

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

## Editors

Tawnya Smith  
Boston University

Kelly Bylica  
Boston University

Jeanmarie Higgins  
The Pennsylvania State University

Rose Martin  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Merel Visse  
Drew University

<http://www.ijea.org/>

ISSN: 1529-8094

---

Volume 24 Number 11

July 24, 2023

## Picturing Creativity: Three Picture Books

Danielle Terceiro  
Alphacrusion University College, Australia

Citation: Terceiro, D. (2023). Picturing creativity: Three picture books. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 24(11).  
<http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea24n11>

### Abstract

This article examines three picture books: *The Dot* (2003) by Peter H. Reynolds, *Art & Max* (2010) by David Weisner (2010), and *The Shape Game* (2003) by Anthony Browne, to see how ideas about creativity are conceived of and pictured for children. Various ideas about creativity and the creative process are encoded in these multimodal texts: the idea of a creative genius putting their unique stamp or signature on the world, the idea of an apprentice artist learning to use the tools of the trade, and the idea of the artist as a playful manipulator of cultural signs. Each of these picture book encodings of creativity has implications for a classroom pedagogy that seeks to encourage creativity and nurture quality creative output.

## Introduction

The picture book is a medium that adults use to teach children about art and the creative process, and it is also a medium in which adults encourage children to engage in their own creative expression. This paper will examine three picture books that are preoccupied with creative processes and the production of artistic works: *The Shape Game* (2003) by Anthony Browne, *The Dot* (2003) by Peter H. Reynolds, and *Art & Max* (2010) by David Weisner (2010). These texts explore creativity within and through the media of painting and drawing. Alongside their verbal text (written words) they cannot help but feature what the picture theorist W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) refers to as *metapictures*: pictures that reflect on pictures. This article will consider how the “visual grammar” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998) within each of these texts inscribes different notions of creativity. Ultimately, each of these picture books positions its young audience as a certain kind of creative artist and implies different notions of classroom pedagogy for teachers. Before undertaking this textual analysis, the article reviews research on creativity and the identification and nurturance of creative talent.

### *Describing Creativity*

“Creativity” has typically been defined with respect to what a creative person produces: work that is both novel (i.e. original and unexpected) and appropriate (i.e. useful, adaptive concerning task constraints) (Sternberg & Lubart, 1998). Creativity occurs across the fields of human endeavour, and thus creative works can include scientific and technological innovations, as well as artistic works such as poems and paintings. It is, however, the latter category- the creative arts- in which there tends to be less consensus about how to determine the value of creative output. In some cases, history provides a perspective that allows us to appreciate the creativity of a work that was judged either too unconventional or too conventional in its original context (Gilhooly, 2007). Creative thinkers are able to combine concepts to generate new ideas (Mumford, 2003), and highly creative artistic works may signal and exemplify a new style (Gilhooly, 2007). Divergent thinking, thinking outside accepted conventions, and problem-solving, are important aspects of creativity (Scott et al., 2004). Highly creative individuals, then, have the potential to transform a whole field of endeavour- to exert influence and to show creative leadership during their period of output.

Subjective judgments cannot be avoided in the appreciation of a creative work, and difficulties arise when an “objective standard” of creativity is used. Social approaches to creativity have sought to work around these difficulties. The “systems perspective” proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1999), for example, recognises that while there is no *objective* standard by which to evaluate creative work, the interaction between producer and audience constructs standards of creativity. The “gatekeepers” of each field can help judge the extent to which someone’s contribution to a field is creative.

Definitions of creativity also struggle to account for the fact that children can be creative producers of work even when they are not yet in a position to contribute meaningfully to a field. There is now a common distinction made between “little-c” or everyday creativity, and “big-C” or eminent or genius creativity (Barbot et al., 2011). It is rare to find evidence of big-C creative achievement in a school setting, and so psychologists concede that tests for creativity that focus on completed work are more adapted for adults who already have achieved eminence in a creative domain through their creative output (Barbot et al., 2011). Indeed, Sosa & van Dijk (2022) undertook a recent review of the little-c / big-C distinction, and conclude that it is a false dichotomy that should be approached critically by scholars to avoid conflating generative and evaluative dimensions of creativity. Brandt (2021) asserts that the standard definitions of creativity are problematic when applied to children, because “children don’t need to produce a change in culture; and their work doesn’t need to be useful. All that is required is that they be interested in going beyond imitation and making things they haven’t seen before” (p. 90).

