

Section 1

What are Multimodal Texts

In this section:

- defining multimodal texts
- writing and multimodality
- affordance and design: using different modes and media
- texts that show and texts that tell
- surveying what children know about multimodality
- developing ways of talking about writing and multimodality (*classroom account: Planning and making picture books with Years 1/2*)
- popular culture and writing.

Defining and describing multimodal texts

Digital technology has brought significant changes to writing over the last 20 years or so. In everyday print-based communications like newspapers, information leaflets or advertising, words are now almost always accompanied by photographs, diagrams or drawings, and the print is enhanced by a variety of font sizes and shapes. Screens are much more familiar in shops, workplaces, schools and homes. Mobile phones transmit images and words as well as sound. Many everyday texts are now multimodal, combining words with moving images, sound, colour and a range of photographic, drawn or digitally created visuals.

But multimodality is not new. People of all cultures have always used a range of ways to represent ideas and communicate meaning through speech, writing, image, gesture and movement, music and sound. The 'newness' is the way that messages are relayed and distributed through different media of communication. Communication is possible not only through the traditional means of paper, in picture books, magazines, novels or information books but now also through the

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computer, as Internet information, emails and presentations, and via sound and visual media – radio, television, videos and DVDs.

Even the most familiar and everyday communications are made up of complex combinations of modes. Talk, whether in face-to-face meetings or viewed on screen, is accompanied by movement and gesture; print is often accompanied by pictures; and films and television programmes rely on sound effects and music to add atmosphere and effect. Any multimodal text might combine elements of:

- gesture, movement, posture, facial expression
- images: moving and still, real or drawn
- sound: spoken words, sound effects and music
- writing, including font and typography.

These elements will be differently weighted in any combination of modes; for example, there is usually no verbal dialogue in ballet, and novels are predominantly made up of words alone.

Children grow up in a highly multimodal environment. In the street, home and school, they are surrounded by texts on screen and on paper which merge pictures, words and sound. They expect to read images as well as print and, increasingly use computers in seeking information and composing their own texts. In school, developments in publishing mean that they are familiar with a wealth of picture books and information books presented in well-designed double-page spreads. These books and the texts children read on screen influence their compositions, acting as models and examples of possible ways to express ideas and information. This has implications for teaching. The texts that children are familiar with – including computer games and hypertext – often follow a different structure from sequential narrative, instruction or explanation. Presentational software and websites extend possibilities for hypertextual composition, and digital technology, with its facility for importing pictures and manipulating text, means that presentation of writing can be more varied, involving design features that paper-based writing does not allow.

However, the expansion of types of text does not mean that writing will become a thing of the past. Far from it. In fact, text messaging, emails and blogging may already have contributed to greater everyday experience of writing. As far as classroom writing is concerned, although handwriting will not disappear, there will be much more on-screen writing. It is also likely that the process of composing, editing and revising will expand to include screen-based presentations as well as writing.

One of the advantages of on-screen production of texts is that children will more easily see themselves as authors, with the responsibility to proofread and craft their writing. The use of interactive whiteboards (IWBs) in classrooms means that it is much easier for a group of learners to view a piece of writing and jointly discuss editing improvements. At first it is likely that they will read the work of published authors, considering use of language to create specific effects and analysing how an experienced writer crafts a piece of writing. From there it is a short step to reviewing their own composition with an analytical eye, examining their own use of

language, style and sentence structure. A group of children composing on screen can readily amend work, so that composition benefits from collaborative support and the facilities of the computer. All of this experience forges strong examples of how an individual can gain satisfaction from crafting a piece of writing until it does the job the author wanted it to do. This process of apprenticeship to reading with a critical eye, editing and revising is equally relevant when children are writing or composing multimodal texts on paper and on screen.

Writing and multimodal texts

This book looks at writing both as part of multimodal texts and in its own right. Including multimodality in the literacy curriculum means learning to decide when to communicate in writing alone and when to use a multimodal form. The term ‘text’ is used specifically to describe the fact that any communication is made up of an interwoven combination of modes. It is just not accurate to describe a designed leaflet, the double-page spread of an information book, or a screen displaying information on the Internet as ‘writing’. Each of these is made up of a combination of image, word, layout and sometimes sound. They are, in fact, *multimodal texts*. To avoid any confusion, we distinguish throughout this book between multimodal texts, which we term ‘texts’, and writing.

Decisions about whether it is better to use a combination of modes or a single mode are related to purpose and audience. If a message is to have maximum effect, it is important to choose the best form of communication. This will be influenced by the writer’s view of what the reader or audience will need to help them understand the meaning. For example, it may be better to use charts, pictures and even gesture alongside words to help explain a complicated process; on the other hand, creating a short story with words alone serves a different kind of purpose. The author selects particular combinations of modes for the job in hand. Similarly, specific media are better suited to certain types of communication: a novel is more easily read on paper than on a screen, and an IWB, with its facilities for moving text and images about, can be more helpful than paper when explaining a process in design technology or science.

Affordance and design

In teaching about choices of modes and media, children need to consider what different modes and media *afford* for making meaning. This is often tied up with the *material* of the medium. Reading a story in a printed book affords a different kind of experience from watching a television or film narrative. The fact that a book is made up of pages – the *material* of the book – which are easily turned by hand, makes it possible to skip descriptive passages, vary the pace of reading, and return

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to earlier pages to check details or recapture the narrative flow. With television or a film, 'skipping' or returning to earlier parts of the story is not possible unless it has been pre-recorded. Even with a recording, where it is possible to review and fast-forward, it is difficult to pick up on detail without much effort. The screen, disc or videotape afford a different set of reading possibilities from a magazine or book because of what they are made of and how they work.

