childhood. At the same time, his parents attached great importance to his education. When he was 14 years old, he went to the famous Summerhill school, which is famous for its free trade and humanized education. Its principal, Mr. Neil, believes that children succeed through love, not through the suppression and punishment of authority (Marcus, 2017). Burningham is influenced by this experience and philosophy, making his works on the side of children and empowering them, which is why there is an ironic reversal at the end of *Chi Dao Da Wang*, expressing his dissatisfaction with traditional education and the authority of teachers. However, *Chi Dao de Li You* is a story created according to the author Yao Jia's childhood experience of being late, Yao Jia was born in China in 1990, her childhood was in a new era of peace and happiness. The childhood of this generation is very warm and happy. The story of the pig is used by the author to relive the vivid and funny life scenes of her childhood, so this picture book conveys warmth and happiness to us.

## Conclusion

Through the above three aspects of the narrative analysis of these two picture books, it can be seen that *Chi Dao de Li You* chooses the small animal piglet as the main character, which is lively and cute, in line with children's cognitive characteristics, and easily resonates with children and their sense of closeness, making it easier for them to get involved in the story. The pictures in the book hide a lot of details, which improve the fun of reading and withstands readers' repeated taste and search for different discoveries and feelings. Through this form of graphic narrative, the theme of "honesty is the best reason" is more easily accepted by children, teaching them to be honest in solving problems and achieving a better educational purpose. In *Chi Dao Da Wang*, the author's portrayal of the main character is more abstract, except for his long name, which can bring novelty to children, but in terms of perception of the character, it is not as vivid as the little pig in another book. Its excitement lies more in the clever conception of the story, which wins children's emotional support through the reversal of the ending. This book has a deeper meaning than *Chi Dao de Li You*, and its educational significance is more geared toward adults, who should most certainly reflect on it and can help in better understanding children.

Although their expressions and connotations are different, these two picture books, taking a children's perspective and writing stories from a children's psychology, converge in the same goal and are both highly successful in constructing children's psychology. One key feature they have in common is that the stories are full of fantasy, which is essential to deeply resonate with children's psychology. Fantasy is one of the most popular things that children do as they grow up, and many good picture books are full of fantasy elements. Whether it's the fantastic journey in *Chi Dao Da Wang* or the fantastic reason in *Chi Dao de Li You*, the ups and downs of the plot make children's childhood full of surprises and colors and bring endless imagination to children. But is this fantasy game acceptable to adults? Obviously, it was not accepted in *Chi Dao Da Wang*, and adults used his power to punish this fantasy. However, in *Chi Dao de Li You*, child's fantasy was not told to teacher, and we could not know adults'

attitude towards fantasy. Finally, the children themselves chose honesty. Through the author's vivid depiction of each scene and the small animal image, a child image with rich imagination and quick thinking jumped onto the paper. Therefore, there is no contradiction between fantasy and honesty. Children need correct guidance from adults, but adults can't deprive children of their right to imagine and suppress their free nature. The complicated relationship between adults and children requires adults to reconcile, and adults always stand in a dominant position. This requires adults to understand and respect children, understand their psychology, give them better help and guidance, and let children enjoy their childhood.

According to Freud, "the driving force of fantasy is the unfulfilled wish, and every fantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, which is associated with a reality that does not make one feel satisfied" (Freud, 1986: 138). For children, their fantasies are often confused with the real world, in which they experience real fear, anxiety, tension, excitement, etc. Fantasy can help children cope with immediate and difficult situations; it becomes a means of helping children, and picture book narratives give children more space for fantasy. Just as the world's classic picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 2014) is also a story that describes children's fantasy, but it is a classic because it goes beyond children's fantasy, it is a fantasy to relieve children's own negative emotions, and it reflects children's complete personality, independent thinking and dissatisfaction with reality. The combination of fantasy and reality through the narrative technique of picture book illustration, *Chi Dao de Li You* relieves children's nervous and anxious mood through fantasy, and the happy ending of *Chi Dao Da Wang* in which the teacher is caught by the gorilla at the end, all have positive meanings for children's psychological relief. Fantasy play is the work of children, and as discussed in the book *Secrets of Childhood*, it is the work of children (Montessori, 2015). They are not looking for profit or help, they just need to fantasize and grow. Recognizing this and maintaining a childlike heart is the key to truly understanding the psychology of children.

This study provides an in-depth analysis and discussion of the narrative and educational significance of children's picture books, which can be instructive for children's growth and education. Research has shown that children's picture books can promote readers' understanding of children's psychological states, reduce children's anxiety about stressful situations, promote positive emotional development, and foster a proper problem-solving mindset. This study provides a case study of picture book narratives that contribute to the promotion of children's mental health and family education. It can also guide parents and teachers to better grasp the details and connotations of picture books through the dissection of picture book narratives and to improve their understanding of children and maintain a healthy parent-child relationship while reading picture books to them. More different picture book themes and styles should also be considered in future research to analyze how their narratives differ to obtain more comprehensive research content and gain more insight into exploring children's psychology and grasping children's education.

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