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Picturebooks as crossover literature

A study of how readers of different ages perceive iconotext and themes
in picturebooks

Bildebøker som allalderlitteratur

En studie om hvordan lesere i ulike aldre oppfatter ikonotekst og tema i
bildebøker

Monica Mikkelsen

Master i undervisningsvitenskap med engelsk fagdidaktikk

Institutt/program for engelsk

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Abstract

Within the crossover genre, picturebooks lack distinctive attention, generally due to the presumption that the picturebook format is limited to the child reader.

Traditionally, picturebooks have been associated with children's first reading experiences as a mean to develop literacy skills. However, in recent decades the picturebook format has changed thoroughly with regard to complexity, through the multifaceted interaction between text and pictures, and cross-generational themes. Although many authors, illustrators and publishers advocate the idea that picturebooks have a dual audience, little research has been completed to substantiate this notion.

To fill these gaps in the research, this study seeks to investigate the variations between two different age level's perception of iconotext and identification of themes. By doing this, the aim is to see how picturebooks can function as crossover literature, in the interest of promoting the idea of utilizing picturebooks at different levels in education. In order to investigate the question at hand, focus group discussions were conducted in 5th and 10th grade. Despite being the only means to collect data, the focus group discussions provided a wealth of material.

The main findings of this study showed that all focus groups had the ability to perceive the interaction between text and pictures. However, variations were found in how the focus groups utilized the iconotext in relation to their interpretation of the narrative, where the older focus groups had a greater tendency to justify their interpretation of visual and verbal communication compared to the younger focus groups. Additionally, the research demonstrated differences with regard to the focus group's identification of the themes in the picturebooks at hand. This thesis concludes that the variations seen between the two age groups relate to the notion of picturebooks as crossover literature, because they demonstrate the complexity seen in picturebooks today.

Sammendrag

Bildebøker mangler betydningsfull oppmerksomhet innenfor sjangeren allalderlitteratur, ofte på bakgrunn av antagelser om at formatet er forbeholdt barn. Tradisjonelt sett har bildebøker blitt assosiert med barns første leseopplevelser, som et verktøy for å utvikle lese- og skrivekompetanse. I senere tiår har bildebokformatet likevel utviklet seg med hensyn til kompleksitet, gjennom en fasettert interaksjon mellom bilde og tekst, og temaer som er av interesse på tvers av generasjoner. Til tross for at mange forfattere, illustratører og forleggere fremmer ideen om at bildebøker har et mangfoldig publikum, er det vanskelig å finne forskning som demonstrerer denne formening.

For å fylle dette tomrommet i forskningen prøver denne studien å finne variasjoner mellom to ulike alderstrinn sin oppfatning av ikonotekst og identifikasjon av temaer. Målet ved å gjøre dette er å se nøyaktig hvordan bildebøker kan fungere som allalderlitteratur, for å fremme ideen om å bruke bildebøker på tvers av trinn i undervisningen. For å kunne gjøre dette ble det gjennomført fokusgruppediskusjoner i 5.- og 10. klasse. Fokusgruppediskusjonene var den eneste metoden som ble benyttet, men diskusjonene resulterte i en stor mengde data.

Hovedfunnene i studien viste at alle fokusgruppene hadde evne til å oppfatte interaksjonen mellom bilde og tekst. Likevel var det variasjoner i hvordan fokusgruppene brukte ikonoteksten i sammenheng med deres tolkning av fortellingen, hvor de eldre fokusgruppene hadde en større tendens til å begrunne tolkningene av visuell og verbal kommunikasjon sammenlignet med de yngre fokusgruppene. I tillegg demonstrerer forskningen forskjeller med hensyn til fokusgruppenes identifikasjon av temaene i de aktuelle bildebøkene. Denne oppgaven konkluderer med at de synlige variasjonene mellom de to alderstrinnene relaterer til tanken om at bildebøker kan fungere som allalderlitteratur, på bakgrunn av at de demonstrerer kompleksiteten sett i bildebøker i dag.

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“There are things that words do that pictures never can, and likewise,
there are images that words can never describe”

- Ed Young (in Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson 2005, p. 62)

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and relevance of the study

The decision to use picture books in the research stemmed from the researcher's own prejudice against reading picturebooks as an adult. As a teacher student, the researcher was exposed to several picturebooks, amongst them *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne. Her first reaction, before reading the picturebook, was that the book was intended for small children, much younger than the levels between 5th and 10th grade she was training to become a teacher for, and therefore irrelevant to her. However, this prejudice was erased as soon as she had actually read *Voices in the Park*, and realized that this was not just for children at all. On the contrary, she recognized several complex themes in the picturebook that young children, and perhaps also older children, would not necessarily be able to perceive in the same manner as adults, such as class differences, depression and low self-value. The researcher pondered thus on her own role as a teacher and educator of literature; if her own mindset had been one where picturebooks were for young children, how did other teachers in school perceive them? During another teaching practice, the researcher introduced the graphic novel *The Savage* by David Almond to two 5th grades. The practice supervisors reacted with surprise and slight disbelief, and acknowledged that they had never used graphic novels or picturebooks in class before. The same surprise and scepticism became apparent when the researcher collected the data for the present master thesis by teachers and librarians at the participating schools. The researcher's general impression is that picturebooks are largely an unexplored treasure in Norwegian classrooms, despite the fact that they are one of the most exciting types of authentic texts teachers can use. However, because picturebooks traditionally have been associated with young children, older readers and teachers can easily overlook the genre due to its seemingly innocent format. Like any other literature, picturebooks can enrich, extend and expand readers' interests, experiences and knowledge (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 1). Yet, what distinguishes picturebooks from any other literature, apart from graphic novels, is the complex interplay between text and picture. In technical terms we call this the iconotext.

1.1.1 Picturebooks and its iconotext and paratext

Picturebooks represent a unique literary form where visual and verbal narratives are combined (Kiefer, 91, p. 70). While most competent readers are familiar with reading verbal text, learning to read and interpret pictures can for many be unfamiliar territory. Text and pictures are equally important in picturebooks, and the iconotext represents the dynamic between these two forms of communication. In some picturebooks, often aimed at young children learning to read, the pictures are simply supporting the text. This type of symmetrical iconotext is seen as the least complex form of picturebooks, as there is no room for interpretation and the reader remains relatively passive. However, most contemporary picturebooks targeted for more competent readers offer complexity on a much higher level. This becomes evident in picturebooks where text and pictures either bring alternative information or contradict each other in some way. Because the verbal text is often limited in picturebooks, the pictures can add to the reader's overall perception of the story through for instance colours, mood and setting. It is most often in these cases, where the text and picture relationship is not symmetrical, that there is room for reader interpretation. Yet, because reader interpretation is an individual process, often based on social background, life experiences and so forth, different individuals may interpret picturebooks variously. The interplay between text and pictures also becomes evident in the paratext (title, front page and endpapers), which is especially significant in picturebooks as the story often starts on the front cover, and may add extra information that is not reoccurring later in the book. These multiple layers of interpretation of visual and verbal communication, in both the iconotext and paratext, therefore represent the very essence of complexity in picturebooks, and subsequently challenge the notion of picturebooks as a format for children.

1.1.2 Themes in picturebooks

In recent decades, picturebooks have advanced significantly with respect to themes. Previously, the themes were in high degree focused around protecting childhood innocence, by censoring various themes seen as inappropriate for children. Although this is still the case for some picturebooks published today, modern picturebooks

have undergone a distinct shift, which has opened up for sensitive and controversial themes, exemplified by mental illnesses, domestic violence and war, to have a substantial place in picturebooks. The most common themes in picturebooks however, address fundamental human needs, such as the need to be loved, the need to belong and the need to achieve. Also existential questions, for instance themes like death, purpose of life and the pursuit of happiness, are common themes in picturebooks. The clear thematic shift found in modern picturebooks has occurred on the basis of authors and publishers who advocate that there are no themes limited to adults, but rather cross-generational topics of interest to readers of all ages. Furthermore, because themes are subject to the reader's interpretation, various readers may identify different themes while reading the same book.

1.1.3 The notion of the crossover genre

The term crossover is ambiguous within literature, as there is no clear definition of what qualifies a book to be labelled as part of the crossover genre. This thesis will however build on the definition put forward by Wall (In Beckett, 2011, p. 64) where crossover literature is seen as books that are addressed to children and adults on different levels, but on equal terms. Within the crossover genre, picturebooks lack thorough attention, largely due to the assumption that the picturebook format is for the child reader. Yet, the complexities found in numerous picturebooks, strengthened by the iconotext, paratext and variety of themes, challenges this notion, and induces the argument of whether picturebooks perhaps more than any other genre can be classified as books for all ages. To demolish the perception of picturebooks as a format limited to children, as well as acknowledging the crossover potential, can prove to be crucial if teachers are to discover and acknowledge the usefulness of introducing picturebooks in their teaching, across age levels.

1.2 Aims and scope of the study

While there are many books to be found in the field of picturebooks as crossover literature, little research have been conducted to substantiate the dual audience aspect of picturebooks. The present master thesis aims to compare the identification

of themes and perception of iconotext across two age levels, 5th to 10th grade, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how picturebooks can function as crossover literature, and thus directed to a wider variety of age groups in school. The project attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Can iconotext add to the reader's perception of themes in picturebooks?
 - 1.1. How does the perception of iconotext vary between 5th and 10th grade?
2. How does the identification of themes in picturebooks vary between 5th and 10th grade?
3. What can a variation in identification of themes and perception of iconotext say about picturebooks as part of the crossover genre?

1.3 Method

Qualitative focus group discussions were employed in order to fulfil the aims and answer the research questions of this study. Prior to the data collection, a set of two picturebooks and the topics for discussion were piloted in two of the four focus groups. Three different picturebooks were provided for the actual data collection, as it was important that all the focus groups had read the same books, in order for the researcher to compare the participants' identification of themes. The researcher's role was to ask questions for discussion, keep the conversation going and to ensure that too many digressions were avoided. A sound recording device was used as the tool for data collection. The collected data were transcribed and then analyzed across the focus groups in accordance with the research questions. The relevant method is further examined in Chapter 3.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 elaborates on the terminology, theory and previous research relevant for this study. The main topics such as iconotext, paratext, themes, picturebooks and crossover literature will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3 details the method used to collect data for the present research. The chapter explores the research method, sampling, limitations and ethical concerns. The picturebooks chosen for the data collection are also introduced in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the results obtained in the data collection, as well as an analysis of the findings. The chapter is divided into two, where the two first research questions are presented with the relevant results.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in light of the research questions and relevant theory. Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on the educational perspective related to the notion of picturebooks as crossover literature.

Chapter 6 include final commentaries regarding the research project and a discussion as to what could constitute further research.

The appendices include the questions prepared for the focus group discussions, although it must be noted that some additional questions were asked during the data collection.

2 Background

This master thesis seeks to explore the crossover potential in picturebooks in order to find a substantial place for picturebooks in Norwegian classrooms. This chapter will delve into the various elements that constitute the complexities in modern picturebooks, and serve the purpose of defining the current terms *iconotext*, *paratext* and *themes* to the crossover concept. Following this, the questions of “how” and “why” picturebooks should have a greater role in Norwegian classrooms will be accounted for.

2.1 Picturebooks

2.1.1 *Defining the genre and the format*

The purpose of the present thesis is to acknowledge the various complexities seen in contemporary picturebooks, and it is therefore seen as necessary to first amplify which qualities that define picturebooks, as well as the picturebook’s usage both historically and today. Picturebooks are often children’s first introduction to literature and are based on an extraordinary collaboration between image and text (Kiefer, 1991, p. 70). Like any other literature, picturebooks can engage and evoke feelings within the reader in a particular way (Ibsen & Wiland, 2000, p. 144). What largely separates picturebooks from other literary genres is the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1). The experience of reading verbal text is something every avid reader is familiar with, but the art of visual communication is for many an unfamiliar field within literature (Doonan, 1993, p. 7). As this thesis focuses specifically on picturebooks, it is important to address what defines the picturebook format. A picturebook is normally 24-36 pages long and large in physical size. Picturebooks must have at least one picture on each double spread; otherwise it is considered an illustrated book. In illustrated books pictures function as a complement to the text, whereas in picturebooks, text and pictures are equally important (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 19). The picturebook, the comic book and the graphic novel are all examples of

formats within contemporary visual literature. Graphic novels bear several similarities to picturebooks in that sense that they contain pictures on each page, rely on interplay between visual and verbal art, and often embody a complex plot. However, the two formats differ where graphic novels tell the story through sequels, like comics (Kukkonen, 2013, p. 84, 88). Further examining of the graphic novel falls beyond the scope of this thesis, yet much of the research conducted in this study is transferable to the utilization of graphic novels.

Barbara Bader puts forward a definition, illustrates the esthetical aspect and identifies the extraordinary potential of picturebooks in the introduction to her influential study *American Picturebook from Noah's Ark to the Beast*:

“A picture book is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and, foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form, it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless.” (Bader, 1976, p. 1)

At the outset, Barbara Bader also construes an audience for picturebooks, namely children. Although the picturebook traditionally has been associated with children's literature as a means to develop literacy skills with younger children, it has in recent years, perhaps more than any other genre, redrawn boundaries and expanded literary horizons (Beckett, 2011, p. xvi). Modern picturebooks often introduce thought-provoking visual and verbal aspects, with multiple layers of interpretation, and can be “effective in promoting creativity and critical thinking with older children” (Dolan, 2014, p. 9). The notion that picturebooks are intended exclusively for children is still alive amongst critics, yet ardent enthusiasts of the genre argues that the picturebook is “just a format” and that there is no reason they should be limited to children (Beckett, 2012, p. 3). This master's thesis aims to shed light on how picturebooks can function as crossover literature, by highlighting the various components that constitute picturebooks as the complex form of literature it is today.

2.1.2 *The iconotext*

The term iconotext represents the dynamic between two individual forms of communication, the visual and the verbal (Louvel, 2011, p. 15). Kristin Hallberg (1982, p. 163-168), who initially introduced the term, defines the iconotext as the implicit “genuine text” in picturebooks, emerged by an interaction of picture and text. The picturebook reader shifts between centralizing the attention amidst image and text in order to acquire meaning, and it is this interaction that adds to the multifaceted nature of picturebooks (Lewis, 2001, p. 32).

When reading picturebooks, whether one looks at the picture or reads the text first, one of the elements will create expectation for the other. Some picturebooks leave little or nothing to the imagination and the reader remains relatively passive. This is the case of complementary picturebooks, where text and picture fill each other’s gaps fully, and in symmetrical picturebooks, where there are two mutually redundant narratives (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 12, 17). It is, however, mainly when the text and picture bring alternative information or contradict each other in some way, that there is room for reader interpretation (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 2). One way of opening up for different interpretations is to subvert the understanding of the story by visual means. This means that while the text encourages or manipulates the reader to adopt a certain perception, some visual details will lead to doubt. An example is Anthony Browne’s *Gorilla* (1983) where the verbal elements suggest that the protagonist has fallen asleep, although the visual elements do not express this explicitly (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 184). Golden (1990, p. 104) provides five examples of how text and picture may cooperate in picturebooks. However, to categorize the interaction between visual and verbal elements in picturebooks offer complexities, as some exhibits clear features, while others reflect more than one relationship, and therefore the examples are merely intended as a model:

1. Text and picture are symmetrical;
2. Text depends on picture for clarification;
3. Illustration enhances, elaborates text;
4. Text carries primary narrative, illustration is selective, and;
5. Illustration carries primary narrative, text is selective (Golden, 1990, p. 104).