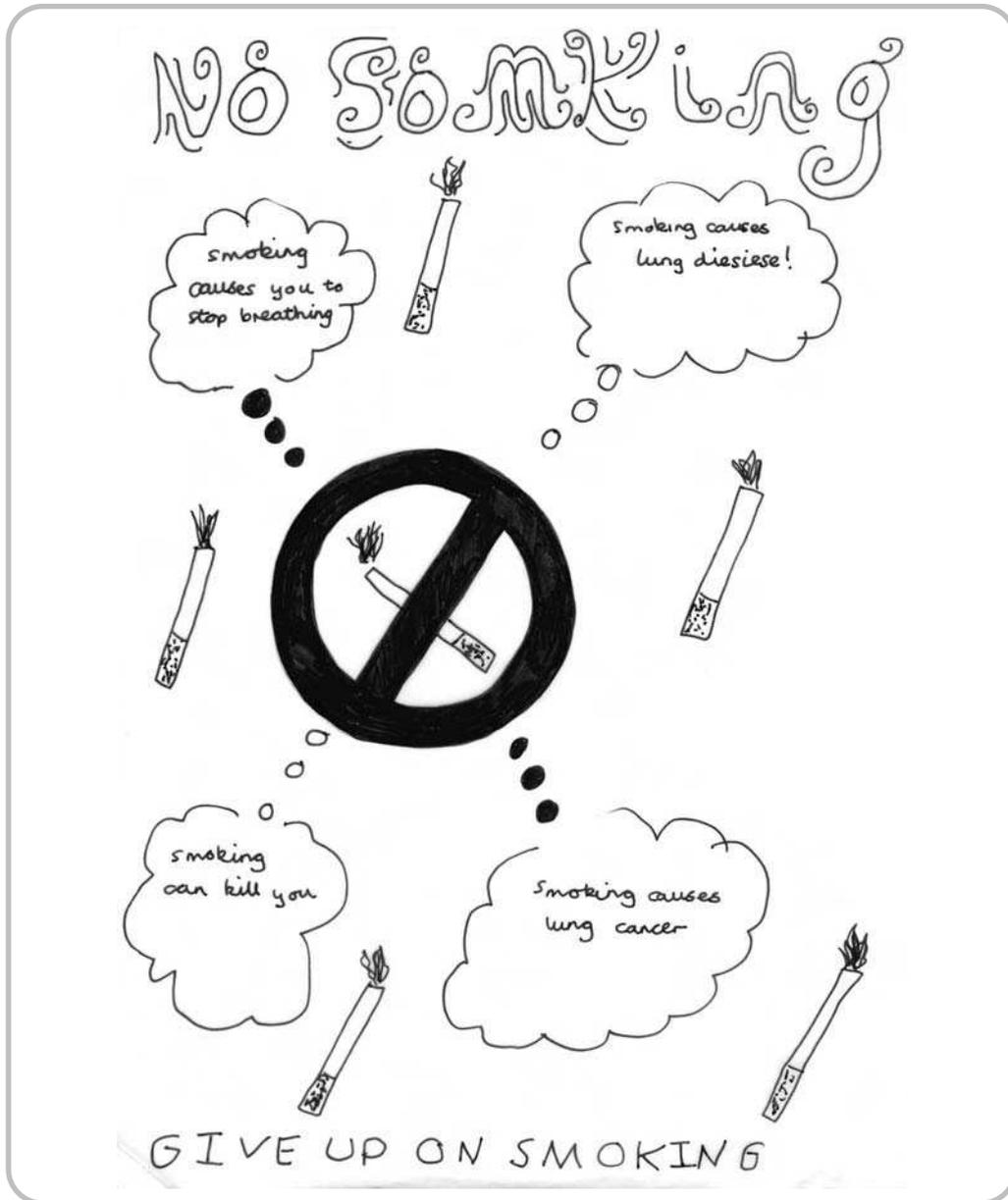
Affordance is also related to differences in messages according to whether they are presented in writing or in words-plus-images. Writing is necessarily chronological – sequenced according to time: *this event happened, then this, then this ...* Instructions similarly obey the dictates of time sequence, since they are presented in a non-chronological order: *for this process you have to do this, then this, then this*. If they are not given in order, instructions are not likely to be very useful. Writing is organised according to time – what you read first – and from top to bottom of the page (in Western languages) as writer *tells* the story or instructions.

On the other hand, if events or explanations are presented in a combination of words and images, and sometimes sound, they may have elements of sequencing but will certainly be organised spatially. The maker of the text *shows* the reader. In information books, for example, with double-page spreads for each topic, the designer deliberately places words and images, as well as arrows, shading, text boxes, and font type and size, to emphasise particular ideas. There may be a strong central image to draw attention to the key idea, and then, through the shape of the central image or by the use of arrows or simply the placing of white space, the reader's eye is directed to different aspects of the spread. In this way, the designer displays the ideas or information, inviting the reader's eye to travel a range of pathways around the page. Composing a multimodal text, then, involves an element of *design*, where modes are combined to get the message across.

Showing and telling

Two persuasive texts by the same writer, Adam (Year 6), one multimodal; one written, illustrate the difference between showing and telling.¹ The text structures of his poster and persuasive piece of writing, with cohesive devices specific to each form, demonstrate how authors, of whatever age, use design to get the message across. In Fig. 1.1, *No Smoking (sic)*, the weight of the message is carried by the strong central image as a direct appeal to the reader. This is mirrored by the words in the thought bubbles, which contain facts about the effects of smoking. The layout gives a steady pace to the design, contributing to the force of the message. The centrally placed lit cigarette and the repeated cigarette motifs punctuate the spaces between the thought bubbles. The eye is led either to or from the central image by the thought bubble tags, which are visual connectives linking statement and consequence with a pictorial version of 'and so ...'. And as the eye roams the white space surrounding the central image, it collides with the reminder of the banned cigarette. In the same way that the

Figure 1.1 Showing: Adam's No Smoking poster



lighted cigarette acts as a repeated linking device, the thought bubbles (and their content) are repetitive, giving force to the implied argument: *if you persist in smoking* (image of cigarette), *this is what will happen* (factual statement). Adam uses thought bubbles, not speech bubbles, inviting the reader to think things over, where speech bubbles would act as direct commands. There is no

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obviously persuasive language – just an opportunity for the reader to consider the link between smoking and illness in a measured presentation of image and word. The patterning of this text shows deliberate design in selecting content – images and language – to convey the message to the reader.