Does the identification of creativity in fact *require* evidence in the form of a completed work—a tangible product, or a performance for an audience? Runco (2015) rejects this assumption, and instead emphasises the experiential aspect: “Creativity gives us rich, meaningful experiences. It adds to our experience, most obviously in an aesthetic way, but also in the sense that creative things keep us mindful and engaged” (p. 27). Creativity is thus recognized as a posture of engagement that is a healthy and rich way to respond to the world, without it requiring output that is recognised as “creative” in a social context.

The “Genevlore model” is one that emphasises the cognitive factors that are at play as *precursors* to the completion of any creative work (see Ward et al., 1998). A particular class of mental structures, called *preinventive structures*, play an important part in creative exploration and discovery. Examples of preinventive structures include symbolic visual patterns and diagrams, representations of three-dimensional objects and forms, mental blends of basic concepts, exemplars of novel or hypothetical categories, mental models representing physical or conceptual systems, and verbal combinations that give rise to new associations and insights (Ward et al., 1998). Furst and Ghisletta (2012) studied the creative process in art schools and found that a high level of idea generation throughout a creative process was linked to higher quality creative output, illustrating the importance of exploration and idea production in the creative process. The thinking patterns of highly creative people tend to be different: the patterns are often less rigid and more breakable into sub-parts, than the thinking patterns of less creative people (Kenett et al., 2014). Li et al (2021) researched the semantic networks of those individuals who have the ability to produce creative metaphors, and found that they have the ability to break away from their existing cognitive associations and to search through neighbouring nodes to find more apt, novel and interesting properties for their

creative metaphors. The ability to make new connections among remote associations is important to creativity (Kenett et al., 2014, p. 2). Semantic creativity can be observed in the use of “high-order” language such as language that incorporates irony, humor and metaphor (Kent et al., 2014, p. 1). Horng et al. (2020) recommend what they refer to as “conceptual combination training programs” to encourage students to combine two or more distinct concepts in a new and novel way (p. 385).

Creativity can be nurtured through the development of technical skill over time and the formation of identity as an artist familiar with the discourse in a field. The development of technical skills in an art studio, for example, can help nurture an artistic identity, and reinforce reflective habits of mind that more closely align what is creatively produced with the student’s personal ideas, feelings, or meanings (Rostan, 2010). Research into the lives of painters, poets and composers through the centuries suggests that “10 years of silence” are required before the production of an original masterpiece (Prager, 2012). Duchamp referred to these years of his creative formation as his “swimming lessons” (see Prager, 2012, p. 274). Once an artist becomes established in their field, the creative process then moves on to preoccupy itself with the exploration of themes, abstract theory generation, and the development of a personal aesthetic (Mace & Ward, 2002). The development of an artist’s distinct and unique creative identity can thus be experienced as intensely personal, at the same time as it is shaped by ideas and discourses that have currency within a particular field of artistic endeavour.

### ***Depicting creativity in the visual arts***

Verbal discussion of creativity in the context of the visual arts is difficult, because creativity here involves the creation of novel, useful ways of communicating through *visual* meaning. The essence of art has been described as the “creation of code”, and in paintings and drawings we can encounter new forms and unknown relations between these forms (Muhovic, 1997, p. 218). Verbal communication may not be the most helpful or efficient way of communicating about this new code. Verbal communication on its own may also struggle to catch up to the meaning-making potential of art at the end of a creative cycle- to be able to describe artistic choices that make meaning out of previously unused materials. On the other hand, the fact that these areas of artistic production may have been less subject to “semiotic policing” in the past also means that there is more room for individual possibilities of creative expression (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 217).

W.J.T Mitchell is a picture theorist whose work on “metapictures” shows how visual material can itself communicate about the creative process. A metapicture is a picture that refers to itself or to another picture of a different type, or a picture that shows what a picture is (Mitchell, 1994). In this schema, a metapicture can refer to itself as a creative form of artistic expression, and it can also refer to the broader world of artistic production and aesthetic

judgment. Metapictures are in themselves a creative form of artistic expression that can be a means of commenting on the nature of creativity itself. Accordingly, metapictures can require some contemplative effort to decode. They imply a viewer willing to pause and take in the layers of “picturality” within the image. Metapictures can be themselves the site of a sophisticated discourse, of creative transformation and/or the deconstruction of creative processes (Grønstad and Vågnes, 2006). Picture books about art and the creative process are apt sites for metapictures.