Golden (1990, p. 104), as well as Nikolajeva and Scott (2006, p. 12) consider the symmetrical relation between image and text as the least complex form of picturebook, by seeing the pictures as simply a shadow of the text. This means that if the two elements of the text appear to be telling the same story in parallel, the question of whether there really is an interaction there becomes important. Lewis (2001, p. 39, 42) and Nodelman (1988, p. 195) argue that pictures can only convey narrative information in relation to verbal text, meaning that it is the verbal text that affects how the reader interprets the pictures. The argument is exemplified by a reader's first interpretation of the book cover, without having seen the title, where the reader can get an idea of what the book is about, yet the impression can change when the title is revealed. However, this may also be the case inversely. An example is the book *The Silence Seeker* by Ben Morley. The blurb tells the story of a young boy named Joe who is told by his mother that asylum seekers have moved in next door, but Joe thinks his mother says "silence seeker". The picture on the front cover shows two boys of different ethnic backgrounds, and might dissolve stereotypical conclusions as of which the asylum seeker is. In conclusion, to categorize the interaction between text and picture in specific picturebooks can prove to be complex, as some picturebooks are very consistent of the text-image relationship, where the case of symmetry or contradiction is perfectly clear, while other picturebooks are subtle and indeterminate, that do not easily fit into that kind of categorization (Lewis, 2001, p. 44).

The paratext represent titles, covers, endpapers and so forth in books, and is important because it is a conducive to the general first impression. However, in picturebooks the paratext is of great significance because of it being an integral part of the narrative. Picturebooks will always, without exception, have a picture on the front cover. The iconotext is therefore of great importance in the paratext as well. The story may start already on the front-page, and may continue beyond the very last page onto the back cover, creating one large picture when the book is folded out. Sometimes the picture on the front-page does not reoccur inside the book, which means that it adds valuable knowledge to the story. The paratext can give an anticipation of the plot, be mysterious to some degree, or it could contradict the story

itself. The title can also reveal much, as picturebooks usually have a limited amount of verbal text (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 241).

People perceive and correspond to signs every day, whether it's iconic signs, where the individual must interpret such as a symbol in order to generate meaning, or conventional signs, where the individual must have the capability to read (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1). In picturebooks, pictures represent a complex form of iconic signs, expected to describe or represent. The text is an intricate form of conventional signs, where the function is primarily to narrate. Where conventional signs are reasonably straightforward, iconic signs provide no direct instruction on how to read them (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1, 2). Consequently, readers of picturebooks at different age levels might assimilate stories variously due to diversities in both literacy and visual literacy skills. Simultaneously, from an educational perspective it might be useful for the teacher to be aware of the different ways that text and picture can work together in picturebooks to facilitate the development of visual literacy (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1, 2). As a visual format, picturebooks are prime tools for comprehension of visual literacy, which will be further elaborated in the following sub-chapter.

2.1.3 Visual literacy

As visual literacy is a type of literacy, the concept of literacy in general will be briefly explained first. The Oxford English Dictionary defines literacy as either the state of being literate or the ability to read and write (The Oxford English Dictionary: definition of literacy). The latter definition is seen as most relevant to this thesis, as visual literacy can be understood as the ability to read, comprehend and evaluate visual elements in forms of artistic style and expression (Camp & Tompkins in Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson 2005, p. 73). Although the current thesis will have its main focus on visual literacy, it must also be made clear that this in no way implies that literacy in the traditional sense should be discarded. Competent readers are well familiar with verbal text; however, it is unaccustomed for many how visual elements communicate (Doonan, 1993, p. 7). In picturebooks, it is part of the complete experience to look at the pictures. While ordinary novels require readers to make up their own image of the

fictional world, picturebooks have already been depicted. That is why the picturebook can function as part of an education, on several levels, in developing a general visual sense and to make meaning from visual information.

To read picturebooks can also provide a valuable introduction to art appreciation (Doonan, 1993, p. 48), and the power of art to provoke responds may be the picturebook's most significant contribution to the reader's cognitive and aesthetic comprehension. Children respond to pictures and illustrations to construct affective and cognitive meaning, and to a certain extent these are likely to overlap (Kiefer, 1991, p. 70, Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 73, Doonan, 1993, p. 7). According to Kiefer (1991, p. 70), it is often the case that children notice small details by illustrators that adults seem to overlook. Because art captures an expression of something that you cannot quite put into words, that is precisely why this part can be seen as the picturebook's most powerful tool to elicit responses in the reader (Kiefer, 1991, p. 70). Picturebook art is simply more than visual relief for a literary effort (Marantz, 1977, p. 149), and within the school walls children do not need art experts as much as they need adults who enjoys the experience of reading picturebooks.

2.1.4 The experience of reading picturebooks

Readers will primarily, regardless of age, background and experience, choose books out of a conscious or unconscious motivation. The choice of book reflects the reader's desire to learn more about themselves, their world and human conditions (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 11). Although children tend to choose picturebooks based on the format, more often it is the title that appeals to children, reflects what the book is about, and suggests whether or not the child will come closer to an emotional identification. In order to identify with and respond to the narrative and its characters, it is of great importance that the reader enjoys and finds the picturebook stimulating. Such achievement is likely to occur when the themes are either comparable to the reader's own acquaintance or within the reader's ability to understand (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 38).

By exploring children's reading of literature and their responses over a period of eight months, Fry (1985, p. 99) found that there were two main ways children would see themselves in books, put in words by 14-year old Sharon: "In certain parts in some books you can imagine you're the person but in others you're *with* them but not actually them themselves". The shift between feeling like the protagonist and being a bystander is due to the way we respond to what we read or see; unless we find ourselves there, the story passes by. Spiro (In Lehr, 1991, p. 4) found that readers add information based on personal knowledge when there is a conflict between a text and the understanding of it. While reading a non-traditional fairy tale to second-grade children where the princess did not live happily ever after, Lehr (1988) discovered that some children had modified the ending to a traditional happy ending when later asked about the story. One possible reason for this is that the children were familiar with a certain type of structure of fairy tales. Memory is selective. Mandler and Johnson (1977) asked first-grade, fourth-grade and university students to spontaneously retell tape-recorded stories. The research showed that the first- and fourth-graders tend to primarily stress outcome and ignore reactions, while adults, not surprisingly, recalled more, suggesting a developmental perspective on recall.

The numerous themes in picturebooks offer a unique opportunity for readers to learn about people similar to themselves, in spite of for example contrasting backgrounds or beliefs (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 38). Picturebooks can be seen as windows to the wide world, where readers can acquire knowledge beyond their own limited experience (Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 62). Similarly, Cianciolo presents the metaphor "every picture is a window", stating that the picturebook illustrations together with the text create a respect for the likenesses, but also for the differences that make up humans as individuals (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 38). Because of the variety of themes seen in picturebooks today, the potential of picturebooks in education is not reserved the literature teaching in school, but can be used interdisciplinary, at contrasting age levels, to teach specific topics. In the two following sub-chapters, two different objectives are presented, in which picturebooks can be utilized in teaching.

2.1.5 Picturebooks in the EFL classroom

Picturebooks are still a relatively undiscovered part of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching; despite the fact that it is one of the most exciting types of authentic texts teachers can use (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 17). It is the case in many Norwegian classrooms that teachers tend to rely heavily on traditional course books. Course books normally consist of shorter texts, like poems, facts, extracts from longer books and so on, resulting in that many pupils sometimes do not get the opportunity to complete a story, read from the beginning to the end. This limited closure of stories can lead to less motivated readers, as reading is simply not fun when you never get to know what happens (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 10). Picturebooks, on the other hand, are short, yet comprehensive at the same time. One of the most important aspects of picturebooks is how they are not written with EFL learners in mind. This means that the language is still authentic: rich, varied and complex (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 18, 51). Some English language learners can easily be intimidated by the amount of text in a novel, and require reading material that is comprehensible and in coherence with the learner's proficiency (Hadaway & Mundy, 1999, p. 83). The strength of the picturebook is its ability to reach all learners, young or old, strong or weak. Because the verbal text in picturebooks is limited, readers are not immediately put off by a large amount of text. On the contrary, because the stories in picturebooks are told just as much through pictures as text, the reader is enabled to encounter unfamiliar words without the expense of comprehension (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 17). Regularly coming across the same vocabulary and expressions in changing context is beneficial, as multiple exposures are an important factor for language learning (Miller, 1998, p. 377). On the other hand, the text may be limited in picturebooks, but the vocabulary can still be fairly advanced. For readers with higher English proficiency, the combination of pictures and text may also be a source of new information to interpret. Readers of all age groups can benefit and feel challenged by picturebooks, as the variety is remarkably extensive (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 22).

2.1.6 Picturebooks as a bridge to the world

One of the remarkable features of books is how they allow the reader to travel, if only in their minds, to different places and different cultures. What distinguishes

picturebooks from other types of literature is the way it can be used as a bridge to learn about either historical or topical events that are normally taught factually. By presenting the learners with pictures, as well as narratives they can relate to, empathise with, be provoked by and laugh with, the picturebook might become more personal. The use of multicultural picturebooks in the classroom has the potential to promote intercultural competence and develop a conceptual understanding of culture (Dolan, 2014, p. 94, Short, 2009). Intercultural education aims to teach students to value and respect the diversity of all human life, countries and cultures, and elucidate themes like equality and human rights (NCCA, 2005, p. 3). As some themes are sensitive and difficult to talk about, picturebooks can be utilised to present different angles and perspectives on specific matters, e.g. war, conflicts and religion. Quality picturebooks have the capacity to “enhance moral reasoning skills, emotional intelligence and empathy”, by exploring themes such as fear, discrimination and tolerance (Dolan, 2014, p. 95). Because the aforementioned themes are not restricted to a specific age group, they contribute to the idea of why picturebooks can be seen as books for readers of all ages.

2.2 Themes

The present thesis seeks to compare the variation between two different age level's identification of themes, in order to find out to what extent picturebooks can be seen as crossover literature. In the following sub-chapters the definition of themes will be presented, as well as children's sense of themes and common themes found in children's literature. Although this thesis aims to find the crossover aspect of picturebooks through concepts such as iconotext, paratext and themes, it is important to note that the two different age levels up for comparison are 5th and 10th grade, and can thus both be categorized as children.

2.2.1 Definition of theme

Themes in literature represent the central meaning behind a piece of writing subtly weaved into the story by the author. In other words, themes can be defined as the motive, the message or the idea that holds the story together (Stoodt-Hill &

Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 28, Lukens, 1982, p. 101). Themes must however, not be mistaken with morals in stories. Morals are messages revealed in stories, either implied or stated directly, and normally teaches a valuable life lesson, such as “think twice before you act”. Themes on the other hand, sums up the book in a simple word or two, and are usually not stated directly. Examples can be “loneliness”, “death” and “friendship”. Literature usually has multiple themes. As themes are subject to reader’s interpretation, different individuals may identify different themes in the same book. The dominant idea or theme, however, should be apparent to readers (Lehr, 1991, p. 68, Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 28).

2.2.2 Children’s sense of themes

Studies on children’s sense of themes in literature have commonly been conducted at primary and secondary level, yet there is little research to be found in the field of themes related to adults. Based on a lack of research in the other end of the scale, children as young as kindergarten level, Susan Lehr (1991, p. 41-48) conducted a research where she compared children’s and adult’s ability to link books with similar themes together. The participating children were in kindergarten, second grade and fourth grade. The results showed that the kindergarten children’s answers were distinctly different from the adult responses in the categories of realistic fiction and folktales. Second graders differed more subtly from adults in both categories, while most fourth grade answers matched adult choices in both categories. She concluded that thematic identification is a fairly early developmental strategy, yet older children are better able to talk about the themes in stories (Lehr, 1991, p. 48). In the context of the present research project, this may mean that the participants in the 5th and 10th grade have the ability to identify the same themes, yet a variation in the discussion of themes may occur. That is why this thesis will also include the perception of iconotext as a mean to variations of the two age levels. Whether children are capable to identify themes in literature is a contentious topic. Piaget (In Lehr, 1991) theorizes that children are unable to develop critical thought below the age of seven or eight. Similarly, Applebee (In Lehr, 1991) suggests that children’s critical response to narratives have not reached interpretive levels of thought before the age of twelve. As pointed out by Sipe (2011, p. 247), the content of some picturebooks addresses

severe controversial themes and problems, yet young readers ability to deal with these complexities should not be underestimated. Similarly, Lehr (1991, p. 67) argues that even if children's perspective of meaning is different from the one of adults, it is presumptuous to interpret that as a lack of understanding. Although readers may forget details about the plot, it is often the notion of theme that remains firmly rooted in their mind. It is also important to note that older readers can examine and enjoy picturebooks as an aesthetic object, no matter what the subject matter or theme is.

2.2.3 Common themes in picturebooks

Contemporary picturebooks have undergone a distinct shift with respect to themes the last decades. While picturebooks were previously censored, with intent to protect children from, what was seen as, adult themes, the distinction between adult themes and child themes are in high degree lessened in today's picturebooks. The wide variety of themes in modern picturebooks is thus a justification to why the audience of picturebooks should be expanded. According to Wyndham & Madison (In Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 28) the most common themes in children's books are associated with fundamental human needs, amongst other:

1. The need to love and be loved
2. The need to belong
3. The need to achieve
4. The need for security – material, emotional, spiritual
5. The need to know.

However, themes regarding fundamental human needs are not exclusively reserved for children, and the listed themes are just as relevant for adult literature. Similarly, Roth and Thomas (2013) found that children between the age of six and nine were particularly interested in the themes of wisdom seeking, becoming your own person and peace-making. Wisdom seeking themes involves existential questions such as death, the purpose of life, happiness, and good versus evil. The theme regarding becoming your own person is about growing self-knowledge, discover talents and

desires, and use those talents to make the world a better place. The theme of peace-making involves emotional regulation, self-discipline, the ability to resolve disputes and communication skills. The aim is to teach children to stick up for themselves and others, but also that there is more to peace than the absence of violence (Roth & Thomas, 2013). The mentioned themes are challenging, as they rarely provide a straightforward answer. Yet, because there are no concrete, clear-cut answers to these thematic questions, readers might spend a lifetime trying to get closer to a revelation, and thus substantiate the theory that also these themes are cross generational. Themes related to dual audience literature will be discussed further in sub-chapter 2.3.2.

2.3 The notion of crossover literature

In the previous sub-chapters, the researcher aimed to acknowledge the different objectives that contribute to the complexities seen in modern picturebooks, and thus support the idea that picture books should not only be limited to young children. The purpose of the following section is to define crossover literature as a concept, and furthermore explore the picturebook's place within the concept. The relevant definition of crossover literature will be introduced first, followed by a brief summary of how crossover literature has expanded in recent years, in order to create a deeper understanding of crossover literature as a phenomenon. This is relevant to the question of why picturebooks still seem to be rather unexplored on the subject of dual audience literature.

2.3.1 What is crossover literature?

Within literature the term crossover is ambiguous. Some focuses the crossover concept around adults reading children's books for their own enjoyment (Falconer, 2009, p. 7, 2010, p. 158). Others interpret the term as books suitable for adult and teenage readers (Rosoff, 2007). Wall explains the dual address in literature as where children and adults are "addressed on different levels, but on equal terms", and it is this definition the present research project is based on (In Beckett, 2011, p. 64).

That readers of different ages have read books that have not been specifically targeted at their age group is not a new phenomenon. When *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll was published in 1865, it was originally aimed at an adult audience, despite the fact that it today tends to be associated with children's literature. However, the concept of crossover literature gained particularly great attention when the first Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling were released in the end of the 20th century. The books became so popular even among adults that Bloomsbury, the publisher behind the series, designed additional book covers specifically aimed at adults. According to new statistics regarding the consumers of books classified for young adults (12 to 17 years), fully 55% of the buyers were 18 years or older, with the largest segment aged 30 to 44 making out 28% of the young adult book sales. 78% of the adults reported that the books were purchased for their own reading (Publisher's Weekly, 2012). Regardless of the fact that literary age boundaries seem to gradually blur out in the constant expanding trend of crossover literature, picturebooks still lack thorough attention as part of the phenomenon, although picturebooks might more than any genre be classified as books for all ages (Beckett, 2012, p. 1).