However, the idea of design is not restricted to multimodal texts. Writing is also designed. Any piece of writing has ‘design’ in that the writer has taken some deliberate decisions, some of them unconscious, in constructing the writing (Sharples, 1999). It goes through the same stages of developing a concept that a car designer or an architect might: generating ideas to address a specific purpose; sketching them out; selecting, rejecting and organising them; producing a prototype (or draft); trying it out; reviewing and adjusting; and, finally, moving to a finished product. Some parts of this process will be unconscious and others conscious and deliberate, as the designer works out how to use the material as effectively as possible.

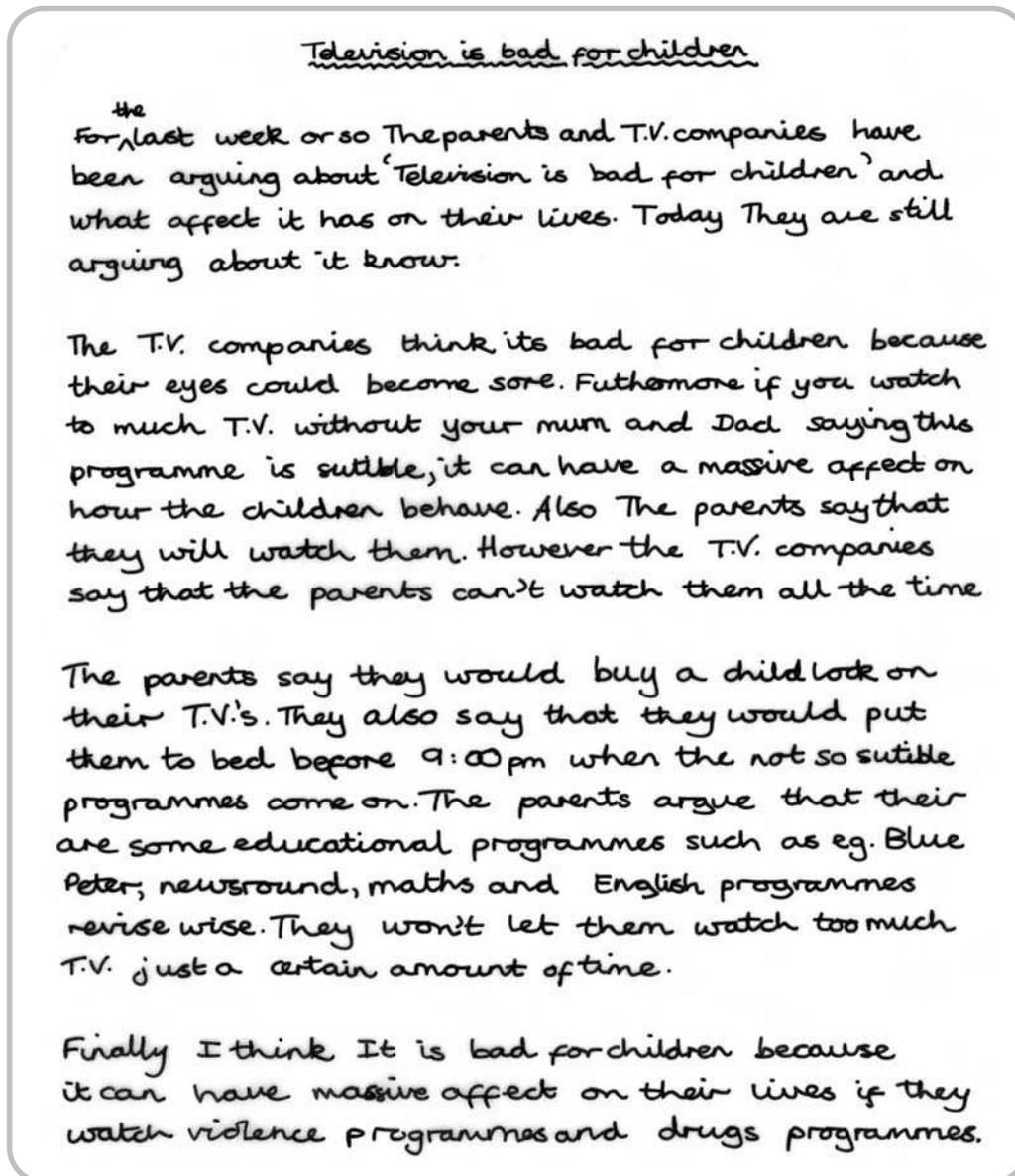
Fig 1.2 shows a written piece completed by Adam after a series of classroom discussions and debates on the proposition, *television is bad for children*. Writing follows a sequenced structure, dependent on time. If we tried to read Adam’s piece from the middle or the bottom first, it just would not make sense. In this piece of persuasive writing, the weight of the message depends on the cumulative effect of the different paragraphs. Even though it is a written piece, it is also designed. It is visually symmetrical – short, long, long, short paragraphs – as part of the pacing of a balanced argument. The content is equally designed to carry an argument in a specific order. Adam begins by giving the reader the context and then places the television companies and the parents in opposition, concluding with his own opinion. Adam’s two texts illustrate the differences between showing and telling, how the affordances of space and time work in different modes. At the same time, however, his poster and writing show that composing multimodal texts and written texts are both acts of design, relating to purpose and a sense of audience.