The picture book format is one that allows for a creative playfulness, and thus is an appropriate format to depict creativity. This playfulness can exist between verbal and visual text, that is, between written words and images. The boundaries between the two may be blurred. For example, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 179) note that text can form part of the “visual material” of a composition, and this blurring of boundaries can be creative.

Picture books can help facilitate a creative engagement with art history. Picture books that parody and appropriate art validate the use of imagination in creating meaningful experiences (Yohlin, 2012). By aiding in interpretation of an art object a picture book can ask the viewer to “go beyond the surface and involve oneself with the image beyond the frame” (p. 271). Evans (2009) encourages readers to celebrate picture books as a form of art, and notes that picture books that reference art works have a dual function in that readers are invited to think about and respond to both art forms (p. 181). There is the danger, however, that texts for children that enculture them into the world of fine art could actually work to discourage small-c creativity in the classroom. Stone & Hess (2020) found that many art teachers hold what they refer to as the “creative genius perspective”: the idea that creative expression requires little effort, and is mysterious and innate. This perspective emphasises originality above all, and evolution of a unique artistic voice. When this perspective is combined with a pedagogical approach that requires children to engage with the masterpieces in art museums, distorted ideas about creativity may result, and children may lose confidence in their artistic potential (p. 374).

The remaining sections of the article consider how ideas about creativity and the creative process are encoded in picture books through word and image, and the interactions between word and image. Because these picture books all evoke learning contexts- the classroom, an art gallery, and an artistic apprenticeship – they imply an audience of both teachers and students interested in engaging with creative processes. Each of these picture book encodings of creativity has different implications for classroom pedagogy.

### ***The Dot: The Artistic Genius***

The journey taken by the child in *The Dot* is a quick journey from mark-making in the classroom, to acceptance as an eminent artist “making her mark” in the world of abstract art. The first work that Vashti hands her teacher is a dot: “Vashti grabbed a felt-tipped pen and gave the paper a good, strong jab”. The next week Vashti notes that the teacher had hung a picture of the dot above her desk: “It was the little dot she had drawn – HER DOT! All framed in swirly gold!” The child’s artistic journey thus begins with a teacher signalling to her that any mark she makes- even a dot- can be a unique form of artistic expression. *The Dot* thus encodes an idea that creative output requires little effort- it is rather a product of innate traits that cannot help but be displayed in a childish gesture or flourish. Childish impulsivity is valorised as creative.

The narrative arc of *The Dot* suggests that the most intense period of creative exploration for an artist occurs *after* they have become eminent, and after they have decided upon which visual forms they wish to explore more deeply in their output. Vashti considers that her first important creative output is “HER DOT”: she understands that she can have a kind of ownership of a signature form (a dot), and from then on, she explores this form in different ways- through colour, size (of materials and medium), and the dot as a void on a filled background. Her creativity is abstract, and her creativity involves working within a framework of self-imposed restrictions (she works only with the “dot” concept throughout the book). Vashti’s idea of creativity is like the creativity of artists within different abstract art movements, who restricted themselves to a few narrowly-defined artistic concepts. Art in this context was meant to be stripped of individual ideals and ambitions, regarded as conveying impersonal, immutable, absolute values (Bocola, 1999). Through repetition, variation, and standardisation, the artist developed the “hallmark” of his or her art (Bocola, 1999, p. 467). At the same time as Vashti’s art conveys universal values, then, it is also individualistic. *The Dot* sets Vashti aside to creatively explore her options within an artistic bubble, rather than locating her within a community of practice.

The handwritten signature is another important way for Vashti to make her creative mark: “Well, maybe I can’t draw, but I CAN sign my name.” When Vashti jabs her first dot, the teacher “pushed the paper towards Vashti and quietly said, ‘Now sign it.’” Signing her work with her name is a way for Vashti to claim an ownership over her “hallmark”. The idea that handwriting is an important way of “making a mark” is reinforced by the author’s choice to hand letter the book, and to note that fact at the end of the book. In this way Reynolds has placed his own “signature” within the book.