2.3.2 *Picturebooks as crossover literature*

Picturebooks have ever since its creation been, and still are, primarily associated with children (Sipe, 2011, p. 244, Beckett, 2012, p. 3). As pointed out earlier, this view was expressed by Barbara Bader when she wrote that a picturebook is "foremost an experience for a child" (Bader, 1976, p. 1). In like manner, Perry Nodelman has described picturebooks as "books intended for young children" (1988). The picturebook has generally been undervalued by older readers, based on preconceptions of the book cover and the seemingly innocent format. Therefore, it is still the case that the general public is largely unaware of the tremendous potential and power of picturebooks to stimulate readers of different age groups (Mawdsley, 1990, p. 10, Beckett, 2012, p. 316). Today's picturebooks clearly challenge the norms and conventions that have commonly been regarded as part of children's literature. First and foremost, because contemporary picturebooks are less censored with regard to themes. Traditionally, it has been a large tendency to spare children

from reading books with sensitive and controversial themes. Maurice Sendak expressed his view on the matter by writing:

“I don’t think I’m stretching the point when I suggest that this ‘let’s-make-the-world-a-happy-easy-frustration-less-place-for-kids’ attitude is often propounded in children’s literature today.... I believe there exists a quiet but highly effective adult censorship of subjects that are supposedly too frightening, or morbid, or not optimistic enough for boys and girls” (1988, p. 158)

Although some adults still object to buying, writing or publishing books with troubling themes in order to protect childhood innocence, many authors, illustrators and publishers advocate today that there is no such thing as “adult” themes, but rather cross-generational topics of interest to readers of all ages (Hade, Paul, and Mason in Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2014, p. 191, Beckett, 2012, p. 212). The Norwegian poet Gro Dahle is an example of authors who introduce sensitive issues in picturebooks. Together with her husband and daughter, the author-illustrators Svein Nyhus and Kaia Dahle Nyhus, she has written several picturebooks with themes such as domestic violence (Angry Man), nice girl syndrome (Nice), depression (Mum’s Hair) and divorce (The War). These books are simultaneously aimed at adults and children, which qualify them to be seen as crossover picturebooks (Ommundsen, 2014, p. 17-36). Because picturebooks consist of both illustrations and text, and insist on collaborative work to resolve them, the variety of picturebooks offer reading experiences on different levels by all ages, where the crossover relationship can “range from one of collaboration to one of confrontation or even exclusion, in which the child and the adult seem to be reading entirely different texts” (Mawdsley, 1990, p. 13, Scott in Beckett 2011, p. xvi).

While adults generally have been seen as co-readers of picturebooks in the past, contemporary picturebooks has become so challenging that they are frequently suitable for adults as well as children. Picturebooks are no longer restricted to one particular group of readers, and adult readers of picturebooks are becoming recognized as readers in their own right (Janet Evans, 2014, p. 191. Beckett, 2012, p. 13). Yet, despite the complexities that are quite clearly seen in today’s

picturebooks, it might take much persuasion to alter the general sentiment of picturebooks being seen as children's literature. This became evident when Kenward (2000, p. 43) investigated the implications of crossover fiction in libraries, and found that only 1 out of 25 public librarians considered the crossover potential of the picturebooks "The Gruffalo" and "Guess How Much I Love You". The librarian acknowledged the crossover potential in the mentioned picturebooks, but also pointed out that the crossover appeal was diminished by the format:

"I suspect because of the format of picture books crossover appeal would be lessened. This is a great shame as I think there is great crossover potential with a number of picture books (Kenward, 2000, p. 43).

At the other end of the scale, Regina Hayes, publisher of Viking Children's Books and author of crossover picturebooks, argues that the picturebook is "just a format" and that there is no reason they should be limited to children (Beckett, 2012, p. 3). Maurice Sendak blames the abiding division created in literature, between writing either children or adult literature instead of simply books (In Beckett, 2012, p. 3). The distinction between books and age appropriateness still exists in the highest degree in most bookstores worldwide. Therefore, the labelling of picturebooks becomes crucial with regard to how picturebooks are perceived by the general public; if certain picturebooks can be considered satisfactory for all age groups; logically they should no longer be classified as part of children's literature (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 1). According to Beckett, many picturebooks could proudly display the recommendation: "Ages: All" (2012, p. 7). Some authors choose to address the crossover prospect in the paratext, like in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, where "Ages: All" is written in discrete letters on the inside of the dust jacket (Beckett, 2012, p. 9). Similarly to the term "Ages: All", Cianciolo (1997, p. 2) presents "Everybody's books", and also mention having seen school and public libraries classify picturebooks as exactly that.

With regard to the present research project, picturebooks are largely presumed as undervalued within the crossover genre. It is the researcher's overall impression that teachers, parents and pupils largely consider picturebooks as a privilege for a young child, rather than books that can be read by different age groups. By providing two

different age levels with the same picturebooks, the researcher seeks to compare the variations in identification of themes, and perception of iconotext and paratext, with the aim of finding out whether there are differences in how the two age levels read and perceive the picturebooks at hand. The method of how the researcher has gone forward to achieve this is presented in the following chapter.

3 Method

3.1 Qualitative focus groups

This study has employed a qualitative method in form of focus groups. The focus groups had a self-contained use, as they were the primary source of collecting qualitative data. It was therefore essential that the focus groups produced enough data in order to meet the aims of the research (Morgan, 1988, p. 3). This study aimed to identify variations in interpretations of themes in picturebooks between two different year levels, 5th and 10th grade, through interaction within the group. Focus group discussions open up for participants to discuss topics they as individuals would overlook, because each participant's experience and attitude can shape the discussion (Barbour, 2014, p. 137, Morgan, 1988, p. 15). For this reason it was crucial for the researcher that the chosen participants were homogeneous with respect to their background rather than attitudes (Morgan, 1988, p. 36). The selected participants for this research project were homogenous on account of age and environment. The sampling of respondents is elaborated further in sub-chapter 3.2. The researcher's role in the discussion was to ask questions, keep the conversation going and enable all participants to engage fully (Wilkinson in Silverman, 2004, p. 177-178). However, compared to one-on-one interviews, the focus group method does not carry the expectation of each participant to answer every question (Barbour, 2014, p. 137). The questions were asked to the group as a whole, rather than individually. As a result, some of the interviewees may have been less participatory than others, due to the fact that some may feel uncomfortable discussing delicate topics in public. Other participants might have felt safer talking about sensitive topics in a majority, since the other respondents are in the same position (Barbour, 2014, p. 137, Morgan, 1988, p. 32).

In this case the researcher wanted to examine two different groups' identification of themes in picture books rather than individual recognitions. Compared to participant observation, the focus group method creates a moderately unnatural setting, because the researcher manages the discussion. On the other hand, the focus group method is valuable because it allows the researcher to observe large amounts of

interaction directed on to the specific topic. Furthermore, this method allows the researcher to manage the discussion in a way that too many digressions are avoided (Morgan, 1988, p. 32). In a sense, focus group interviews can be experienced as fairly natural for the participant, because the interview is closer to everyday conversation, and typically include communicative instruments such as joking, challenging, boasting etc. (Wilkinson, 2012, p. 180). For the reasons mentioned above it was considered most beneficial to apply the focus group method to the project, rather than individual interviews or participant observations.

3.2 Sampling

For this research study, two focus groups were formed in a 5th grade and two in a 10th grade, making a total of four focus groups. The choice of age levels was determined by the basis of the researcher's own teacher training in primary and lower secondary education for years 5 to 10. As this master thesis is aimed at education, it seemed appropriate to compare the differences between the lowest and the highest age level in relation to the researcher's teaching. With regard to resources concerning the school's accessibility of participants and transcription of the data, the researcher decided that four pupils in each focus group were manageable. In addition, the researcher considered that a smaller focus group would allow all participants to engage in the discussion.

The selection of participants was a case of convenience sampling, where the main criteria were that the pupils attended either 5th or 10th grade. Several schools were asked to participate, but most of them did not find the time in their schedule. Only two schools, one 5th grade and one 10th grade, agreed to participate in the study, which meant that the pilot study also had to be conducted in these classes (See sub-chapter 3.3). A number of seven pupils from the 10th grade agreed to participate in the study. One participant withdrew after reading the first book, and was replaced by a new volunteering participant for the second book, still making out a total of seven pupils from 10th grade. Most pupils in the 5th grade wanted to take part of the research, and were therefore chosen at random by their own teacher.

3.3 Pilot study

A set of two picturebooks and the interview questions were piloted prior to the research conducted for this master thesis. The pilot study was carried out in order to ensure that the instruments functioned the intended way prior to the actual data collection (Loewen and Philp, 2012). Piloting the research is valuable to the researcher in terms of testing the interview questions and remove/make changes to ambiguous, difficult or easy questions, rehearse the process of, in this case, reading the picturebooks and test the equipment used to collect data (Zoltán Dörnyei and Kata Csizér, 2012, p. 79). The participants in the pilot study were a sample of the target group that the study was designed for. By reason of limitations with regard to participants, the pilot study in this research was conducted with two of the focus groups, one from each grade (Limitations caused by this choice are elaborated on in subchapter 3.7).

The pilot study took place approximately a week before the actual data collection, spread over two days. Three pupils from the 10th grade and four pupils from the 5th grade participated in the pilot study. Two picturebooks, different from the ones planned for the data collection, but with similar difficulty level, were chosen. These were *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne and *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* by Emily Gravett. In addition to the books, the pupils were provided with a work sheet where some main focuses for the study were specified. The testing was recorded in order to obtain an overview of time spent and also to check that interview questions worked to obtain the necessary data. The researcher informed the pupils about ethical issues, and made it clear that they participated voluntarily, and therefore could withdraw anytime. Considering that the books were written in English, it was carefully thought through which language should be used in the discussion. The researcher decided that a discussion in the pupil's mother tongue, Norwegian, would be most profitable, because the aim was not to measure L2 capabilities, but interpretations of themes and perceptions of iconotext. In order to give the participants the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions fully, without the struggle to find the appropriate words, it was seen as more suitable to keep the discussion in Norwegian.

After the interview, the pupils were asked questions regarding the method, in terms of comprehension of both the books and the interview questions.

The results from the pilot study led to some changes regarding the use of a recording device, where it became necessary with two devices in order to secure quality of the sound. Especially in the 5th grade, it became evident that some instructions had to be clearer, as several of the participants often spoke at the same time, which again would be difficult for the researcher to hear and transcribe afterwards. Also, the researcher noticed that the younger participants were particularly interested in pointing out details they noticed in the picturebooks while reading them, yet without any further interpretation, and this ended up being slightly interruptive. It was therefore clear that the books should be read first, before going back and take a closer look at the pictures and the text. The work sheet also proved to be redundant, as most pupils were either too occupied with the book or waited for the researcher to ask the questions.

3.4 Data collection

The data collection took place a week after the pilot study, and was spread over two days. Three hours were provided for each focus group, as it proved to be sufficient in the pilot study. All discussion was held in Norwegian, as it was seen as an efficient way of ensuring that every pupil had the ability to take part in the discussion.

3.4.1 Recording the results

Sound recording of the group discussion was an important source for collecting the necessary data. Using sound recordings could lead to risks in terms of malfunctioned equipment, inaudible voices and distractions for the participants. However, these possible risks are still outweighed by the benefits of having accurate data to transcribe. The alternative would have been to rely on notes or memory, which are both possibly unreliable. The recordings were stored on a password-protected computer, and erased towards the end of the research.

3.4.2 Discussion

The researcher opened the group discussion by asking a discussion-starter question, which presented the basic topic for the session: “Have you worked with themes in books before?”. This way the discussion starts from the participant’s perspective rather than the researchers, and can also provide information on the diversity in the group (Morgan, 1988, p. 50). Despite the fact that most students recognized the word “theme” and knew what it meant, it was in all the groups considered necessary to explain the word further. Another discussion-starter question was asked as a follow-up to the first one: “Have you read picturebooks before?”. Then the picturebooks were introduced, and the researcher picked out one to start with. The order of the three picturebooks that were read varied, except that *The Dark* was always read as number two, since the two other books were by the same author and shared some stylistic features.

Nothing was revealed about the picturebooks in advance except for the title and author, to prevent influence from the researcher. Once the book was chosen, the body of the discussion started with the researcher asking questions about the front cover and the title:

1. What can you say about the front cover of the book?
2. What are your thoughts on the title of the book?
3. What feelings are the people on the cover expressing?
4. What do you think the book is about?

After the discussion of the paratext followed a collective reading of the picturebook. The researcher read out the book slowly, in order to give the participants time to look at the pictures. However, the researcher made it clear in advance that the book was to be read first, before going back to the beginning and start the discussion of the picturebook. Although this could prevent spontaneous discourse while reading the book, it was seen as most beneficial based on the experience gained from the pilot study. This way the participants were able to obtain an understanding of the full story first. Due to limited time resources and restricted availability of the picturebooks in Norway, the researcher could only provide three copies of each picturebook. This

meant that the three or four pupils in each group had to share two picturebooks among them while reading the book, and afterwards they received the third copy that was read from. Limitations for this are noted in sub-chapter 3.7.

Each focus group discussion was based on the same discussion questions. However, the questions varied to some extent for each picturebook, as different characters and situations were portrayed. It is important to note that the term “iconotext” was never introduced explicitly to the participants. Still, the questions asked in the focus group were designed to create a discussion related to this term. Examples of the related questions are: (See appendix 1-3 for all discussion topics).

1. What is your impression of (character’s name)? What is that impression based on?
2. How are the colours in the picturebook? How are they contributing to the mood or sense of the book?
3. How do you think the text works with the pictures? Do they tell the same or a different story?
4. How would the book work with picture or text only?
5. What do you think the themes of the book are?

The dependency of the researcher to ask questions varied in each group. One of the focus groups in the 10th grade relied little on the researcher to ask questions in order to share their opinions of the picturebooks. This may be due to participation in the pilot study the week before, yet the researcher’s conviction is that the discussion also then flowed freely. As pointed out by Morgan (1988, p. 69), focus groups that have participated for a longer period of time may have an increased familiarity with the method, and require less structured guiding. The other 10th grade focus group relied to a high degree on the researcher to start and continue the discussion. A potential cause may be that the researcher comes in as an outsider, and because the pupils are participating in a research, it is expected that the researcher ask the questions. In the two 5th grade focus groups the discussion flowed freely, yet with more digressions and focus on spotting details in the pictures without further interpretation. It was therefore necessary for the researcher to ask questions in order to collect relevant data.

3.5 The picturebooks

The researcher provided the picturebooks used in this study. In order to compare the themes identified by the different participants, it was essential that they had read the same picturebooks. The picturebooks were selected in collaboration with a professor at the University of York, as well as the supervisor for this project. The main criteria for selection were:

1. The books were authentic picturebooks
2. The books varied in themes
3. The books had a seemingly wide age appropriate range.

3.5.1 *Gorilla by Anthony Browne*

Gorilla won several prestigious awards when it was first published in 1983, including the Kate Greenaway Medal, the Emil/Kurt Maschler Award, the New York Times Best Illustrated Book and The Boston Globe Book Award. The picturebook tells the story about Hannah who loves gorillas. She wants to go to the zoo to see a real life gorilla, but her dad is always too busy to take her there. Instead Hannah's dad gives her a soft toy gorilla on the night of her birthday, which changes into a real live one during the night. The gorilla puts on her father's hat and takes Hannah out on an adventure. The book is a warm and sensitive story about loneliness, and the need to feel secure and loved. These feelings are emphasized in the pictures by the use of dark colours, shadows and facial expressions, for instance because Hannah's dad never looks directly at her. The non-linear narrative form, the juxtaposition of unrelated images and the surreal illustrations make it a post-modern picturebook.