What children know about multimodality

The separate chapters of this book give examples of teaching multimodality to develop a range of different types of text. However, so that teaching can be geared towards building on children’s experience, it is worth finding out just what they do know. The survey in Fig. 1.3 is designed to discover their experience of multimodal texts and what they understand about how these texts work.

Surveying children’s experience of multimodal texts

As part of a project on making picture books, Andrea Blythe, a Years 1/2 teacher, used the surveys to help her to plan. She interviewed the children

Figure 1.2 Telling: Adam's persuasive written piece, *Television is bad for children*.

before and after the project. Fig. 1.4 shows George's survey responses. His initial views are on the left of the questions, and his ideas after the project are shown on the right.

George clearly likes visual texts with moving images and is experienced with computer games and television. In answer to question 4, he says, 'Moving pictures are more interesting to me.' His least favourite text type was

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Figure 1.3 Survey of children's experience of multimodal texts

Surveying Children's Experience of Multimodal Texts
(With younger pupils this will need to be completed by the teacher)

Tick the things you read, write, watch or play at home:

- Comics
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Television
- Computer games
- Information on the internet
- e-mails
- texting
- Books with word and no pictures
- Books with pictures
- ... other things (add anything here that isn't listed)

- Which of them do like best? Number them 1, 2 and 3.
- Which do you like least? Underline just one.

List them in the grid and fill in the answers:

My best choices	Does it have more pictures or more words?
1	
2	
3	
My least favourite	

1. **Do you prefer reading words or pictures? Why?**
2. **What can words tell you that pictures can't?**
3. **What can pictures tell you that words can't?**
4. **Is there a difference between what moving pictures and still pictures can do?**
5. **Choose a book with words and pictures and use one double page spread to explain to a friend or your teacher:**
Which you look at first – words or pictures

How you read the page as a whole – where do you start?
6. **Find a piece of work you've done recently where you've used words and pictures/diagrams and explain to your friend or a teacher*:**
 - What you were showing through the pictures and what you were using the words to explain.
 - Does the text do what you wanted it to do? How?
 - Could you have done it better if you had used pictures or writing in a different way?
 - Would it have been better if you could have done it on the computer? How?

Figure 1.4 George's responses to the multimodal texts survey

George

Surveying Children's Experience of Multimodal Texts

Before Project **After Project**

Tick the things you read, write, watch or play at home:

Comics
Magazines
Newspapers
Television
Computer games
Information on the internet
e-mails
Texting
Books with word and no pictures
Books with pictures
... other things [add anything here that isn't listed]

③ ✓
② ✓
① ✓ Playstation

Which of them do like best? Number them 1, 2 and 3.
Which do you like least? Underline just one.

List them in the grid and fill in the answers:

My best choices	Does it have more pictures or more words?
1 Playstation	pictures - "It only has words when you set it up" ①
2 Computer games	"more pictures - no words" ②
3 television	"a couple of words and lots of pictures" ③
My least favourite	Comics + magazines - "because they don't have very much excitement, they only have little square pictures, with lots of them + words to read." ①

1. Do you prefer reading words or pictures? Why?
Words because it's easier. When it's pictures you get too interested in the pictures + it stops you reading the book.

2. What can words tell you that pictures can't?
Words can tell you information but pictures just can tell you what it looks like.

3. What can pictures tell you that words can't?
They can tell you what they (info/words) look like
It's showing you extra detail

you don't get as much info as the pics when you just read words.
Words can give you a bit of info. but not as much as pictures.
If you had a picture of a messy room with a mouse on the floor the picture tells you straight away + the words don't.

(Continued)

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Figure 1.4 (Continued)

George

4. Is there a difference between what moving pictures and still pictures can do?

Yes - still pictures are good but moving pictures are more interesting for me.

Moving pics like Shrek can talk but still pics don't.
Noises and music as well.

5. Choose a book with words and pictures and use one double page spread to explain to a friend or your teacher:

Which you look at first - words or pictures

The pictures because they told me what's going on first + the words tell me what else is going on in the story

How you read the page as a whole - where do you start?

I started with the words, you can't read pictures

- Pics. I always look at the pictures first. I can get more detail e.g. the words don't tell you the man has a moustache

I started reading the pictures

6. Find a piece of work you've done recently where you've used words and pictures/diagrams and explain to your friend or a teacher:

What you were showing through the pictures and what you were using the words to explain.

I chose big bold pictures with lots of details for my reader. I have used close up shots as well. I used yellow and white colours to make it stand out. I was careful to put full stops in the right places. I made some parts sad by using grey and black colours.

Does the text do what you wanted it to do? How?

Yes, I used arrows on my plan and in my work so the reader knew where to read next.

Could you have done it better if you had used pictures or writing in a different way?

Yes, to do more pages to make it like a real story book because it's a fake one

Would it have been better if you could have done it on the computer? How?

Yes I could have included a bit more detail and some frames.

comics and magazines because they don't have very much excitement, they only have little square pictures with lots of them and words to read.

However, before the project, he saw words as more important than images: *when you get too interested in the pictures it stops you reading the whole book.* His

Figure 1.5 Ben's responses to the Multimodal Texts survey

Ben

Before Project **Surveying Children's Experience of Multimodal Texts** **After Project**

Tick the things you read, write, watch or play at home:

- Comics
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Television
- Computer games
- Information on the internet
- e-mails
- texting
- Books with word and no pictures
- Books with pictures
- ... other things [add anything here that isn't listed]

Which of them do like best? Number them 1, 2 and 3.

Which do you like least? Underline just one.