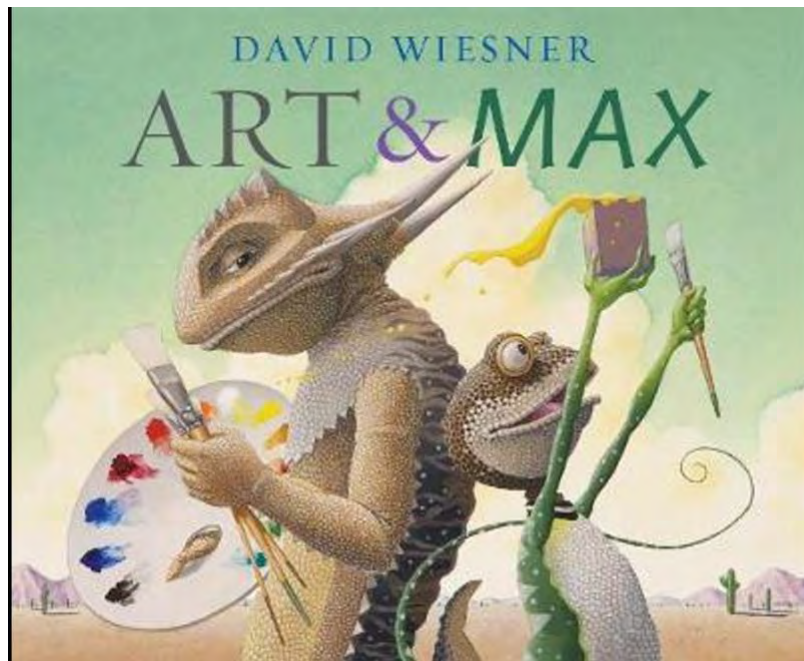
Figure 1. *The Dot*, cover.

*The Dot* (Figure 1) jumps very quickly from a teacher's observation of small-c creativity in the classroom, to the student's big-C creativity in the wider artistic world. Opening ten in *The Dot* depicts an exhibition of Vashti's work at the school art show a few weeks after making her first dot. The picture of the exhibition extends across two pages. At the far right there are three viewers of Vashti's work, each holding some sort of printed programme. Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) consider that the left-right directionality of a visual composition can be understood as the movement from the "given" to the "new" (pp. 179-185). The spectators on the right represent a "new" element in Vashti's story: her artwork is now part of an official art "scene" and is subject to a type of art criticism, as shown by the art programmes. At the same time this new audience sits within abstract art's ideology of silent meditation (see Mitchell, 1994, p. 225) - all three spectators are standing separately from each other, looking directly at the art. They are around the corner from Vashti, and at the vanishing point of the picture. Closer to the gutter of the page, and the corner, is a boy who is looking towards Vashti and pointing towards her with a fully outstretched arm. This vector created by the pointing boy draws us back from right to left, to reconsider Vashti, who is on the far left. Vashti is the "given" in this picture, but now we have to reconsider her in light of the fact that her works have been placed within the world of art, with its own audience, discourse and criticism. We are to reconsider her as an "artist". This is reinforced by the next page, where the boy tells Vashti "You're a really great artist". Vashti the artist is not looking at her drawings or the spectators, but at a sculpture which includes two circular forms. Like many other openings, Vashti is surrounded by a watercolour dot: this dot is a soothing yellow colour and

encompasses both Vashti and the sculpture. Vashti is holding a large notebook: she appears to be on the lookout for creative inspiration. The dot highlights her special creativity, but it also places her within an artistic bubble. She is separate from the artistic world in which her works “have made a splash” and is not expected to contribute any conversation about her art. Her creativity and status as an artist set her apart from her audience. Vashti engages in conversation with the boy, but it is not conversation about her art, it is a conversation about how the boy can become an artist too (“‘I wish I could draw,’ he said. ‘I bet you can,’ said Vashti”). Vashti’s identity as an artist has imbued her with the confidence to encourage another young person to overcome their lack of confidence. Her encouragement to her peer implies that he can activate an innate artistic potential simply by the process of drawing, or mark-making.

### ***Art & Max: The Disruptive Apprentice***

*Art & Max* depicts the creative world of two lizard characters. From the beginning of *Art & Max*, the character Max is depicted as a force of disruption as he enters the settled, cultivated world of Art, a painting Master. “Art” of course, is a name that evokes Art’s vocation as an artist, and “Max” also is an evocative name, because the reader soon apprehends that Max’s impulsive form of engagement with the world is always set to maximum.



*Figure 2. Art & Max, cover.*



Max's disruptive force is cued by a playful interaction between word and image, and a blurring of the boundaries of what is visual or verbal text. The text in *Art & Max* only depicts the words spoken by Art and Max, and these words are depicted in different fonts, according to the speaker. Max's words are in an italic, sans serif font, and Art's words are in a traditional serif typeface. The qualities of the italic text- moving forward, not "weighed" down by traditional typeface attributes- are also present in the visual depiction of Max as he collides with Art in the first opening. Max is leaning forward, running at a tilt towards the next page. Art holds his ground but his painting materials fly out of his grasp. There is something disruptive of the status quo -a creative force, perhaps- at play in the multimodal representation of Art and Max in this opening.