3.5.2 *Look What I've Got by Anthony Browne*

Look What I've Got is another picturebook by the internationally acclaimed author Anthony Browne. The book, published in 1980, tells the story about Jeremy, who appears to get everything he wants, with the purpose of making Sam jealous. However, Jeremy's efforts fail, because Sam is not concerned with materialistic

pleasures. Sam is content with his life. Surreal illustrations, visual jokes and a rather simple language content complements this lesson in realising that happiness comes from within, and is not defined by what one owns.

3.5.3 The Dark by Lemony Snicket and Jon Klassen

Author Lemony Snicket and illustrator Jon Klassen complement each other's work in this story about a young boy named Laszlo who is afraid of The Dark. The book won the Bccb Blue Ribbon Award in 2013, the same year as it was published. Lemony Snicket personifies and breaks the stereotype of The Dark into something gentle, friendly and wise. The Dark wants to be understood by the little boy Laszlo, because Laszlo have misunderstood him. This he achieves by explaining for example that without the dark, you would never know if you needed a light bulb. The picturebook features a clever combination of light and dark, where the faded colours of the illustrations are put on black paper to emphasize the mood of the story.

3.6 Coding

3.6.1 Transcription

Transcription of the collected data is a time consuming process, and it is important for the researcher to decide what level of detail to include (Mackey and Gass, 2012, p. 206). In the case of this study, the researcher found it unnecessary to include every utterance, as the aim was to measure something very specific; the participant's perception of iconotext and paratext as well as identification of themes. The parts that were excluded from the transcription applied for periods of digressions and nonsense. However, the actual transcription was done in a fairly narrow manner, which means that fine details such as hesitation, laughter and pause length was included. In the planning of transcription several conventions were considered, yet it was hard to find a format suitable for the aims of the research. In this case it seemed most appropriate to adapt a convention rather than adopt one, and the choice fell on VOICE transcriptions (VOICE, 2007). An advantage of having the transcription in a certain format is that it may ease subsequent data analysis. Because focus groups

were the basis for data collection, a vertical format was most suitable, as this implies symmetry and equal dominance of speakers in the transcription (Edwards, 2007). The audio recordings were first transcribed in Norwegian, and later translated into English. Limitations for this are noted in the following sub-chapter.

3.6.2 Analysis

To answer the two first research questions of whether there are variations in how 5th and 10th graders perceive the iconotext and identify themes in picturebooks, the transcription of the data was thoroughly examined. With regard to the first research question, the researcher rated the participants' perception of iconotext by how the participants justified their interpretations with examples from pictures and text. This occurred in two ways:

1. The participants specifically gave examples from the iconotext to justify their interpretation, by pointing precisely to pictures and text.
2. The participants indirectly gave examples from the iconotext to justify their interpretation, by mentioning situations in passing that can only have stemmed from reading both pictures and text.

To interpret the participant's perception of iconotext in relation to themes proved to be complicated on several levels. First and foremost because the iconotext and paratext may have influenced the participants' interpretation of the storyline, yet these interpretations may not have been related to the concluding themes. The results presented in chapter 3 are therefore a selection of examples where iconotext and paratext may have influenced the participants' notion of themes, because the examples bear resemblance to the final themes recognized by the participants. This means that the examples presented have been interpreted by the researcher as relevant to the themes, yet there is no way to know for sure that it is precisely these findings that has made the participants conclude with the specified themes.

3.7 Limitations

The research was carried out in a short period of time, which can be seen as a

limitation to the study. As mentioned in sub-chapter 3.2, the research had limited time resources concerning participating schools, and a research conducted over a longer period of time might have shown more convincing results. Still, as pointed out by Morgan (1988, p. 33), it is possible to complete focus group research in just a few weeks as long as the research serves an explicit purpose, which can be said for the present study. However, the kind of qualitative research that would include more detailed analyses of transcripts and have the possibility to return to the field for more data may require more time. Although each focus group discussion lasted only three hours, to handle data collection from two focus groups each day can be a tiring pace for the researcher. The question of whether the participants perceived the amount of time given to read and discuss the picturebooks as exhausting is also relevant to the limitation. At the same time it was advantageous that the participants had the method and aim fresh in mind, to easily be able to remember what they were going to look for in the picturebooks. Yet it would have been desirable to carry out research over a somewhat longer period of time.

Another limitation with regard to time resources was that the pilot study had to be tested on two of the focus groups. That approximately half of the pupils participated in the pilot study may have caused a greater familiarity with the project. However, as themes are subject to reader's interpretation (Lehr, 1991, p. 36, Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 28), the researcher has reason to believe that the pupils who participated in both the pilot studies and the focus groups did not identify themes differently on the basis of further participation. Yet, they were presumably more confident in both the researcher and the project.

A third limitation regarding the time issue is the use of sound recordings as the only source of data collection. If the research had taken place over a longer period of time, it had been possible to also collect written material from the participants to assemble extensive data collection.

The picturebooks chosen for the research project can also be noted as a limitation. When the final research question aimed to explore whether certain picturebooks could be placed in the crossover genre, there is a great pressure on the books chosen for the study. In a larger research project it would have been possible to use

a wider range of picturebooks. Also the fact that the participants did not receive one copy each of the picturebooks, due to little availability of the books in Norway, can be seen as a limitation. Picturebooks are just as much about visual communication as verbal, and if it was the case that some participants did not have the chance to look properly at the pictures, it may have had influence on the final result.

Something that could threaten the validity of the task was the necessary translation of the transcript from Norwegian to English. To transcribe participant's utterances offer complexities in relation to the choice of words, so as not to ascribe the participants with different opinions or attitudes than intended. However, it must be noted that the researcher cross-checked her own translations with those of a fellow student, in order to avoid the matter mentioned above.

3.8 Ethical concerns

Studies conducted in the field of education require the researcher to consider several ethical concerns. With regard to ethical legitimacy, the inception of this project was to contact the *Norwegian Centre of Research Data* (NSD). After a conversation on the phone, where the researcher explained the project in great detail, it was decided that the study was not subject to notification, as no sensitive information was to be collected, that directly or indirectly could reveal the identity of the participants.

Before the necessary data was collected, the principle of informed consent had to be addressed. Two stages were involved in the matter of seeking informed consent from minors. Firstly, the researcher consulted and requested permission from the adults responsible for the participants, which in this case were the teachers. Secondly, the participants themselves were asked to take part of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 54). The researcher made both teachers and pupils aware of all aspects that the project would entail, before they committed to participating. Also in each of the focus groups the researcher emphasized that the participants had the right to refuse to take part or to withdraw once the research had begun, without questioning (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 52, Neuman, 2007, p. 49). During the sound recorded data collection, the participants were carefully informed not to

use each other's names. However, to ensure that kind of complete anonymity can prove to be difficult, as it can be jeopardised just by one single participant slipping up. Still, it is the responsibility of the researcher to protect every participant from public disclosure, and all sound recordings were stored on a password-protected computer, which only the researcher had access to. All recorded data material was deleted when the research was completed. In order to protect the confidentiality of the contributing pupils, teachers and schools, there is no mentioning of names in this thesis.

4 Results and analysis

This chapter will present the findings relevant to the two first research questions. The results are initially divided by the two first research questions, and further categorized by the picturebooks and the contrasting grades, 5th to 10th. Simultaneously as the introduction of the results, an analysis and comparison of the collected data will be presented. The third research question, related to whether the results add to the notion of picturebooks as crossover literature, will be presented in the discussion chapter.

4.1 Can iconotext add to the reader's perception of themes in picturebooks? How does the perception of iconotext vary between 5th and 10th grade?

4.1.1 *Look What I've Got* by Anthony Browne

Focus group 1, 5th grade

The paratext was discussed before the picturebook was read. The researcher asked the focus group what they thought the book was about on the basis of text and pictures. One of the participants uttered that it was about non-sharing, whereas another participant added that he thought it was about a boy who was spoiled, because it looked like he did not want to share. Another participant added that the same boy on the front cover was stupid, because he was not wearing a helmet while riding a bike. These are three examples of how the paratext, influenced by the iconotext, has given the participants a perception of what the book is about.

The participants generally described the antagonist in the story, Jeremy, as spoiled. The researcher asked why the focus group thought he behaved the way he did. One participant thought Jeremy tried to be cool and popular. Another respondent said it was because Jeremy thought he was very rich. The participant substantiated the statement through an exemplification of how Jeremy got a football as soon as his bike had been destroyed. Jeremy's face expressions were described as proud,

cranky and unyielding. The focus group commented on how bad things seemed to happen Jeremy all the time, whereas one of the participants referred to a picture where Jeremy's face is turning green after eating too many sweets, and said that Jeremy was becoming nauseous. That Jeremy is becoming nauseous is not explicitly stated in the verbal text, and is therefore an example of where the participant has perceived additional information to the story through visual means.

When the researcher asked the focus group for their opinion of the protagonist, Sam, two respondents said that he must have had a better upbringing than Jeremy, as exemplified below. Because Sam only has two lines in the whole book, the impression of Sam is most likely based on the dynamic between Jeremy's verbal lines and Sam's reactions to these, expressed through the pictures.

B5.1: Well, he's got better parents, you can say.

B5.1: Some just get-, some parents just give their children everything they want, like "I want one of those", and then they buy it.

The focus group found all the quirky details in the picturebook particularly amusing, and it almost became a competition of spotting most details. The researcher asked whether some of the details could be a symbol of something, whereas one of the respondents said that it meant that people should be happy with what they have got. She reasoned her answer by saying:

G5.1: Well, here's a heart, and (..) there's a hand holding a door almost like it's agreeing with the world.

Focus group 2, 5th grade

Before the collective reading of the picturebook, the paratext was discussed in the focus group. The researcher asked the focus group to look at the picture and the title, and say what they thought the book was about. One of the participants pointed out that one of the boys in the picture had a package in his hands, and that the other boy was jealous of him. Another participant agreed, and added that the boy with the

package did not want to share with the other boy. The package was by one of the participants described as very realistic, as if it was a real picture within a drawing. A third participant added, similarly to the participant in the first 5th grade focus group, that one of the boys was cycling without a helmet, which made the other boy annoyed.

The focus group described Jeremy as a spoiled kid who probably came from a rich family. When the researcher asked why they thought Jeremy acted the way he did, three of the participants said that it was probably the lack of friends that made him behave like that. This interpretation may have basis in that the book never shows Jeremy with other peers than Sam. Two of the boys in the focus group reflected on how Jeremy's attitude might have been the wrong approach to make friends, as exemplified below:

- B5.2: I think he's trying to make friends the wrong way (1) because he thinks he has to make people jealous for them to be his friends.
- B5.2: Because he just wants to show his friends that "you don't have it". That wasn't a great idea. Then you'll make them jealous, and then they might be sad because they don't have it, and they may become angry.

Two of the participants also commented on how bad things seemed to happen to Jeremy every time he was mean to Sam, and said Jeremy had been exposed to bad karma. The bad things that are happening to Jeremy is a case of where text depends on picture for clarification, seeing as it is never stated in the verbal text that Jeremy falls off his bike, become nauseous or is chased by an angry dog.

The focus group described Sam as kind, even when Jeremy was being mean to him. One participant justified this answer by saying:

- B5.2: He cares less about what he has, and more about being content with himself (2) and helping people.

Related to the statement above, the pupils showed a clear case of interpretation of the iconotext regarding a specific page in the picturebook. The picture on the page is divided in two, where the city is on one side and the woods on the other side. Sam is placed in between the two of them, and the text goes as follows: “Sam walked on, out of the town, towards the woods”. Two of the participants reacted to the page and theorized that Sam probably wanted a peaceful place to be and that he needed a place with more oxygen.

One of the participants also indicated that he had an understanding of authorship, by commenting how the author had tried to bring out the most in a specific picture, as exemplified below. The mentioned picture is on the last page in the book, where Sam is looking into the woods, and where one with a closer look can see several hidden animals. The text says: “But Sam wasn’t listening”. The researcher asked the focus group what they thought the picture and the text expressed, without giving away any hints about the animals. One of the participants answered:

B5.2: He didn’t care much about Jeremy going to the zoo. There are many animals in this picture. He has tried to bring out the most in this picture.

Focus group 1, 10th grade

A topic of discussion before reading the book was the paratext. The researcher asked the group what they thought the book was about in relation to the picture and the title. Two of the participants shared their interpretation of the iconotext. One participant said he thought it was about a snobbish braggart who showed off all the things he owned. Another respondent added that one of the boys in the picture had a supercilious look and did not even bother to look at the other boy.

After reading the picturebook, the participants started discussing it, without waiting for the researcher to ask them questions. One of the focuses was the detail in the illustrations, and two of the participants discussed what the various details could symbolize, as shown in the example below. The example shows how the

respondents have used the additional information provided by the pictures to interpret the symbols and the general storyline.

G10.1: (..) And then you have ears, like “oh, look what I’ve got, look what I’ve got”, and then like “listen to me, listen to me”.

G10.1: And it kind of looks like, in a way, uhm (4) yes, that Sam and Jeremy, they’re holding hands. And I think that means that they used to be friends before they (1) uhm, maybe had a fight.

The researcher asked the focus group what their impression of Jeremy was. One participant said that Jeremy was a fool; another thought he was unsure of himself, while the last respondent said that Jeremy tried hard to impress people. One of the respondents commented that Jeremy did not always have a condescending look; sometimes he just looked scared or miserable. A presumption was made later, implying that Jeremy might have had low self-esteem. This was in conjunction with an illustration of Jeremy lying on the ground, as exemplified by one of the participants below. The example below refer to a participant who showed high comprehension of the text and picture interaction, by forming an interpretation beyond what is expressed in the text.

G10.1: (..) I think maybe, it seems like he has high self-esteem, but you see that he-, when he lies down in a way, when he-, when the police officer crashes and stuff, it goes-, his self-esteem goes down a bit? So then you kind of get to see the real him, that he’s a bit insecure? So that it seems like he’s got a really, like really, really, really high self-esteem, but when he lies down in a way, then you see that he’s actually a confused and very insecure little person.

Another participant also formed an interpretation of Sam and the picturebook in general based on what the pictures in the book expressed. The mentioned

respondent said that she thought all the quirky and surreal details were a part of Sam's imagination. The statement, as shown below, was related to an illustration of a clothesline with a bra with three cups, trousers with real legs sticking out underneath and a superman costume with Clark Kent's glasses.

G10.1: But I kind of think it is Sam's fantasy. Like all of this? How he sees ordinary clothes, when they're hung up and then (..). Then one doesn't really notice that Jeremy (2), was it Jeremy? Yes, that Jeremy has got so many things, because he's busy looking at other things?

As in the second 5th grade focus group, the picture of Sam who walks out of the town and into the woods was also mentioned, this time in connection with his imagination:

G10.1: And here it kind of looks like-, what he walks past is like-, it is the reality, but he imagines it differently (..). That he has got a more positive view than-.

The subject of Sam's fantasy world was also mentioned in relation to the last picture in the book, where Sam is looking into the woods with the following text "But Sam wasn't listening". Particularly one of the respondents in the example shown below, reacted to the page by making an interpretation of how Sam is happy and pensive when he is surrounded by nature.

G10.1: I think, uhm, that last picture (..), this one, when he looks into the woods, that he sees his own world of zoo's and stuff. That he's kind of-, he-, he's happy surrounded by nature and stuff, that it-, it is enough amusement for him in a way.

B10.1: He has fantasy!

G10.1: And Jeremy sort of doesn't (..). He had his own zoo. And I also think it's funny with all those details he has included (3).

Interviewer: Yes?

G10.1: Uhm, well, there's plenty of like, uhm (2) birds and stuff that shows that he-, he thinks a lot.

The researcher asked the focus group what their opinions were on the interplay between verbal and visual communication. One of the participants pointed out an example where the reader is dependent on both forms of communication.

G10.1: Look for instance, here it says, "Jeremy sat down suddenly", but like it doesn't say what happened, that he got sick and all. And then-, and then you don't get the same impression if you haven't read the pictures (..).

Two of the participants managed to emerge themselves into Sam and Jeremy's situation, by transferring the circumstances into their own reality.