List them in the grid and fill in the answers:

My best choices	Does it have more pictures or more words?
1 <u>Computer games</u>	pictures, some words
2 <u>television</u>	has loads + loads of pictures, some words
3 <u>books with pictures</u>	pictures
My least favourite	<u>Newspapers</u> because it's got information that's not for children

1. Do you prefer reading words or pictures? Why?

Words because reading pictures you can get detail but not the actual words

2. What can words tell you that pictures can't?

Words can tell you a lot of info. but pics can't really tell you a lot of info.

3. What can pictures tell you that words can't?

Pictures help tell you what the words are because they are actually doing it.

- pictures because they are interesting

- don't know because they both give you detail.

extra things like in the background, dark or light, different colours

(Continued)

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Figure 1.5 Continued

Ben

4. Is there a difference between what moving pictures and still pictures can do?

You have to read the book out + don't move around. Videos (films) tell you the words + it goes a lot faster. You don't have to read it.

They both move because you turn the page. Still pics - you have words too. Moving pics give you more ideas.

5. Choose a book with words and pictures and use one double page spread to explain to a friend or your teacher:

- Which you look at first - words or pictures
(pointed to) pictures first
- How you read the page as a whole - where do you start?
I look at the pictures + then the words

Pictures first because you need to see the extra detail

—same response.

6. Find a piece of work you've done recently where you've used words and pictures/diagrams and explain to your friend or a teacher:

- What you were showing through the pictures and what you were using the words to explain.
Pictures - details of a rocket. My 1st page had a rocket + some words with 4 more pictures on the other side with lots of ideas for the reader.
- Words - I put words in the middle to include lots of details to go with the pictures
- Does the text do what you wanted it to do? How?
Yes - I wanted it to turn out funny but sad as well. At the end I gave my baboon a guitar to cheer him up + some pics were sad. I used some close-ups because I thought my reader needs to see close detail.
- Could you have done it better if you had used pictures or writing in a different way?
I wanted to include more long shots on the end with extra words but I didn't have time.
- Would it have been better if you could have done it on the computer? How?
I think it would have been better on the computer because you can get it what size you want + you can type it in right.

answers to questions 2 and 3 about the specific functions of words and pictures show some understanding of the affordances of the different modes, but in question 5, he says, 'Oh no, you can't read the pictures.'

After the project he still retains his liking for moving image texts and is able to articulate the differences between the modes used in multimodal texts and picture books, identifying the fact that films have dialogue, sound effects and music, but still pictures do not. He has also shifted his ideas about the role of images in reading when he says, '*You don't get as much information ... when you just read the words.*'

Ben (Fig. 1.5) also prefers visual texts, but again, before the project, he sees writing as more important because pictures tell the reader *what the words are*. He does not regard reading moving images as reading at all. In response to question 4, he says:

You have to read the book and don't move around. Videos tell you the words and it goes a lot faster, you don't have to read it.

After the project he feels confident to say that he prefers reading pictures but thinks that words and pictures have equal weight. In response to question 2, he says, '*Both give you the detail.*' He has also developed a more assured vocabulary to talk about what pictures contribute to meaning. He now sees pictures as adding to what words can tell the reader: *extra things like in the background, dark or light, different colours.*

ACTIVITY: FINDING OUT WHAT CHILDREN KNOW ABOUT MULTIMODAL TEXTS

Colleagues might use the Survey of Children's Experience of Multimodal Texts in Fig. 1.3 (CD-ROM) to find out about children's existing knowledge and preferences. The first questions can be answered without any prior work, but it may be worth planning a teaching sequence which includes multimodal texts before asking for responses to question 6.

Developing a vocabulary to describe multimodal texts

The surveys and responses before and after the project show that children bring a good deal of multimodal text experience into the classroom and that they are capable of making choices about their preferences. However, this raw experience deserves building on so that they can maximise their knowledge and experience. Andrea Blythe's account of her classroom work explains the process.

14 Visual Approaches to Teaching Writing**CLASSROOM ACCOUNT: PLANNING AND MAKING
PICTURE BOOKS WITH YEARS 1/2**

My Years 1/2 class had already had some experience of reading film and before I started the three-week unit on picture books I reminded them of the moving image work we had done. I chose Anthony Browne's books as a basis for the picture-book project because they offer strong models of how words and pictures work together to intrigue the reader. I used *Shape Game* as a starting point because I was sure it would engage the children as we looked at the text in detail. This book requires the children to spot differences in the illustrations and focus on how the visual text communicates meaning to readers. I followed this up by reading *Changes* and *Gorilla* to help the children see that the same author can use pictures and words in different kinds of combinations. *Changes* shows how themes and the storyline conveyed in the visual text influence a reader's feelings. With *Gorilla*, I wanted to draw attention to how the style of the visual text works on the reader's emotions. I particularly focused on Anthony Browne's use of colour to communicate sadness and the size and placement of figures on the page to carry messages about relationships. In independent sessions, we spent time on drawing and drama to help the children explore the messages in the book.

While we were planning the picture books, I modelled storyboarding, talking through making choices of what to include in my book, how I was going to use pictures and words to complement each other. I reminded them about how camera angles, close-ups, mid- and long shots, colour and placing of pictures can influence the reader's (or viewer's) feelings. The children used dictaphones to record their ideas before beginning their storyboards so that they could get ideas together instantly without worrying about the secretarial skills of writing. It also helped a lot with redrafting. The children worked with their usual editing/response partners. I had allowed a couple of sessions for the children's planning process, but as we were working, it became clear that the children would need an extended period of time to complete their plans if their ideas were going to be properly developed. They were so involved and engaged in the work that I was happy to take the time for them to complete the stories to their satisfaction.