*Art & Max* encodes an idea of artistic apprenticeship within an artistic community, and the importance of obtaining familiarity with the tools of the trade and the medium of artistic production. *Art & Max* uses metapictures to show Max's growing familiarity with his creative trade, and also breaks down the creative elements visually for the reader. A sequence of metapictures in *Art & Max* deconstructs different materials of artistic production by deconstructing Art himself. Max paints Art with oil paint, which cracks and disintegrates. Max then sees that Art is dusty (painted with pastels) and blows this colour away with a fan. When Art is left depicted in watercolour, Max offers him a drink and sees the colour wash out of Max. Max does not explain why he is doing these things to Art, and there is no verbal narration outside of spoken words to explain the background or motivation of the characters. The tenth opening shows Max's joy and surprise (arms thrown up in a kind of euphoric victory pose) at the latest deconstruction of Art. Max does not seem to know how his actions will impact Art, but his idea of creativity involves following impulse, and enjoying surprise outcomes.

*Art & Max* shows the transformation of an apprenticeship under a Master, and the self-conscious adoption of certain artistic postures and habits of mind. This transformation is seen most clearly at the closure of a series of metapictures that depict Max reconstructing Art after his line drawing has been pulled by Max and fallen into a tangle of thread. When Art is lying in a tangle, Max calls to "Arthur" for help- perhaps reverting to the formal full name of his acquaintance in the hope of conjuring some of the traditional, representational abilities of a fine artist for himself. In the next opening, when Max says "OK, here goes!" he has the same hand-on-chin gesture that Art had earlier when Max asked him what he should paint. Max has taken on the clichéd gesture of a reflective, cultivated artist. He now has to quash his impulsivity and try and try again to "draw" Art back into an acceptably representational form, as shown in the thirteenth opening, where Max attempts to pull the thread into a representation of Art..

*Art & Max* also shows that a Master can become more creative through interactions with an apprentice, even as they retain their authority as Master. The last opening of *Art & Max* shows Art enjoying some Jackson Pollock-style action painting, directly onto a cactus. Art has moved in the opposite direction to Max- he has moved towards an impulsive, gesture-directed mode of creativity. And even though Max's stance mirrors Art's "action painting" stance, he is applying paint to a traditional easel to a swirly though recognisable portrait of two lizards, which are posing nearby. In this opening Max and his easel are "framed" by the work of Art (or more specifically by Art's back and legs, extended arm and paintbrush, cactus and ground). This framing suggests that even though Art has moved to a style of painting like that of Jackson Pollock and other abstract expressionists, who "in their spontaneous and passionate devotion to the painterly act, [sought] to become one with their own feelings and to realise that unity in visual form" (Bocola, 1999, p. 397), he still wishes to retain some overarching authority over other aspiring artists who have not cultivated his traditional set of skills. In other words, Art is still a "gatekeeper" of what is considered an appropriate achievement in the field. Art's actions frame and relativize the work of Max, who is still learning the representational skills needed to be a "real artist".

The last opening of *Art & Max* thus implies that there is a proper framework in which to explore creativity: it is only when you have cultivated yourself as a fine artist and learnt representational skills that you can then break your own rules and have fun with the medium and the materials. Within this context the Master has an important role in reigning in and redirecting childish impulsivity and encouraging sustained and thoughtful attention to a task. However, there is something in this context to be re-learned by the Master of an impulsive apprentice: that action-filled gestures can help one to engage creatively (again) with a medium in a childlike way. In the last opening, Max is not as concerned with the quality of his final product as he is with enjoying a shared creative experience within his artistic community of practice.

### ***The Shape Game: The Creative Explorer***

*The Shape Game* uses metapictures to show a creative engagement with art that is encouraged by a family visit to the Tate Museum in London, which is represented as an important event for the main character in the formation of his identity as an artist. The first opening of this book sets up the adult narrator as an accomplished artist. The left-hand page shows a man drawing a picture, seated before an artist's drawing board, with an artist's paraphernalia on the ledge beside him. The right-hand page is a metapicture: it depicts the picture that is being completed by the artist on the left-hand side, and shows the hand drawing it. The hand is drawing an arrow at a boy ("me"- presumably the "artist" as a young boy), who is standing in front of a blank sheet. Unlike Dad, Mum, and George, the artist is not depicted as a picture

within a frame. The placing of the boy outside the frame, and the arrow, convey the idea that this boy has a special creative calling not shared by the other framed family members.