G10.1: (..) I recognised myself in there, but in a completely different way. For example, that on social medias you often post something if you get something new, or if you're happy with something then you post it, and then in a way, it is in a way really like (2) a bit of showing off. (..) And that, well I really recognised myself in that.

G10.1: If you think that way, then it is very familiar. Like, one often does that. Or, if you are for instance (3) really the way social medias are and that, you really just show off what you have got that no one else has got. Or what you're doing, that no one else is doing, and it's a bit like that. It can be an awful feeling (1) sometimes, uhm (2) if you don't have what everyone else has got.

Focus group 2, 10th grade

The paratext was a topic for discussion before the book was read, and the researcher asked the focus group what they thought about the front cover and the

title. One of the participants commented that Jeremy had a supercilious look, while Sam was just standing there with his hands in his pockets. Another participant related the front page to the saying “my horse is bigger than yours”. The focus group in general exhibited a great understanding of the iconotext in the paratext, among the other examples, a third respondent theorized that Jeremy was probably more interested in having material things than having good friends, where a different participant uttered that the book was probably about different values.

After the reading of the book, the participants described Jeremy as selfish, but also a lonely, attention-seeking boy with low self-esteem, who thought he had to have a lot of things in order to make friends. Two participants saw Jeremy's desire for attention as a result of lack of affection from his parents, as exemplified below. This interpretation goes beyond the information provided in the picturebook, as Jeremy's parents are never mentioned in the pictures or the text.

G10.1: It seems like he needs a lot of attention, that it's sort of his goal.

G10.1: Yes, he buys many things, but the others never really look at him.

Interviewer: Who are the others?

G10.1: Yeah, like his parents don't care much about him, and then he gets- (2). Then he wants other people to look at him and such. That he has sort of a need of attention.

One of the participants defined the protagonist Sam as a sympathetic boy. Another respondent commented on how Sam does not really care that Jeremy is treating him badly, and characterized Sam as brave and mature. The relationship between Sam and Jeremy was described by one participant as a power struggle, and exemplified with a picture where Jeremy has just fallen off his bike and Sam is standing over him:

G10.1: But uhm, it's sort of a power struggle, that Jeremy wants to seem higher up than Sam, but for instance here, he's lying on the ground, and then it's like-, it can like

symbolize that it's Sam who has the power. That it's he who has got the good moral, and yeah.

The peculiar details in the illustrations were a subject of discussion, whereas one of the participants interpreted some of the details as a symbol freedom:

G10.1: Uhm, I think that here-, you see many symbols of how he is as person in a way, because there are many birds, and birds can often symbolize freedom in a way? And the same goes for that peace sign, and the heart there, and a small smiling figure (..).

Comparison

The paratext was discussed first in all four focus groups, and the variations were moderately large in terms of the focal point of each group. Focus group 5.1. interpreted Jeremy as a spoiled boy, saying that it looked like he did not want to share. Similarly, focus group 10.1. interpreted the front cover as a story about a spoiled and snobbish braggart who was showing off, with a supercilious look on his face and ignorance towards the other boy in the picture. Focus group 5.2. had a different approach, and depicted Sam as someone who was jealous of Jeremy's package. Both the 5th grade focus groups reacted to the fact that Jeremy was biking without a helmet; an observation that was not made by the 10th graders. The fact that the 5th grade focus groups were concerned about this particular observation might have basis in the bike training that is conducted at primary level in Norwegian schools. Similar to the other 10th grade focus group, focus group 10.2. mentioned the supercilious look on Jeremy's face, but made a more nuanced interpretation of Jeremy by saying that he seemed to be more interested in material things than having friends. In addition, one of the participants in focus group 10.2. suggested that the picturebook perhaps dealt with different values. A respondent in focus group 5.1. was the only one to notice the hidden photograph within the drawn pictures on the front page; namely the package that Jeremy was holding.

After the reading of the picturebook, all focus groups elaborated further on their interpretation of the paratext. Focus group 5.2. was still the only group that understood Sam as jealous of how Jeremy constantly received new material things, yet the interpretation was modified into a failed attempt from Jeremy's side to make friends. This was reasoned by how bad things seemed to happen to Jeremy all the time, perhaps because of bad karma. Jealousy and karma were however pointed out as themes by the present focus group, and it can therefore be noted that in this case, the paratext and the iconotext contributed to perception of themes in the picturebook.

Although focus group 5.2. understood Sam as jealous of Jeremy, they also pointed out how Sam seemed to care less about things, and more about being content with himself and help others. Sam walking out of the city and into the woods to find peace and fresh oxygen exemplified this. Similarly, focus group 10.1. theorized that Sam was happy surrounded by nature, and that the woods were enough amusement for him. An example provided was the last picture in the book, where one with a closer look can see animals in the background, and how Sam imagined his own zoo. In relation, focus group 10.1 understood the quirky details in the picturebook, such as the three-cupped bra and the Clark Kent costume hanging on a clothesline, as part of Sam's imagination. Accordingly, fantasy was specified as a theme by focus group 10.1., and these examples from the discussion justify to a high degree an influence from the iconotext. On the topic of details in the picturebook, a specific symbol in the picturebook was interpreted differently by the two 10th grade focus groups. While focus group 10.2. understood the symbol of birds as a token of freedom, focus group 10.1. interpreted the birds as a symbol pertaining to thought, showing a variation in interpretation between the two groups.

The character Jeremy was in all focus groups described as a spoiled person, yet the two 10th grade focus groups made a deeper analysis of the character by suggesting that he may act in the particular manner because he is insecure and has low self-esteem. Focus group 10.2. suggested the theory in relation to a question of why they thought Jeremy behaved like he did, while focus group 10.1. exemplified it by referring to a picture of Jeremy lying on the ground after a crash, saying that he looked like a confused and insecure little boy. The same picture was discussed by focus group 10.2, and seen as a power struggle between the good and the bad,

showing a variation in the two 10th grade levels' focal point of the picture. Focus group 10.2. saw Jeremy's behaviour as a cry for attention, perhaps based on lack of affection from his parents. This was exemplified on the basis of how Jeremy constantly got new things, yet no one really looked at him or seemed to care about him. In like manner, focus group 5.1. theorized that Sam may have had a better upbringing than Jeremy, where material things were not the main focus, showing a slight correlation in interpretation between the two age levels. Both of the present focus groups also suggested themes that can be seen in context with these interpretations. Focus group 10.2. proposed themes such as "different values", "need for attention" and "need to impress", while focus group 5.1. suggested themes, albeit on the border to morality, "if you have money but no friends, you have nothing" and "things does not mean happiness". It can therefore be noted that the iconotext in this case have contributed specifically to the perception of the themes in the picturebook.

The co-dependency of text and pictures in the current picturebook was pointed out by focus group 10.1., where Jeremy becomes nauseous after eating too many sweets, only comprehensible by noticing the green colour of his face. The situation was also recognised by focus group 5.1., but was mentioned in relation the bad things that constantly happened to Jeremy. These are still examples of where two focus groups have perceived the same situation, albeit at different levels.

4.1.2 *The Dark*

Focus group 1, 5th grade

During the discussion of *The Dark*, the researcher found it slightly difficult to get the focus group to justify their answers in accordance with their interpretation. All respondents showed an awareness of what the story was about, how the protagonist felt and the essence of the story, yet the question of "why" the participants had come to that conclusion was modestly supported. The paratext was discussed in the group before the collective reading of the book. The researcher asked what the group thought the book was about, where one of the respondents pointed out the dark basement in the picture. Another participant added that the picturebook was probably

about a boy that was scared of going down to the basement, showing that the participant responded to the iconotext.

The focus group described the protagonist Laszlo as scared of the dark. One of the respondents thought Laszlo was brave because he seemed to be living alone in a big house, as there were no other people mentioned in the text or seen in the illustrations. The iconotext have therefore in this case contributed to the perception of Laszlo as a person. The picturebook said that The Dark sometimes hid in the cupboard and also sometimes behind the shower curtain, where one of the participants explained how some things are scarier once it's dark, as exemplified below. The participant showed in this case the ability to connect the book to real life events.

B5.1: The dark is still the same (3). If you're watching TV, then there's light in the background. But when it's dark, then the TV is the same, but you can't see as much. Like when you go to bed in your room, you see all your things, but when you're going to sleep and the light is turned off, then you see only some of the things.

The researcher asked the focus group whether it was possible to read the specific picturebook with only text or only with images. One of the participants referred to a page in the picturebook where The Dark tells Laszlo to open the bottom drawer, and Laszlo opens it and says "thank you", whereas the participant said that he wouldn't have understood what Laszlo thanked for if it had not been for the illustration. In this case, the participant shows a high degree of comprehension of the iconotext.

One of the participants was also able to connect a page in the picturebook, where the Dark explains why we need darkness, to something she had read before:

G5.1: I'm reading one of those girl magazines, and there were two girls, and one of them said: "The stars cannot shine without darkness".

The researcher asked the participant to elaborate on what she thought that meant:

G5.1: That there is a meaning with it. Or with that one, in that context I understood (1) that nothing could be good without something being bad. Like, here it says “without the darkness, the light can not be” or something like that.

The example above was mentioned again with regard to themes, where the participant suggested that “nothing can be good without something being bad” as a theme. Although the proposal is more on the line of morality than themes, it still shows that the participant had an understanding of the story and was able to connect the pictures and the text in *The Dark* to something she had read before. The other theme suggested by the focus group, although on the border to morality, “don’t be afraid, others are also afraid”, did not have a strong link to any of the examples from the iconotext.

Focus group 2, 5th grade

Also in the second focus group the researcher experienced that it was problematic to receive support for the participants’ interpretation of the picturebook, in a higher degree than with the first focus group at the same level. While discussing the paratext, one of the respondents suggested that Laszlo might have woken up in the middle of the night because of a sound from the basement, and that he became afraid because it was dark. The participant exhibited in this case a high degree of iconotext comprehension.

The participants’ general impression of Laszlo was that he was scared of the dark. When the researcher asked what they thought of Laszlo as a person, one respondent said that Laszlo was alone and lonely, as it was just him and The Dark. Two of the participants shared their concern about Laszlo being alone in the big house, and also said he was brave to go down in the basement by himself. The participants have in this case noticed that he is alone in all pictures, and their impression of Laszlo is therefore coloured by the iconotext. The theme of bravery was suggested by the

focus group later on in the discussion, and consequently the iconotext have added to the perception of themes in the picturebook.

The researcher asked the focus group whether it was possible to read the specific picturebook with only text or only with images. One respondent said that it could prove to be difficult, because you could get a different perspective on the story, as exemplified below.

B5.2: It might be difficult without the pictures. When Laszlo is sitting in the windowsill you might think he's just looking at the sunset. You don't know that something had happened.

None of the participants in the present focus group specifically pointed out the interaction between pictures and text when Laszlo received the light bulb from The Dark, yet one participant mentioned the situation in relation to his impression of The Dark, as shown below. The participant has in this case formed an interpretation on the basis of the iconotext.

B5.2: He probably wanted to die. I think so, because he gave Laszlo the light. He should have taken the light from him instead so that he would get used to it. That's why The Dark lives.

Focus group 1, 10th grade

During the discussion of the paratext, one of the respondents suggested that Laszlo was afraid of the dark or scared of everything that is in the dark. Another participant uttered that the title *The Dark* had a negative connotation, because "dark" was emphasised with "the" in front. All participants characterized Laszlo as brave or confident, because every night he sought out to the dark and tried to conquer his fear. As a response to this, one of the participants commented on Laszlo's choice of room in the house, as exemplified below. This information is only revealed through pictures in the book. The matter of overcoming fear was one of the themes

suggested by the focus group, and might have basis in the interplay between picture and text in the picturebook.

G10.1: (...) I noticed that it looks like he's at the loft, and that can represent that he doesn't like the basement so much, and that he wants to stay away from it.

One of the respondents explained fear of darkness on the basis of "the unknown". That although things are the same whether it is light or dark, it is the fact that one can no longer see that makes it scary. She reasoned her answer by pointing out how The Dark may have at first represented all the scary things that children are afraid of in the dark, but then in the end he proved to be helpful with respect to finding the light bulb. The two other participants also defined the Dark in the story as scary at first, but in the end helpful. Three of the themes identified by the present focus group can be linked back to this perception of the iconotext, namely the themes of "prejudice", "unknown can change to the known" and "scary things can be useful".

One of the participants noticed the interaction between image and text, in which the reader only by looking at the picture can see that The Dark gives Laszlo a light bulb, as shown below. Although on the border of morality, "scary things can be useful", was one of the themes suggested by the focus group. Because The Dark helps Laszlo to find the light bulb, the notion of theme may have been influenced by the iconotext on this particular page. As well as noticing the iconotext, the participant also commented on how the picture and the text collaborates to make meaning.

B10.1: Uh yeah, something I noticed.. I never saw that there was a light bulb in that drawer. So without uhm (2) the pictures to the text it wouldn't make as much sense.

Another participant followed the previous utterance by commenting on the collaboration between the author and the illustrator, and thus exhibited critical thought concerning the making of the picturebook:

G10.1: But since there are also different people who have written it, they have cooperated very well, and then they could make it work. I think uh, how they have drawn the pictures as dark and light and where the sun shines compared to where the dark is, and where the distinction is, like it shows a lot. (..) That you see it very well when he's going down the stairs, that it's all dark when you go down, that you understand it much better, and then when everything is light except from one place (..), when his room is the only place that is light, and everything is dark around him, that you make your point very well by, by showing it that way.

Focus group 2, 10th grade

With the second focus group in the tenth grade the researcher found it enormously difficult to get the participants to justify their answers in accordance with their interpretation. The paratext was briefly discussed before the collective reading of the book, where one of the participants suggested that the book might be about someone who was afraid of the dark. Another respondent uttered that the colour were darker than in the first book, but that they seemed appropriate in relation to the title. The participant have in this case reflected on the relationship between text and picture in the paratext, and found a correspondence between the two elements.

The general impression of Laszlo was that he was afraid of the dark, but also that he liked to explore things and had a great imagination. One of the participants justified this by pointing out how Laszlo went down to the basement to seek out the dark, something that is only revealed through pictures. This shows that the participant have responded to the interaction between text and pictures. The dark was defined by one participant as creepy in the beginning of the book, especially because of the way he asked Laszlo to follow him down to the basement, but less scary in the end. One of the themes that were identified by the present focus group was "things are not as scary the second time you encounter it", which may have its basis in this particular impression of The Dark.

The researcher asked the focus group how the interplay between picture and text functioned in the specific picturebook, whereas one participant answered:

G10.2: When he walked around the house and used the flashlight to illuminate different things (2) you wouldn't understand that it was the dark that asked him to "come here", and said like "not there, not there, it's down here".

Another respondent focused on the contrast between the dark colours and Laszlo in the picturebook, as exemplified below. The participant's impression of Laszlo has in this case been emphasised by the iconotext.

G10.2: Yes, well, like when he walks down to the basement (2) you get it, but when you see how big the dark is, you realise how little Laszlo looks.

Other themes that were identified by the focus group were "overcome fear" and "don't let the fear take over you life", which in this case did not seem to have a strong link to examples from the iconotext.

Comparison

In three of the four focus groups, the researcher found it problematic to receive support for the participant's interpretation of the book. This means that the mentioned focus groups had the ability to interpret the general storyline and the themes, yet the question of "why" they had come to the specific conclusions were not often justified. This may have basis in the fact that *The Dark* is a slightly more straightforward picturebook than *Look What I've Got*, meaning that little extra information can be read from the pictures.