I also had to adjust my plans for the sessions completing the picture books. As I was modelling planning for layout, I returned to the books we had used for shared reading, hiding the written text and asking the children to decide what Anthony Browne could have written to add further meaning for the reader. At this stage, I focused in more detail on the contrast between the written text and the visual text in Browne's books. I asked four key questions to prompt the children's thinking:

- Do the words say what the characters are feeling?
- If not, why not?
- How/what information do the pictures give the reader?
- How does Anthony Browne make the words and pictures give some different messages to the reader about the same story?

We returned to the questions throughout the drafting and presenting processes to keep the children focused on the ways they wanted the different modes to work to make their own stories engaging for the reader. They chose colours carefully, both for the pages of their books and for the pictures themselves. As Reece's example shows, their final books drew imaginatively on the Anthony Browne books we had studied.

I had wanted the children to 'become authors' during this unit of work, and I was pleased that they felt so much pride in their work. They took a great deal of time and care over their work, as real authors do. One thing I discovered was that the planning and thinking process needed as much time as the writing and making of the book – and from their response to the surveys after the work was finished, it was well worth the time!

When we returned to the survey, I asked the children to explain their choices of pictures and words. I was impressed with the way that all of them were able to reflect on and talk about their books. For instance, George talked about perspective and colour as well as about his writing:

I chose big bold pictures with lots of detail for my reader. I have used close-up shots as well. I used yellow and white colours to make it stand out. I was careful to put full stops in the right places. I made some points sad by using grey and black colours.

And Ben was very clear about how he wanted to reach the reader's emotions:

Yes, I wanted it to turn out funny but sad as well. At the end I gave my baboon a guitar to cheer him up and some other pictures were sad. I used some close-ups because I thought my reader needed to see close detail.

Reece does not find writing particularly easy, but his 'chameleon' story was a real triumph for him (Fig. 1.6a). He certainly shows how he, like Ben and George, latched on to the idea of using different layout and colour to create mood and get the reader involved. He also shows choice in framing, as sometimes he opts for a full-page image and at other times uses small frames (cut out and stuck on a coloured background). Equally, he is careful about the placing of the words in relation to the images, designing his whole book with varied layout.

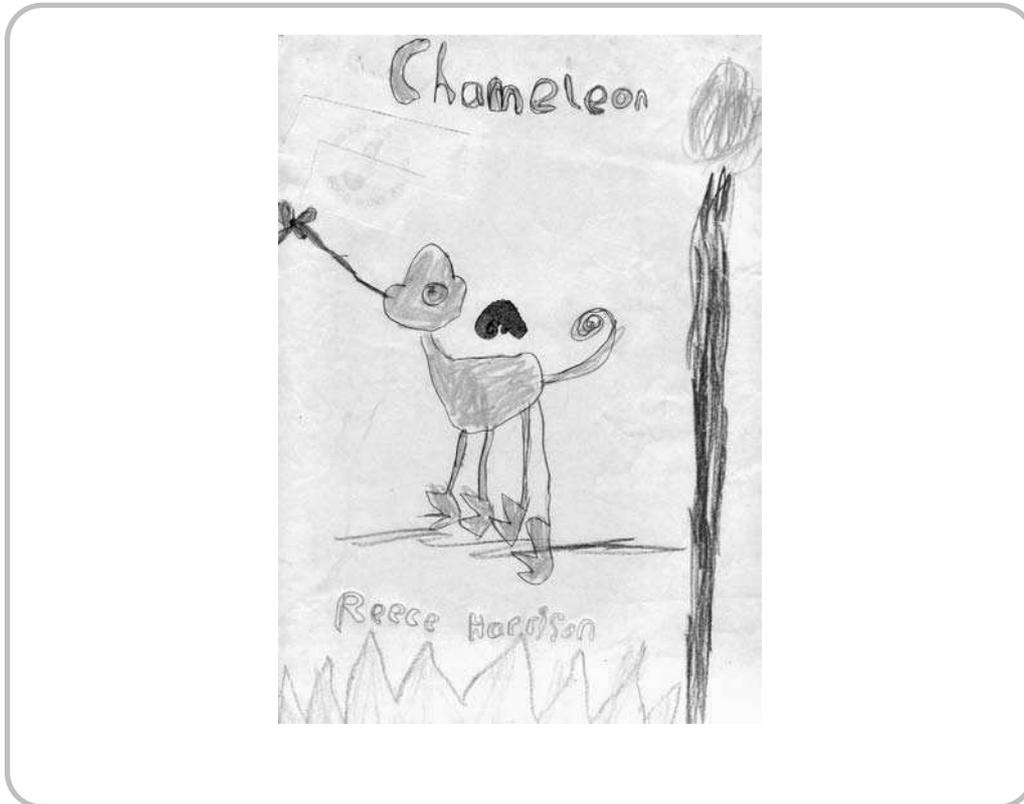
The whole of Reece's book is shown on the CD-ROM. Some pages are included here.

He is not very confident about writing but got very involved in making his book. His story begins: *Harry was playing a game. It had a chameleon in it. It was catching a fly.*

His second page is a full-page spread which is almost entirely black with Harry in the middle, suggesting the character's gloom. The words on the facing page say: *Harry told his dad that he wanted to go to the zoo.* He places this bald sentence centrally and illustrates it with a dark, gloomy image, telling the reader that, like Hannah in Anthony Browne's *Gorilla*, there was not much chance that Harry's father would take him to the zoo.

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Figure 1.6a Chameleon cover



On the third page, Reece turns the page to a portrait with a centrally placed picture of the chameleon and the words: *Harry went to bed. He was so excited because it was his birthday.* The fourth double-page spread has the words: *Harry got a toy chameleon but Harry wanted a real chameleon and after it grew bigger.* The image on the facing page shows three small frames with images of a toy chameleon getting bigger in each frame.

For the fifth spread, Reece returns to a single page with an image of Harry lying down with the speech bubble 'Well' and a large chameleon beside him. Underneath are the words: *Harry was amazed and the chameleon was so big* (Fig. 1.6b).

