



## Extended Abstract

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# Children Audiences on a Horizon Beyond the Story: A Reflection on the Stories which Direct the Attention of Children toward the Mistakes of the Fictional Character

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## Introduction

Readers, especially children, often find themselves in a position below the story and the storyteller when encountering narratives. They typically perceive themselves as learners and passive recipients. The storyteller knows the ending, and the omniscient narrator guides the story and delves into characters' minds. Children consider themselves inferior to the story, the story's hero, and to the adult reading the story as well. On the other hand, traditional tales and many modern stories explicitly or implicitly aim to educate children or instill certain values. This research focuses on a different category of children's stories where authors attempt to elevate children from their familiar subordinate position. These stories lead children to the experience and feeling that they understand the situation more accurately than the hero.

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Sometimes the hero makes mistakes, or for various reasons cannot view the situation from another angle, or suffers from a childlike illusion, or falls into a cognitive error. However, the interesting point is that the child notices the mistake and understands the story beyond the level at which the hero is stuck, finding themselves in a horizon above both the hero and the story.

### **Research Method, Literature Review, and Purpose**

This distinctive experience can be examined from both cognitive/psychological and narratological perspectives. On the one hand, children are placed in a metacognitive position where they can practice evaluating the story and its hero. On the other hand, these stories employ unique narrative creativity. The reader engages with the story by considering perspectives hidden from the hero's view. The story no longer has a closed framework and is not enclosed by a tall, impenetrable wall. The narrative explicitly invites the child and allows them entry into the text of the story.

While no research with exactly this approach has been published in Persian, there are relevant Western studies on children's engagement with narrative. Notable works include Isabelle Nières-Chevrel's *Introduction to Children's Literature* (1964) discussing the hero's superior position; R. McCallum's *Very Advanced Texts: Self-conscious Stories and the Testing Effect* (2007) examining the adult reader's superior position; and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's work (2006) on picture books where visual narratives can guide children to a perspective beyond the textual story and hero.

Given the special position that such narratives create and the way they invite children to the process of metacognition and help them in recognizing their identity and building self-confidence, and also due to their aesthetic creativity and narrative innovations, studying these works in independent research could provide a foundation for greater attention to writing such stories in our homeland.

### **Discussion**

The study examines multiple Western and Iranian examples, focusing on eighteen works, to analyze various approaches authors and illustrators use to create such positions. Works include Frank Asch's trilogy (*Bear Shadow*, *Happy Birthday Moon*, and *Moon, bear's dream*) Eric Battut's *The Secret*, P. Hutchin's *Rosie's Walk*, Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are", and Fereidoun Amouzadeh Khalili's *A Mischievous dragon whose eyes were/were not astigmatism*.

The difficulties that the heroes of these stories face, which sometimes progress to the point of imagining and believing in frightening creatures, become a special experience and test for the audience placed in a superior perspective. They view the problem as a lower position and within the context of play and aesthetic creativity. The story does not impose teachings on them. No one gives them orders. The story stimulates their curiosity. Instead of learning from someone, they think and discover through critiquing and examining the hero. Critiquing the hero is a valuable opportunity for children to develop their critical thinking abilities. This is especially true when critiquing a hero who evokes the audience's sympathy and empathy, and whom children often view as a role model. In this way, children are guided toward the valuable experience of self-criticism. This process of critiquing others and, of course, critiquing oneself, establishes psychological reflection in children. Particularly when they examine the cognitive errors and biases of the hero and, consciously or unconsciously, measure their cognitive horizon against the hero's, they are led to the distinguished experience of metacognition.

On the one hand, in encountering these stories, children find themselves playing with boundaries. The child feels that the familiar framework of the story and its boundary with the omniscient narrator is being played with. In many of these stories, they engage with the blending of reality and imagination's boundaries. The child more or less achieves a sense and perception of breaking the fourth wall and deframing, and tastes the flavor of narrative creativity.

In picture books, using this approach, the familiar format of complete harmony between image and text breaks down. The child becomes aware of a kind of duality between visual narrative and textual narrative; that is, another comparative situation alongside comparing the hero with themselves. This new situation can guide them toward more reflection, questioning, and evaluation.

### **Conclusion**

Through these stories, children reach a genuine experience of self-confidence and personal independence, and leap from a position of absolute passivity to the role of an active and critical audience. The foundations for transitioning to the horizon of metacognitive experience are also established. In particular, we must consider these stories' special capacity for addressing challenges such as fear of darkness, inability to control anger, immersion in fantasy, and lack of self-confidence in creative and solution-oriented ways. From an artistic perspective, both story and illustration appear in new ways outside familiar and repetitive frameworks, redefining the child's connection as an audience with the story in a different way. This audience is not

merely listening, observing, and learning; rather, they question the workings of the story and its characters, and critically examine the harmony and disharmony between visual and textual narratives.

**Keywords:** stories for children, audience, child's imagination, visual narration, metacognition

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