The protagonist Laszlo was described as brave by three of the four focus groups. Focus group 5.1. characterised Laszlo as brave because he lived alone, which is information provided through an interpretation of the text. Similarly, focus group 5.2. pointed out how Laszlo was lonely and alone in a big house, and that he was brave

to dare to go down in the basement. The present focus group was also the only group to suggest “bravery” as a theme to the book. In a like manner, focus group 10.1. described Laszlo as brave, because he sought out to The Dark and tried to conquer his fear. The theme of “overcoming fear” was suggested in both 10th grade focus groups. The interpretation of Laszlo had in a high degree basis in the iconotext, as there is no mentioning in the verbal text of Laszlo’s living situation, bravery or the fact that he goes down to the basement.

The co-dependency between pictures and text in the picturebook becomes highly visible when Laszlo receives a light bulb from The Dark in the pictures, yet there is no mentioning in the text. Laszlo do however say “thank you”, which means that if the pictures had not been included, the reader would not know what he thanked for. Three out of four focus groups responded to the situation. A participant in focus group 5.1. explained that since the text only says “open the bottom drawer” and then “thank you”, the situation would not have been clear if it had not been for the pictures, where the reader can see that Laszlo finds a light bulb in the bottom drawer. Similarly, a participant in focus group 10.1. stated that without the pictures, the story would not make sense. Focus group 10.1. also suggested “scary things can be useful” as a theme in the picturebook, which may be linked to the fact that The Dark helped Laszlo find the light bulb. Focus group 5.2. had a slight different approach, suggesting that The Dark perhaps wanted to die, seeing as he gave Laszlo the light bulb. The first two focus groups had a more critical perspective on the light bulb’s role in the story, with regard to the co-dependency between pictures and text, while the latter focus group had an interpretation of The Dark’s intentions, on the basis of the iconotext. In the discussion of focus group 10.2., the subject of the light bulb was never mentioned in either of the contexts. The researcher did ask them specifically how the text and the pictures worked together, whereas one of the participants replied that because The Dark seemed so big, it made Laszlo seem even smaller, which shows that her impression of Laszlo had been influenced by the pictures in the book. Focus group 10.1 was the only one to comment on the collaboration between the author and the illustrator, exhibiting high critical thought as readers.

Two of the focus groups had a similar interpretation of The Dark as a concept. Focus group 5.1. pointed this out by explaining how material things are exactly the same

things when it gets dark, it is merely the fact that you are not able to see that much that makes it scary. Similarly, focus group 10.1. made it clear how the dark really is the same as the light, yet the dark is the unknown and seems scarier because your vision is restricted. Some of the themes that were brought up by focus group 10.1 in relation to these interpretations were “prejudice” and “unknown can change to the known”, while focus group 5.1. did not have any themes strongly linked to this interpretation.

In summary, the focus group’s interpretation of iconotext and paratext in *The Dark* were more similar than in *Look What I’ve Got*. Particularly group 5.1. and 10.1. identified and interpreted many of the same elements in an alike manner.

4.1.3 Gorilla

Group 1, 5th grade

The paratext was discussed before the collective reading of the book. The researcher asked the participants what they thought the book was about, and all of the participants joined in the discussion. One of them thought the book was about a girl, seeing as there was a girl on the front cover. Another respondent said that he thought it was about a gorilla and a girl who were best friends, whereas another participant added that it looked like they were hanging out, despite the differences in size. One of the themes suggested by the focus group was “friendship”, which may have its basis as early on as in the paratext. These are all interpretations influenced by the iconotext.

The number of gorillas or gorilla items in the pictures seemed to particularly intrigue focus group 1 in the 5th grade, as it almost became an internal competition about spotting the most gorillas. The respondents described Hannah as a girl who loved gorillas, by reasoning of all the gorilla objects in their family home and that she even had cereal in shape of gorillas for breakfast. One respondent said that Hannah seemed like a girl who got what she wanted. Two themes identified by the focus group were “greediness” and “be happy with what you have”, referring to how

Hannah had so many gorilla things, but still wanted more. Another participant uttered that Hannah was sad because her father was working too much and did not have time to take her to the zoo. The participants characterized Hannah's father as someone who looked sad, annoyed and firm. One respondent also added that the illustrations were fun and colourful, except in the beginning when the father was working a lot. The iconotext have in this case influenced their general impression of the storyline, albeit there is no strong link to any of the themes suggested by the group.

One respondent expressed that she found it sad how Hannah's father would not cuddle her, which is not explicitly suggested in the text. She continued by giving her opinion on one of the pictures where Hannah is watching TV on the floor as exemplified below, showing a high comprehension of visual literacy.

G5.1: What I liked about this one is that it's a bit lighter, only a bit of light from the TV. So she felt that there was something around her at least.

The participants were asked what they thought of the family home, and one respondent answered that it looked dark and that darkness symbolized sadness. One respondent described Hannah's state of mind in the end of the book, by reflecting on the additional information given by the iconotext:

G5.1: She's happier, because her dad is no longer dressed in those dark colours, and it looks like she has painted a picture for the wall.

Group 2, 5th grade:

A review of the paratext was central in the beginning of the focus group discussion. The researcher asked the participants to share their general impression of the paratext, whereas one respondent said that he thought Hannah had gone to the zoo and met a wild Gorilla, but after they got to know each other they became friends. Another participant said she thought Hannah had gone out in the middle of the night,

where she encountered the gorilla and went on an adventure with him. A third respondent shared his theory about the storyline by saying that he thought Hannah was sad and had snuck out in the night, where some thieves had chased her and the gorilla had come to her rescue, and after that the two of them had become friends. The fourth participant suggested that Hannah did not have many friends, causing her to go out in the night and play with the gorilla. The latter response may be linked to the theme of “loneliness” that was identified by the focus group. While discussing the paratext, it was clear that all participants had interpreted the iconotext and thus created a perception of the general storyline based on the information on the front cover.

After the reading of the picturebook, the second focus group in the 5th grade centralized the father in the story. All respondents characterized him as someone who worked too much and was more concerned with his job than his daughter, yet two participants also described the father as kind. This was justified through an observation made by one of the respondents, namely that the reader never gets to see the father's face. Two of the themes identified by the focus group may be linked to these interpretations, namely the ones of “don't just think of yourself” and “be with your children and don't always think of work”. One participant said that he thought the father worked as much as he did in order to make enough money to spend more time with Hannah. He continued by pointing out how the father had bought Hannah a gorilla and a cake for her party, and put forward the theory that perhaps Hannah's father had saved money for just this occasion. That the father gave Hannah a gorilla is mentioned in the verbal text, but the making of the cake however, is only mentioned through visual means, which means that the participant have utilized both the visual and verbal elements to interpret the story.

Another respondent also mentioned the father's workload, in relation to their modestly furnished house, which is only exposed through the pictures:

B5.2: Here's the TV and there is light. Not much light, they didn't have a lot of stuff. Maybe that's why the father had to work all the time, they couldn't afford things like that.

The researcher asked what the focus group thought about the last picture in the book, where Hannah reads her birthday card with her father standing behind with his hands around her. One respondent said that the father was probably thinking about finally being able to take time off and give his daughter the best birthday. Another participant pointed out that the father had a banana in his back pocket. The research followed up this response by asking what the participants thought that could be a symbol of. One respondent suggested that he had planted the gorilla in their home, while another participant said that the father had dressed up as the gorilla.

Group 1, 10th grade:

The paratext was discussed briefly before the collective reading of the book, yet without any suggestions of what the book was about. After the reading of the book, the researcher asked the focus group what impression they had of Hannah, and what it was based on. A general impression was that Hannah felt lonely. One pupil reasoned his answer by referring to a picture where Hannah is sitting on the floor watching TV, and the only light in the room comes from the TV, as exemplified below:

B10.1: Just that she desperately tries to get in touch with her father (2) and then uhm (2) yeah, that she's alone, watching TV in that picture. And then (1) and that it was only a small part of the room that was lit up. And just around her.

The researcher asked a follow up question related to the previous example of the transcript, by asking what the participants thought of Hannah's family home in the present picture. One participant mentioned that it seemed sparingly furnished, while another pointed how the contrasts between light and dark could represent two different points of view or two different worlds, without explaining it further. One participant also added that the specific picture was different from the other pictures in the book as it exhibited Hannah's isolation. A theme suggested by the focus group was "loneliness", and have in this case been highly influenced by the iconotext.

The participant's general first impression of Hannah's father was that he was very preoccupied with his job. The researcher asked the participants to elaborate on why they absorbed this response, as shown below. The examples demonstrate an immense comprehension of the iconotext within the group, as their interpretation is largely based on the interplay between text and picture.

- G10.1: She does tell us in a way, that he never has time for her, and he's working all the time according to her. And then you also notice that he isn't really present. He's never with her, and most often you see him by a desk or something.
- B10.1: But also if you (2) also, also (1) when you see him (1) then (1) he almost always look miserable. Like he doesn't want to be talked to. Or doesn't want to talk to anyone.
- G10.1: Since our first impression, when we see him, when they're eating breakfast, then -.
- B10.1: He let's the paper come between them.
- B10.1: (..) But then also on the next page (2) then (1) uh, you see that there's a chair between them.
- G10.1: Yes, she's like trying to make contact, but he doesn't want to @.
- B10.1: No, he (2). That he just ignores her completely. Not interested in being with her.
- G10.1: And then, and the colours change here (2). You can see her in the light, but everything else is dark and such. It kind of seems like she is alone, only that she is born into that bubble.

One of the participants uttered that the gorilla could represent the father figure Hannah wanted; as the pictures show that the gorilla puts on her father's hat. A theme identified by the focus group was "better relationship with parents", which may be linked to this scenario. When the gorilla takes Hannah on an adventure in the middle of the night, the two of them visit a zoo, and a picture of a captivated chimpanzee is presented with the text: "She thought they were beautiful. But sad." Two of the participants discussed that there seemed to be more details on the

chimpanzee than on the gorilla. One respondent said that the picture almost emphasized that the chimpanzee was unhappy. Another participant added that it might have reflected Hannah's feelings, but that the adventure with the gorilla had done something to her. The theme of "hopes and dreams of better times" might be applicable to this situation.

Group 2, 10th grade

During the discussion of the paratext, one participant suggested that the book was about two friends, a gorilla and a girl, because they were looking at each other. Another participant added that the book might be about bonding, which was later suggested as one of the themes of the book.

The second focus group's general first impression of the father in *Gorilla* was that he worked a lot. One participant said that it seemed like Hannah's father did not pay too much attention to his daughter. Two respondents saw it as a possibility that the father was a single parent, and that he did his best to provide for him and his daughter, and that it was a sign of caring that he worked that much. It was also commented that he looked very formal. The themes of "other things are important than just work" and "have time for your children" may be linked to these observations. When the researcher asked about the relationship between Hannah and her father, one participant commented on how there is rarely eye contact between the two of them. Another respondent said that because the father is constantly busy, there is little time for Hannah and her father to bond. As mentioned previously, the matter of "bonding" was one of the themes identified by the focus group.

Two of the participants pondered on whether humans were turned into gorillas in Hannah's dream. This was justified by reason of a gorilla dressed as Charlie Chaplin in the dream; in other words a human turned into a gorilla. Two respondents put this in context with the father, and believed that the gorilla recreated the father Hannah wanted, as shown below. Their interpretation is in this case influenced by the iconotext, and may also be linked to the theme of "role models" that was suggested by the focus group.

G10.2: It seems like she is dreaming, and that the gorilla is the way her father (3). The way she wishes her father could be in a way. In dreams things are often not that good? So when he puts on the hat, it can be a symbol that it is her dad in her dream? And the next day he has a banana in his pocket.

G10.2: Yes, and the gorilla also says “see you tomorrow”.

Two participants in the focus group gave extra attention to the use of colour in connection with Hannah’s father, and how they changed throughout the book. This observation shows a high comprehension of the iconotext:

G10.2: (..) you can also see on the pictures in the beginning of the book, that they’re pretty – (2), not dismal, but plain. And then in the end, like, or, like in that one, he’s also in colours, and not just her.

G10.2: (..) The colours are pretty strong when the girl is in the picture, and in that way it is a colourful book, but the father’s colours are more plain than hers, and he’s also dressed in similar (1), he matches the background of the picture and such.

Comparison

One group differed from the other three groups with regard to the focus of discussion. Focus group 5.1. mainly described Hannah as greedy because she had all kinds of gorilla items, but still wanted more. That Hannah was greedy was never mentioned in the other focus groups. On the contrary, the focal point was either Hannah’s lack of attention from her father, or the fact that her father worked all the time. The relationship between Hannah and her father was described similarly in the groups. Focus group 5.2. stated that Hannah’s father was more concerned with work than with her, and pointed out that the father’s face is never fully revealed in the picturebook. Similarly, focus group 10.1. commented how there was always something in between Hannah and her father, such as a newspaper and a chair. In a

like manner, focus group 10.2. pointed out that there was never any eye contact between Hannah and her father. The iconotext have in this case influenced the participant's interpretation of the relationship between the two protagonists in a high degree. Additionally, the themes between the three mentioned groups had similarities, such as "be with your children and don't always think of yourself", "better relationship with parents" and "have time for your children", and it is clear that the iconotext have had an influence on these themes.

The father in the picturebook was the focal point of focus groups 5.2., 10.1. and 10.2., yet also commented on by focus group 5.1. Both focus group 5.1. and 10.2. commented on the use of colours in the representation of the father. Focus group 5.1. pointed out that the illustrations were fun and colourful, except in the beginning when the father was working a lot. Similarly, focus group 10.2. reacted to how the colours of the father changed throughout the book, from plain and insignificant to colourful. The use of colours in the picturebook have in this case influenced the general impression of the father. On the subject of why the father was working a lot, focus group 5.2. suggested that he might have been working hard in order to make money to spend on Hannah. Focus group 10.2. had a similar approach, implying that the father was the main provider of the family and that his hard work was a sign of devotion. Additionally, it was mentioned by focus group 5.2. that their family home was dark because they could not afford to have light in all rooms. The cause of the father's hard work is never mentioned in the text, and these interpretations are thus based on the knowingness that the father works a lot, along with the additional information that the pictures offer. The family home in the picturebook was a subject for discussion in all the focus groups. Focus group 5.1. described the home as dark, and pointed out a specific picture where Hannah is sitting in the dark and the only light in the room comes from the TV, saying that the dark symbolized sadness, but also that the TV made Hannah feel that she at least had something around her. Focus group 10.1. also focused on the contrasts between light and dark in the specific picture, suggesting that it emphasized Hannah's isolation. Similarly, focus group 5.2. pointed out that there were not much furniture in the picture, and that the only light in the room came from the TV. The light on the TV was also mentioned by focus group 10.2., saying that it was the only source of light and that it contributed to a dismal mood.

The gorilla was also mentioned in relation to Hannah's father in the focus group discussions. Focus group 5.2. pointed out that the father was carrying a banana in his pocket on the last photo in the picturebook, which could mean that the father had either planted the gorilla in the house or dressed up the gorilla. Focus group 10.1. had a different approach, suggesting that the gorilla could represent the father Hannah wanted, as the gorilla put on her father's hat in the picture. Similarly, focus group 10.2 thought that the gorilla might have recreated the father figure that Hannah longed for, as he put on the hat, had a banana in his pocket, and also because the gorilla said "see you tomorrow" and the only person Hannah sees the next day is her father. These are all interpretations based on the iconotext, and some of these observations may have affected the perception of themes, such as "role models", "bonding" and "better relationships with parents".

In summary, three of the focus groups had several similarities when it comes to perception of the general storyline, yet the 10th grade level had essentially a more multi-layered understanding of the iconotext, by being able to interpret the symbols, colours and representations of the characters further. The iconotext have in a high degree influenced the participant's perception of themes in the picturebook, and only a slight variation in formulation is to be found between the two age levels.