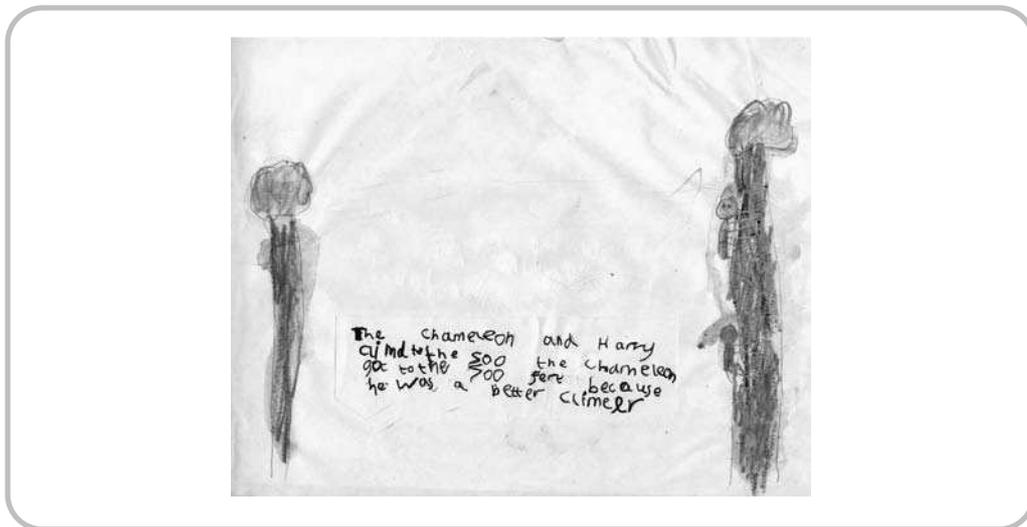
Again Reece varies the layout, as in the sixth spread he places the words between two trees with the chameleon and Harry climbing the right-hand tree to get into the zoo: *The chameleon and Harry climbed to the zoo and the chameleon got to the zoo first because he was the better climber* (Fig. 1.6c).

The final page is again presented as a portrait with a small image of Harry and his father (who has not appeared in the picture text before) and the words: *'Hooray' said Harry we are going to the zoo and this is a secret we are going again!!* (Fig. 1.6d).

Figure 1.6b *Chameleon*, fifth double-page spread



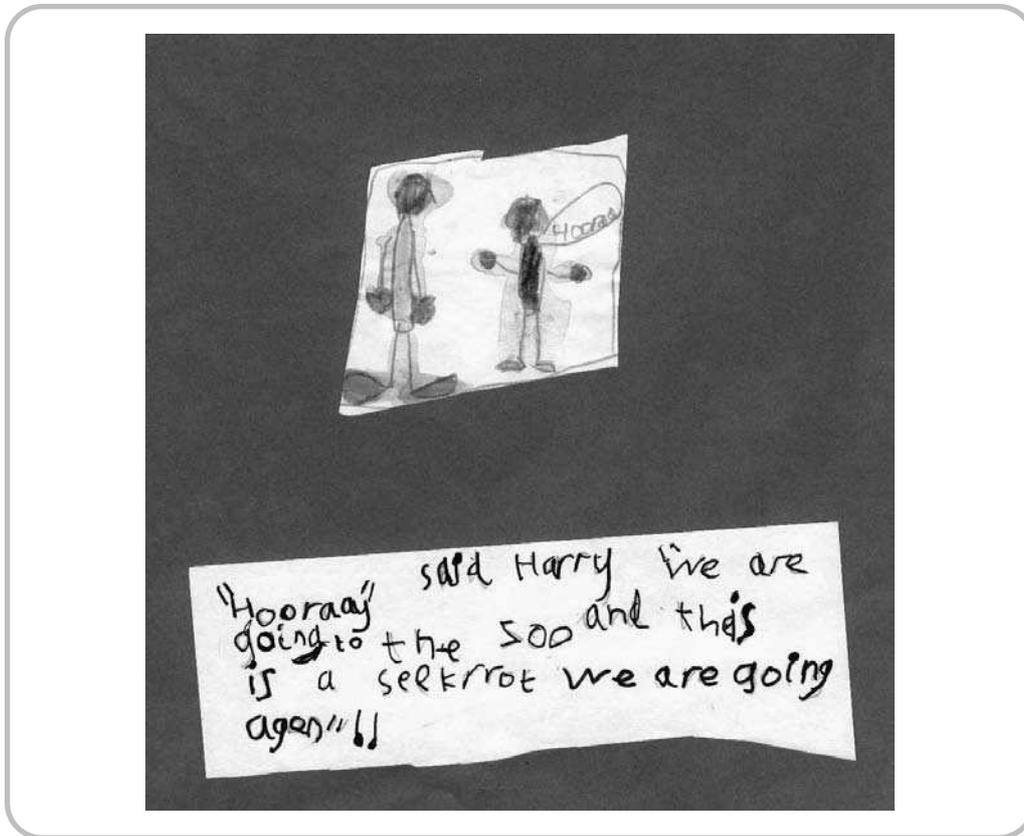
Figure 1.6c *Chameleon*, sixth double-page spread



This last page is particularly clever because Reece is signalling that although Harry's father has agreed to take him to the zoo, the reader and Harry share the secret that he is 'going again' because the chameleon had already granted his wish and taken him to the zoo. Reece, like the others in the class, has

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Figure 1.6d *Chameleon*, final double-page spread



become a successful author who can suggest subtleties of meaning through the multimodal text.

Andrea Blythe, Cann Hall Primary School, Clacton-on-Sea, Essex

ACTIVITY: TALKING ABOUT WORDS AND PICTURES

Andrea's questions (adapted here) can be a good starting point for readers of any age to tackle the way a complex picture book works:

- Do the words say what the characters are feeling?
- If not, why not?
- How/what information do the pictures give the reader?
- Does the author make the words and pictures give different messages to the reader about the same story? How?