4.2 How does the identification of themes in picturebooks vary between 5th and 10th grade?

The main goal of the following sub-chapter is to present and analyse the results of research question two, which evolves around the variation of identification of themes between the two year levels. The researcher collected the answers to the research question by asking the participants what themes they recognised in the various picturebooks. The focus group's identification of themes did prove to be somewhat more challenging than anticipated, due to the thin line between morals and themes in literature. Despite the fact that the researcher explicitly explained the difference between morals and themes, it is apparent that the participants in this research has in some cases perceived the moral of the story, yet found it difficult to label the book

with one or more themes. Whether these results could have been different with a more comprehensive instruction of themes and moral in literature can be speculated. The researcher has still decided to include the themes that are more in line with morals, on the basis of that it is the participants themselves who have been unaware of the differences between the two elements, which means that these are the themes suggested by the participants. Additionally, it is still possible to compare the differences between themes/morals, and to take that into account when one investigates whether picturebooks can be defined as crossover literature. The various books will divide the following sections, where the themes for each focus group will be presented, compared and analysed.

4.2.1 Look What I've Got

With regard to the theme vs. moral issue, there were two focus groups that stood out in the discussion of the present picturebook. Focus group 5.2. and 10.2., in contrast to the other two groups, identified themes only, which means that they did not suggest any morals, as shown in the tables below. Focus group 5.1. and 10.1. have on the contrary almost exclusively perceived the moral in the picturebook as themes. Accordingly, the themes and morals identified in the tables below illustrate diversity between all focus groups. The focal point of focus group 5.1. was related to materialism, exemplified by “things doesn't mean happiness” and “if you have money but no friends you have nothing”. Similarly, one of the themes identified by focus group 10.1. was “money's not the most important”. Although these themes can be linked to the theme “different values”, which was suggested by focus group 10.2., there is a clear distinction in formulation, as well as a recognizable division in meaning, as “values” can be interpreted in numerous ways.

All focus groups have essentially identified contrasting themes in the picturebook, which is evident in the tables below. Some of the themes can be related to each other, such as “if you brag you won't make friends” and “need to impress”, yet because the latter theme is more general it would be conflictive to suggest that these themes are identical. The same can be said about the themes of “you are supposed to share” and “greed”, which were identified in the 5th grade focus groups. The great

variation in the groups substantiates the theory that all readers perceive and recognize different themes while reading literature.

Focus group 5.1	Focus group 5.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you have money but no friends you have nothing - Things doesn't mean happiness - Having things doesn't mean you are better at doing everything - You are supposed to share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Karma - Jealousy - Greed

Table 1: Look What I've Got 5th grade

Focus group 10.1	Focus group 10.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differences in kids - Children can be nasty towards each other - Douchebags will be ignored - Money's not the most important - Fantasy - If you brag you won't make friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different values - Need for attention - Loneliness - Need to impress

Table 2: Look What I've Got 10th grade

4.2.2 *The Dark*

Some variations were found between the different year levels with regard to identification of themes, as exemplified in table 3 and 4 below. The two 5th grade focus groups have suggested “don't be afraid” and “don't be afraid of the dark” as themes, although they can be classified as morals. These differs from the 10th grade themes of “overcome fear” in terms of the moral vs. theme difference, but also in

formulation which may be due to age and vocabulary contrasts. The theme of “prejudice” recognised by focus group 10.1. can be related to the theme “things are not as scary the second time you encounter it”, identified by focus group 10.2, showing a slight similarity between the two groups. Although there are no groundbreaking differences related to the identification of themes between all the focus groups, as many of the themes/morals can be linked to each other, there is still a distinct difference in formulation of the themes, which means that albeit the 5th graders are able to identify the dominant theme or idea in the picturebook, the 10th graders might have a stronger ability to clarify the specific themes.

Focus group 5.1	Focus group 5.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't be afraid - Others are also afraid - Nothing can be good without something being bad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't be afraid of the dark - Bravery

Table 3: The Dark 5th grade

Focus group 10.1	Focus group 10.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcome fear - Unknown can change to the known - Prejudice - Scary things can be useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcome fear - Don't let the fear take over your life - Things are not as scary the second time you encounter it

Table 4: The Dark 10th grade

4.2.3 *Gorilla by Anthony Browne*

The themes discovered in *Gorilla* by the focus groups differed to some extent. Compared to the other three focus groups, the greatest difference is apparent in focus group 1 in the 5th grade, as shown in table 5 and 6 below. What distinguishes this group from the others is the interpretation of Hannah as greedy and ungrateful for everything she had in her life. The three remaining groups had either a focus on that the father should have more time for Hannah, that the two of them should bond, or that Hannah was lonely. Still, focus group 5.1. is the only group who mentions

“friendship” as a theme, which can absolutely be seen as an important theme in the book. Some similarities can be found in the formulation of theme between focus group 5.2. and 10.2., where group 5.2. suggests “be with your children and don’t always think of work” as a theme, while focus group 10.2. have a more general perspective in their notion, suggesting “other things are important than just work”. These are however both morals, and not themes, yet it substantiates their perception of the picturebook as a whole. Focus group 5.2. and 10.2. both mention “loneliness” as a theme, which can be seen as one of the main themes in the picturebook. Few similarities are seen between the two 10th grade focus groups, except for the themes of “have time for your children” and “better relationship with parents”, which can carry some of the same meaning. Between the two 5th grade focus groups there are no similarities, which means that the two groups have perceived the book completely different, despite being in the same year level and in the same class.

Focus group 5.1	Focus group 5.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greediness - Be happy with what you have - You get what you want on your birthday - Friendship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don’t just think of yourself (Father) - Loneliness - Be with your children and don’t always think of work

Table 5: Gorilla 5th grade

Focus group 10.1	Focus group 10.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loneliness - Hopes and dreams of better times - Fantasy - Better relationship with parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bond - Have time for your children - Other things are important than just work - Role models

Table 6: Gorilla 10th grade

Comparison

All focus groups showed the ability to identify themes in picturebooks, despite the additional suggestions of morals. However, some variations were seen between the identified themes. These differences became particularly apparent in *Gorilla* between focus group 5.1. and the other groups. While focus group 5.1. suggested themes such as “greediness”, “be happy with what you have” (from Hannah’s perspective), and “you get what you want on your birthday”, the other groups identified themes exemplified by “loneliness”, “have time for your children” and “hopes and dreams of better times”. Apart from the present example, all focus groups had a high perception of the dominant themes in the picturebooks. Although some of the themes differ in formulation, they might have a similar connotation. This can be exemplified with the suggested themes (and morals) in *Look What I’ve Got*: “different values”, “money’s not the most important” and “greed”. Focus group 5.2. and 10.2. were the only groups to identify themes exclusively in relation to the themes in *Look What I’ve Got*, whereas the two other groups suggested morals as well. However, this was not a general situation, as both of the groups suggested morals as themes in the other picturebooks.

The present chapter has presented the results obtained in the present research project. The following chapter will discuss these results based on the theory presented in chapter two, as well as the aims and research question guiding the present thesis.

5 Discussion

In the following chapter, theory and findings will be discussed to shed some light on the research questions. The present master thesis had three main purposes. Firstly, to investigate whether the iconotext and paratext had an impact on the participants' perception of themes in picturebooks and whether there was a variation in the comprehension of the iconotext between 5th and 10th graders. Secondly, to explore the diversity in identification of themes between the two year levels. Thirdly, the main thesis question relates to whether the variations in the previous objectives can say something about picturebooks as crossover literature.

5.1 Main findings

The main findings of the study show that the participating focus groups had a high comprehension of the iconotext, yet some variations could be found in the interpretation between the groups. The diversity in interpretation of the iconotext could occur across year level, but also between the same aged groups. In some contexts there was a clear link between the discussion of iconotext and the suggested themes, while in other cases the themes appeared isolated. The themes that were pointed out in the focus group discussions varied to some extent in two of the picturebooks, yet significantly in one of the picturebooks. In the following sub-chapters, the different aspects of these results will be discussed and analysed in accordance with the theory presented in chapter 2.

5.2 Discussion of main findings

5.2.1 Variations in the perception of iconotext related to picturebooks as crossover literature

There is clear evidence in the focus group discussions that the participants had a high perception of the iconotext in the picturebook. This became evident when the participants discussed particular situations that could only have been perceived

through the interaction between picture and text, such as the occurrence of the light bulb in *The Dark* (p. 53). In this case, the iconotext has a form of where text depends on the picture for clarification (Golden, 1990, p. 104). Additionally, the high perception of iconotext became apparent when the participants specifically justified their interpretations by referring to pictures and text. This was exemplified by a 10th grade participant in the discussion of *Gorilla*, where she pointed to both text and picture to support her interpretation of how Hannah's father never had time for her: "She does tell us in a way, that he never has time for her, and he's working all the time according to her. And then you also notice that he isn't really present. He's never with her, and most often you see him by a desk or something." Although all focus groups exhibited an understanding of the relationship between verbal and visual elements in the picturebooks, variations were found between the groups.

Firstly, with regard to immediate reactions to the picturebooks, where there was a tendency among the 5th grade focus groups to have an internal competition of spotting the most amusing details in the two picturebooks by Anthony Browne. Both *Look What I've Got* and *Gorilla* consist of numerous small and surrealistic details in the pictures, and many of the 5th grade participants only provided descriptive answers of what they saw in the pictures. According to Kiefer (1991, p. 70) children often notice small details in picturebooks that adults may overlook. Although the 10th graders cannot be portrayed as adults, it was still a tendency that the 10th grade focus groups did not attend to the details unless the details were worthy to their interpretations, in form of symbolization. This may have basis in that readers with higher English proficiency consider the combination of pictures and text as a source of new information to interpret, while the pictures function as a visual aid for readers with lower English proficiency (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 17, 22). The variations in utilizing the iconotext seen in the situation above, illustrate the diversity of the picturebook format, and add to the notion of picturebooks as crossover literature because of its ability to reach all readers in an individual manner.

Secondly, variations between the groups became noticeable in relation to the basis of interpretation of the iconotext in the picturebooks. Especially in the discussion of *The Dark*, the researcher found it hard to receive support for three of the focus groups' interpretation. An example can be found in focus group 5.2., where the researcher asks "what is your perception of *The Dark*?", whereas one participant answers: "He is nice". Although the researcher did ask follow-up questions to such

responds, for instance “why do you think he is nice?”, many of the questions remained unanswered, which may be a sign that it was either too difficult for the participant’s to formulate a good response, or that the participants were not able to reflect on their basis for interpretation. Applebee (In Lehr, 1991) stated that children’s critical response to narratives have not reached interpretive levels of thought before the age of twelve, which in other words suggests that the two 5th grade focus groups in this research are too young to depict and respond to stories. However, clear evidence from the focus group discussions contradicts and undermines this theory. An example from the first 5th grade focus group discussion of *Gorilla* shows that the participant has emerged herself into Hannah’s situation and imagined what the fictional character felt in the specific picture: “What I liked about this one is that it’s a bit lighter, only a bit of light from the TV. So she felt that there was something around her at least”. Similarly, in the discussion of *Look What I’ve Got* a participant in focus group 5.2. gave Sam features that were not mentioned explicitly in the text, showing the ability to interpret and respond to what he perceived from the iconotext: “He cares less about what he has, and more about being content with himself and helping people”.

Another example that weakens Applebee’s theory was the capability of a participant in focus group 5.1. to make connections between the *The Dark* and previous readings. In the picturebook, *The Dark* explains why we need darkness, for instance in the following manner: “without the dark, everything would be light”, whereas the participant commented on the similarity to something she had read before: “The stars cannot shine without darkness”.

Despite the fact that the participants, who were, according to Applebee, below the level of having interpretive skills, did exhibit the ability to express critical responses to the picturebooks, some variations were found across the age levels in terms of interpretation. This became evident in the discussion of *Gorilla*, where focus group 5.1. described Hannah as greedy and ungrateful, whereas the 10th grade focus groups, as well as focus group 5.2. characterised Hannah as lonely, forsaken and sad. Nikolajeva and Scott (2006, p. 1, 2) argue that readers of picturebooks at different age levels may assimilate stories variously due to diversities in both literacy and visual literacy skills. This may be applied to this specific situation, as the focal point of focus group 5.1. was Hannah’s material obsessions of gorilla items, instead

of the notions of sadness and loneliness that dominated the other focus group discussions. In other words, focus group 5.1. focused on the explicit objects seen in the pictures, while the remaining groups interpreted the underlying and implicit mood represented by the visual elements. Most competent readers are familiar with verbal communication, yet the ability to interpret visual elements is for many an unknown territory, which may also have been a factor in the example above (Doonan, 1993, p. 7). Still, Lehr (1991, p. 67) points out that even if children's perspective of meaning is different from the one of adults, it is presumptuous to interpret that as a lack of understanding. In the current situation, this can be related to how focus group 5.1. had a completely different perspective of the picturebook than the other groups, yet did not lack the ability to understand and interpret Hannah in their own particular manner. The variations presented above show a clear difference in how the participants understood the interplay between image and text, perhaps based on experience of interpreting visual elements rather than age. The complexity of the iconotext is one of the picturebook's most important attributes, and thus the examples above demonstrate why picturebooks can be seen as books aimed at all ages, on the basis of readers' varied experience.

5.2.2 Variations in the identification of themes related to picturebooks as crossover literature

It was evident in all focus group discussions that the participant's perception of iconotext may have led to their notion of themes. However, it is important to note that despite the fact that not all the examples from the discussions related to the iconotext can be directly linked to the suggested themes, it may still be the case that the iconotext have influenced the participant's notion of themes. This is due to the fact that none of the themes fall outside what has been discussed in the focus groups, but because the participants may have failed to justify their answers with examples from image and/or text, the researcher has not taken the freedom to associate these responses to the themes that have been suggested. Of reasons related to validity and reliability, the present thesis will thus only focus on the examples that can be proved to have a strong connection to the proposed themes.

An example of where the perception of picture and text in picturebooks may have contributed to the focus group's notion of theme can be found in the discussion of *Look What I've Got* in group 10.2., where one participant points out that Jeremy buys new things in order to gain attention: "Yes, he buys many things, but the others never really look at him (..) He wants other people to look at him and such. That he has sort of a need of attention." The theme of "need for attention" was suggested by the mentioned focus group, and because it is only revealed through pictures that no one looks at Jeremy, it is an example of where the collaboration of picture and text has contributed to the participant's notion of theme. Another example can be found in focus group 5.2., who commented on how bad things seemed to happen to Jeremy continuously throughout the book and called it "karma", which was later suggested as a theme. The text in the picturebook entrusts the pictures to tell the reader what is happening with Jeremy, and it is therefore the case that the pictures have contributed to the participant's perception of the themes in *Look What I've Got*. Despite the fact that the focus groups identified multiple themes in the picturebooks at hand, the results clearly demonstrate a variation in perception of themes between all focus groups, both across age levels and between the same aged groups.

These variations may be due to the fact that themes are subject to reader's interpretation, and as a result different individuals may identify different themes while reading the same book (Lehr, 1991, Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 28). The differences in the perception of themes became particularly apparent in *Gorilla* between focus group 5.1. and the remaining groups. Focus group 5.1. suggested themes such as "greediness", "be happy with what you have" (from Hannah's perspective), and "you get what you want on your birthday", while the themes in the other groups can be exemplified by "loneliness", "have time for your children" and "hopes and dreams of better times". In this case, the identification of themes has led to exclusion, in which focus group 5.1. seem to have read an entirely different picturebook than the remaining focus groups (Mawdsley, 1990, p. 13. Scott in Beckett 2011, p. xvi). The exclusion shown above may have basis in the interpretation of the iconotext, as focus group 5.1. has focused on the most explicit verbal and visual elements in the picturebook, rather than the multiple layers of interpretation provided by the iconotext. Therefore it may be plausible to reason the variation on the basis of visual literacy and literacy skills. However, the case of exclusion was not a general circumstance seen in the discussions by focus group

5.1., which may point to either that this particular picturebook offered complexity on a higher level than the others, or that the picturebook was comparable to the participant's own acquaintance in a different way than the participants in the other groups. With regard to picturebooks as crossover literature, the example above illustrates the variations in which readers comprehend, analyse and interpret the complex interplay between text and pictures in picturebooks, based on such as visual literacy and literacy skills, and recognition of the characters related to their own life experiences.

Lehr (1991), as well as Stoodt-Hill and Amspaugh-Corson (2005, p. 28) points out that although readers can respond to picturebooks variously, the dominant theme or idea should be apparent to the reader. Except for the example shown above, all focus groups generally exhibited a high perception of the dominant themes in the picturebooks. This can be exemplified through the themes identified in *Look What I've Got*, such as "things doesn't mean happiness", "greed", "money's not the most important" and "different values". The mentioned themes differ in formulation, yet the main idea of each theme may carry associations to each other. Also in *The Dark* there were contrasts with regard to formulation of themes between the 5th and 10th grade focus groups, yet the dominant theme was still clear to all groups. While the 5th grade focus groups identified themes as for example "don't be afraid" and "don't be afraid of the dark", both the 10th grade focus groups suggested "overcome fear" as a theme. Such variations in terms of phrasing are to be considered conventional while dealing with focus groups of contrasting age levels.

In her research on children's sense of themes, Lehr (1991, p. 67) found that thematic identification was an early developmental strategy, yet older children were better able to talk about the themes. These findings are also relevant to the present master thesis, where particularly one example from the focus group discussions proved that the 10th graders were, in a higher degree than the 5th graders, capable to elaborate on the suggested themes.

The mentioned example involves the theme "loneliness", which was suggested by focus group 5.2. and 10.1 during the discussion of *Gorilla*. Although the two focus groups identified the same theme in the picturebook, there were significant

differences with regard to the discussion of the theme. In the conversation about the paratext, a participant in focus group 5.2. suggested that the picturebook was about a girl who did not have many friends, causing her to go out in the night to play with a gorilla. There was no mentioning of the term “loneliness”, yet the fact that the participant perceived that Hannah did not have any friends, may have caused her to later suggest “loneliness” as a theme of the book. Focus group 10.1. on the other hand mentioned the word “loneliness” in relation to Hannah several times throughout the discussion, and the researcher asked the group to elaborate on how they had obtained that impression. A specific picture in the book was particularly central for the identification and justification of the theme. One participant substantiated his impression of Hannah on the basis of that she was alone watching TV and that it was only a small part of the room that was lit up, and just around her. Another participant followed the utterance by pointing out how the contrasts in the specific picture portrayed Hannah’s isolation. The example above clearly shows the variety between two age groups’ discussion of the same theme, and agrees with Lehr’s findings on how young children may be able to identify themes, yet older children are more competent when it comes to debating themes. However, it is important to note that these differences between the groups in no way imply that the 5th graders had a lack of understanding of the picturebook (Lehr, 1991, p. 67), but rather show diversities in literacy and visual literacy skills between two different age levels (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1, 2). Related to the notion of picturebooks as literature for all ages, the example above also demonstrates the complexities of the picturebook format. Because readers comprehend the information given by the iconotext differently, which in this case led to the 10th grade focus group to make a deeper interpretation than the 5th grade focus group, prove that picturebooks should not be limited to children.

Many authors, illustrators and publishers today support the idea that there is no such thing as “adult” themes in literature, but rather cross-generational themes of interest to readers of all ages (Hade, Paul, and Mason in Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2014, p. 191, Beckett, 2012, p. 212). Some of the dominant themes in *Look What I’ve Got* are materialism, greed and contentment, which are themes that may be considered rather complex. Still, the present picturebook is considered suitable for age 3-8 by Publisher’s Weekly (n.d.), and is thus aimed at readers younger than all the

respondents who participated in this research project. If *Look What I've Got*, with its intricate themes, can be considered appropriate for children as young as age three, the aspect of a dual audience becomes relevant.

An example from the results can be provided in order to verify that the themes in *Look What I've Got* are cross-generational themes that can intrigue readers of all ages, and not just the target audience of 3-8 year olds (Publisher's Weekly, n.d.). The mentioned example regards two 10th grade participants who emerged themselves into the situation of Sam and Jeremy, and made a strong connection to the modern world and social medias. The participants both uttered that the case of how Jeremy was showing off his new things felt very familiar, and was exemplified by how people often posted pictures on social medias if they had bought something new, if they were doing cool activities and etc. The discussion ended with a comment on how it could be an awful feeling not to have what everyone else had. The example above clearly shows that the picturebook caused a reaction in the participants, where they both recognised themselves in the characters, despite the fact that the book is originally targeted at a younger audience. Such identification with the narrative and its characters is most likely to happen when the reader enjoys and finds the picturebook stimulating. In most cases this is when the book is either comparable to the reader's own acquaintance or within the reader's ability to understand (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 38).

While the example above clearly shows how the 10th grade participants identified themselves with the narrative in a picturebook aimed at 3-8 year olds, it is relevant to highlight how the 5th grade focus groups reacted to themes that may be perceived as complex. An example can be provided from focus group 5.1., regarding the theme "contentment" in *Look What I've Got*. The state of being content is defined as "to be satisfied in mind" (The Oxford English Dictionary: definition of be content). Although "contentment" was never suggested as a theme in any of the focus groups, one of the participants in group 5.2 identified the mental state when he uttered that the protagonist Sam seemed content with himself. As the word "content" is never mentioned explicitly in the verbal text, the participant exhibit a high degree of comprehension when he interpreted and empathised with the character. In relation to the notion of picturebooks as crossover literature, the example above may be particularly important in connection with the sensitive and controversial themes seen in modern picturebooks. Sipe (2011, p. 247) points out that young reader's ability to

deal with complex themes should never be underestimated. The wide variety of themes seen in picturebooks today is thus a confirmation of why the audience should be expanded.

5.2.3 Picturebooks: Literature for all ages?

Throughout the chapter of results and analysis, as well as in the discussion of the findings, the researcher has demonstrated the variations seen between the different focus groups. These variations are important in the achievement of a place for picturebooks in the world of crossover literature, and to further attain a position for picturebooks in Norwegian classrooms. The focus groups that participated in this study have all shown the ability to comprehend and respond to the iconotext and themes in the picturebooks at hand. The variations in the discussion have enlightened the notion of how readers perceive and react to picturebooks, and demonstrated that the 5th graders in this study were able to interpret visual and verbal communication as well as identifying themes, yet the 10th grade participants in most cases exhibited a higher capability of elaborating on their interpretations.

The variations seen in the interpretation of the iconotext may have basis in the participant's development of literacy and visual literacy. Picturebooks consist of a complex interplay between text and pictures, and it is up to the reader to depict the two forms of communication. Despite the significant age difference between the focus groups in the study, it should be noted that the variations are not necessarily caused by age, but rather a result of experience in understanding and responding to verbal and visual communication. This can be reasoned by the fact that differences were observed both at the same age level and across age levels in terms of comprehension of the interaction between text and pictures. With regard to picturebook as crossover literature, the results in the study emphasise the picturebook's strength to reach learners of different ages, and with various starting points in terms of competency. An example of this can be how the 5th grade focus groups in a larger degree found the visual elements of the picturebook amusing, while the 10th graders seized the opportunity to acquire extra information in order to make a deeper interpretation of the narrative. The complex interplay between text

and pictures is what adds to the multifaceted nature of picturebooks, and demonstrates why the picturebook is a prime tool to enhance a general visual sense, and strengthen the ability to make meaning from visual information (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 1, 2).

With regard to the identification of themes in the focus group discussions, all focus groups proved their ability to recognise the essence of the narrative. Although there was a tendency to suggest the moral of the story rather than the themes, the focus groups still displayed that they had understood the meaning of the picturebook. As mentioned earlier, only one example differed completely in terms of interpretation of the themes, namely the case of *Gorilla* in focus group 5.1. Because themes are subject to reader's interpretation, the identification of themes can range from one of collaboration to exclusion, where it can seem like the participants are reading a completely different book, which was the case in the example above (Lehr, 1991, p. 67, Stoodt-Hill & Amspaugh-Corson, 2005, p. 28). Another variety in the focus group discussions related to the participant's identification of themes had basis in formulation. That means that the themes were suggested in a different manner, yet carried a certain similarity to each other. As mentioned previously, an example of this can be the themes of "overcome fear" and "don't be afraid", as they both concern fear. A theme such as "fear" represent the cross-generational themes found in modern picturebooks, because it concerns a universal feeling that people of all ages can recognise.

5.3 Cross-generational picturebooks: A place in Norwegian classrooms?

Based on the results from the study, it can be argued that picturebooks should play a more significant role in the Norwegian classroom setting. The current research project emphasized the picturebook's ability to reach readers of all ages on different levels, where the participants were challenged to comprehend and interpret the interplay between two forms of communication, the visual and the verbal. The participating focus groups demonstrated their ability to perceive and respond to the iconotext, yet the results showed variations in literacy and visual literacy skills. By including picturebooks in the classroom, the pupils have a unique opportunity to

enhance both of these competencies, while at the same time learn about the specific theme or topic of the picturebook. When readers are introduced to literature comparable to their own acquaintance, or within their ability to understand, the reader has the freedom to learn more about themselves, their world and human conditions (Cianciolo, 1997, p. 38). The picturebook format gives teachers the opportunity to teach pupils about a variety of topics, without the compromising of time and complexity. This can be reasoned by how the focus groups in the present study spent an average of thirty minutes on each picturebook, yet were still able to comprehend, interpret and respond to the different elements of the picturebooks. Furthermore, the picturebook is a great tool interdisciplinary, as the variety of themes is severe. This means that topics that are normally taught factually can be taught through complex interactions between text and picture, where the pupils are presented to a narrative they can become involved in. The present research project showed that the participants were able to empathize and relate to the characters in the picturebooks at hand. By presenting the pupils with characters they can relate to, empathize with, be provoked by, laugh with and so forth, a result may be that the narrative become more personal, because the pupils are presented to a character they grow attached to.

5.4 Picturebooks as crossover literature: Limitations of the present study.

In order to further the idea of picturebooks as crossover literature, it is necessary to discuss to what extent this study fulfils, or does not fulfil, the aims set for the study. The first area of discussion is related to the scope of the participant group. As the project was limited in resources and time, the researcher had to work with the choices at hand. The scope could positively involve participants with greater age difference, yet this does that mean that the results are of any less interest to the field of picturebooks as crossover literature.

Another topic for discussion is limitations regarding the method, i.e. formulation of the questions, explanation of the terms “theme” and “moral” and the choice of picturebooks. The formulation of questions regards situations where it was difficult to get the focus groups to justify their answers in accordance with their interpretation. The point at issue is whether the results had been different if the

questions asked had been more specific. At the same time, the researcher had to remain passive to some extent for the sake of not influencing the focus group's interpretation. On the subject of themes and morals in literature, it would have been favourable to devote time to elaborate on the difference between the two terms. As the issue of identifying morals instead of themes was present in all focus groups, the results may have proved different if an explanation of the terms had been completed in a higher degree. Additionally, if the focus groups had identified more themes rather than morals, the comparison of the results may have become more apparent. The limitation regards the picturebooks utilized in the research project. In retrospect it would have been desirable to include a wider range of picturebooks in connection to the complex themes found in picturebooks today. Different picturebooks might have influenced the scope of the variation of perception of iconotext and identification of themes between the two age levels.

Whether the chosen method of having focus group discussions exclusively was the best choice to fulfil the aims of the study is also a question for discussion. The method was chosen with care and conveyed at the best of the researcher's power, but there is a possibility that a different approach would have been better suited. However, to apply focus group discussions as a method was seen as most appropriate with regard to the participants, as the questions are asked to the group as a whole, and there is no expectation of each participant to answer every question. While dealing with complex picturebooks, some participants may feel uncomfortable discussing delicate topics in public, while others may feel safer talking about sensitive issues in a majority because the other respondents are in the same position (Barbour, 2014, p. 137, Morgan, 1988, p. 32).

Despite limitations both in regard to scope and method of the present study, given the resources at hand, the results can be considered reliable.

6 Final commentary

The present study has accomplished its main goal. It shows how readers of different ages perceive, interpret and respond variously to the complexities in picturebooks, and strengthen the idea that picturebooks can be read by readers of all ages. During the period of the data collection, a literary context was created, in which the participants showed the ability to engage themselves in the picturebook format, immerse the character's positions and reflect on the thoughts, values and norms of the different characters. The participant's interpretation of the narrative and the themes proved to be influenced by the interaction of pictures and text in a high degree, despite the variations seen between the focus groups. These variations showed that all the focus groups were able to comprehend the visual and the verbal communication, yet the 10th grade focus groups were in a higher degree able to justify their interpretations and connect the picturebook to real life events. This result clearly shows how today's picturebook challenge the conventions and norms that traditionally governed the genre, through cross-generational themes and complex narrative strategies.

The aim of the thesis was to address the almost complete lack of attention paid to picturebooks within the crossover genre, and further shed light over the neglect of a genre that deserves more attention within the expanding trend of crossover literature. Through the process of planning and writing this thesis, the potential of picturebooks have only become clearer. As a final comment, it is strongly encouraged to incorporate picturebooks in the Norwegian classroom and school libraries, if, for nothing else, the benefit of varied teaching.

6.1 Thoughts about future research on the field

The present study has discussed how picturebooks can function as crossover literature, and the possibilities for further research are vast. First and foremost, it could have been interesting to conduct the same research with participants of wider age variety, in order to investigate the differences between the child and the adult reader of picturebooks. It is also not assured whether this study would have had the

same results with different researchers or different picturebooks. Another interesting angle for further research can be *how* the crossover aspect can be made discernible to the readers. This research focused on the content, such as iconotext and themes, in order to substantiate the notion of *why* picturebooks can have a dual audience readership, yet it would be intriguing to investigate for instance the labelling of picturebooks in school libraries, public libraries, book shops and so forth, and see to what extent the readers are influenced by this when they choose books. The possibilities are extensive, and the present research can argue that the field of picturebooks as crossover literature should not be put to rest. It is an interesting aspect, as the picturebook may engage readers of different ages, if only given the acknowledgement as complex literature on equal terms with other type of literature. To the teacher, the picturebook can be a valuable tool in the teaching. Therefore it could also be interesting to utilize picturebooks in research on such as enhancement of visual literacy with pupils of different ages. This study was a small step in the direction of acknowledging the dual audience aspect of the picturebook format, but it showed interesting results that could arguably contribute to the important field of picturebooks as crossover literature.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Discussion topics for *Gorilla*

- What can you say about the front page of the picturebook?
- What are your thoughts on the title of the picturebook?
- What do you think the picturebook is about?
- What do you think about the colours in the book? How are they contributing to the mood or sense of the book?
- What impression do you have of Hannah's father? What is that impression based on?
- What impression do you have of Hannah? What is that impression based on?
- What are your thoughts on the gorilla?
- What do you think about the family home in *Gorilla*?
- What do you think about the events this specific night?
- How do you think the pictures work together with the text?
- How would the book work with picture or text only?
- What are the themes of the book?

8.2 Appendix 2: Discussion topics for *The Dark*

- What can you say about the front page of the picturebook?
- What are your thoughts on the title of the picturebook?
- What do you think the picturebook is about?
- What are your thoughts on the illustrations in the picturebook?
- How are the colours in the book presented? How are they contributing to the mood or sense of the book?
- What impression do you have of Laszlo? What is that impression based on?
- What are your thoughts on *The Dark*?
- How do you think the text work together with the pictures?
- How would the book work with picture or text only?
- What do you think the themes are?

8.3 Appendix 3: Discussion topics for *Look What I've Got*

- What can you say about the front page of the picturebook?
- What are your thoughts on the title of the picturebook?
- What do you think the picturebook is about?
- How are the colours in the picturebook? How are they contributing to the mood or sense of the book?
- What impression do you have of Jeremy? What is that impression based on?
- What impression do you have of Sam? What is that impression based on?
- How do you think the text works with the pictures? Do they tell the same or a different story?
- How would the book work with picture or text only?
- What are the themes of the picturebook?