Popular cultural texts and writing

Andrea Blythe's Years 1/2 class shows how children can draw on models of published picture books to help them explore their own combinations of words and images. However, as the surveys show, many of the multimodal texts that children prefer to read, view and play are those they enjoy at home. They are part of the popular literacies which children have available to enhance their classroom learning (Marsh and Millard, 2006). There are some problems, however, about using popular cultural texts in the classroom. First of all, teachers may be unaware of what children do read and view at home. Then there are tensions about bringing children's home text experience into the classroom: these are, after all, their personally preferred texts, providing a special type of pleasure which is distinct from the satisfactions of classroom learning.

There is no doubt that teaching multimodality should be firmly based on what children know. However, their text experience drawn from home is necessarily implicit. They may know how texts work to engage and entertain them, but at a subconscious level. Building on their implicit knowledge of modes, media and affordances and what they offer for composition and writing means explicitly discussing how texts work to express ideas. The following examples from a Years 3/4 class show how children's knowledge of computer games encouraged them to be more adventurous in writing stories. Over the course of five afternoon sessions, the class used what they knew about computer games as a basis for retelling the story of Little Red Riding Hood.² After they had written these stories, they used images captured from a Lara Croft computer game to plan another story.

The following extracts show how the children drew on their knowledge of some of the features of games to write inventive accounts of Red Riding Hood's journey to her grandmother's house. Millie uses the familiar choice of pathways:

...and suddenly I come to a fallen tree. I looked inside the fallen tree and found the key to grandma's house and I crawled out the other side. Then I came to the place where there were three paths. 1 was a bumpy path and a winded path and a squared path I chose the winded path....

Sylviana includes collecting, another familiar feature of computer games:

... Little Red Riding Hood set off. Granny's house was on the other side of the wood. First of all she came to the woods and saw some jam tarts so she picked them up....

... About 5 minutes later she saw 3 strange, different paths. They had numbers on them. 1 was curvy. 2 was straight. 3 was a zig-zagy path.....

John puts obstacles in the way of Red Riding Hood:

Once upon a time there was a girl called Little Red Riding Hood or Ribon for short.

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Ribon's grandma was very ill. So she decided to take a basket of cupcakes to grandma.

So Ribon took cupcakes to her grandma and she met some obstacles on her way.

There were spider webs, paths, woodpiles and stiles.

But the most dangerous of them all was a **BIG BAD WOLF!**

Ribon met the wolf and the wolf chase ribbon into his trap. Fortunately for Little Red Riding Hood the wolf had dropped the key....

The Red Riding Hood stories were enlivened by the knowledge of game patterns, but after using pictures to plan their stories, almost all the class wrote in a distinctly different way, including movement and sound as well as familiar computer game features. Millie begins in the third person but moves into first-person narration as she becomes more involved in the story. She describes action, movement and space to take the reader with her:

One day Jenna was crouching by a very tall building. Then she slowly jumped up and quietly walked off to this huge drain pipe. That went to the top window of the building that she was crouching outside of before. Then she went inside hanging from the railings and hiding from the two guards that looked very serious. Then when the guards looked straight ahead I snook past the guards and I found myself in this dark gloomy room with a blue laptop that opened an oval door when you press special buttons....

In contrast with the subdued use of verbs in her Red Riding Hood story, Sylviana's story is also full of strong movement:

One day Lizzie Lovet went on an adventure. She was crouching on top of the highest building in the world (that's in New York). She had a long thick rope in her back-pack which was very very heavy. Lizzie yanked out the rope and slung it on the next building's chimney. She held on very tightly and jumped off the building and crashed with a big **BANG!** ...

After using pictures from a real computer game to plan narratives, many of the children gave the reader the 'backstory' as an introduction. John tells the reader:

After escaping from Lumcet's killer bunny factory our hero has landed on a roof top in China. She must go through the local museum and on the way avoid patrols. Lara slipped into the museum.

She found a laptop by a door. She used the laptop to open the door and there in front of her were some lasers.

These examples suggest that children can use their knowledge of popular cultural texts, including computer games, to good effect to enliven their writing. Although they are presenting a written form, children draw on other modes – movement, sound and pictures in their minds – to add zest to their narrative writing.

This book explores the potential of multimodal texts to enhance children's composition, offering classroom accounts, planning frameworks and digital resources to help make the most of what children bring into the classroom from their everyday multimodal experience.

Summary

Multimodality involves the complex interweaving of word, image, gesture and movement, and sound, including speech. These can be combined in different ways and presented through a range of media. Children are surrounded by multimodal texts so that it becomes imperative to teach multimodality if they are to realise their potential as communicators in the twenty-first century. In teaching children about language and literacy, including reading and writing on screen as well as on paper, it is worth finding out just what they know about the texts they encounter inside and outside school. Maximising children's potential as writers and multimodal authors means explicitly:

- teaching about how texts, modes and media work, separately and in combination
- helping children to become selective in matching mode and media with purpose and in making appropriate choices for specific audiences
- using children's home experience of texts and technology in the classroom, and developing critical awareness of how to read images, sound, design, posture and movement as well as words.

Notes

1 Adam's text and poster first appeared in an article by Eve Bearne, 'Rethinking literacy: communication, representation and text' in *Literacy* [a journal of the United Kingdom Literacy Association] 37 (3) November 2003, pp98–103. We are grateful for permission to reprint these images.

2 For a full account of the work, see Bearne, E. and Wolstencroft, H. (2005) 'Playing with possibilities: children and computer texts' in Marsh, J. and Millard, E. (eds) *Popular Literacies, Childhood and Schooling*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.