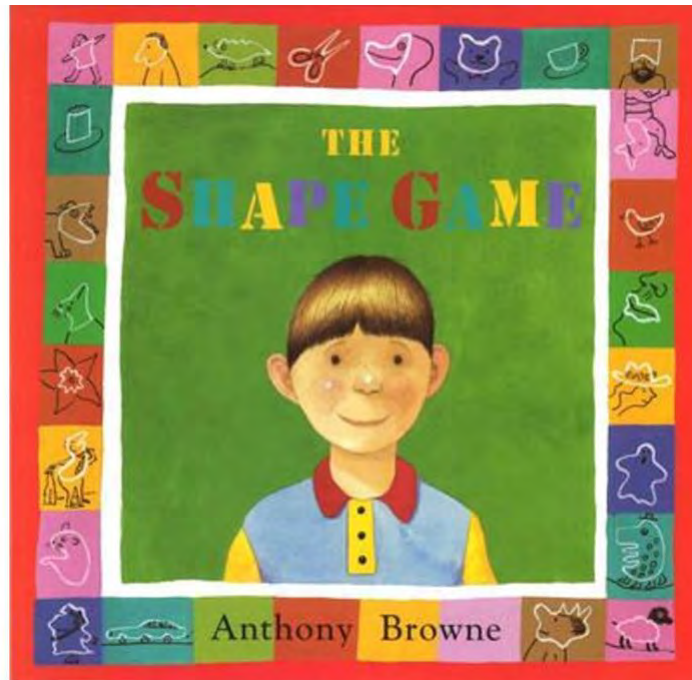


Figure 3. *The Shape Game*, cover.

Browne wrote *The Shape Game* after his period of residency at the Tate Britain gallery, and his introduction to the book explains that his intention during this time was to create a book based on responses to works of art in this collection, and to conduct workshops with children and their teachers. This picture book was designed to represent a learning process, and it was also designed to be part of this learning process. Even though it depicts a family, *The Shape Game* includes its implied audience, school teachers and their students, and it facilitates their connection within a broad community of practice that is interested in engaging with museum art.

Browne depicts an important part of the creative learning process as learning to decode the story of a painting. The ideas about creativity encoded in *The Shape Game* are linked to a process of learning about, and responding to, fine art. In the fifth opening of *The Shape Game*, the text points to different aspects of a painting the family has decoded together after “we all worked it out”. These include references to Adam and Eve and the Fall- the kind of literary allusions that were common in paintings of past centuries. The idea that every picture tells a story, and that a picture can be part of a larger story, equates, at this point in the picture book, to an idea of imagination as having a verbal and contemplative orientation.

*The Shape Game* includes many parodic versions of paintings which extend over a whole page, and in so doing it uses a higher order visual language to show a family making new and humorous associations as they engage with the artworks. The text thus models an important creative trait- the ability to make new connections among remote associations. These parodic versions of paintings are unframed and thus encode an idea of creative openness. Members of the narrator's family often replace the original characters of the gallery painting, highlighting the intense creative engagement of the whole family. The family's stories are mingling with the stories that they encounter in the gallery art. These pictures show that the family's playful engagement with high art is opening up a new, creative way of being. "Scavenging" from fine art works and turning them into parody shows that the very act of scavenging from fine art for one's own purposes can be a creative act in itself. The family are now involved in an active and collaborative generation of ideas.

*The Shape Game* depicts analogical thinking as an important part of the creative generation of ideas. This analogical thinking is encoded in images. Much of the fun of the art gallery experience is shown by replacing objects in paintings with isomorphic objects. This fun is explicitly encouraged in the "spot the difference" instruction in the two pictures in the sixth opening of *The Shape Game*, which swapped a rope for a snake, a hat for a cat, and so on. Something that could be real, but which is ridiculous in its context, is introduced into a setting. The parodic pictures have no text "commentary", and perhaps Browne's idea is to encourage readers to make their own effort to imagine new stories and possibilities for humorous disruption in these parodic pictures. As noted above, even just listing the similarities and differences between objects can contribute to creative thinking, and *The Shape Game* here provides an explicit lesson on this.

*The Shape Game* highlights the use of humor as an important generative aspect of creativity. The tenth opening contains a representation of *The Meeting, or Have a Nice Day Mr Hockney*, a Tate Gallery painting by Peter Blake (1981-1983), on the left hand page. The right page shows this painting reworked to incorporate multiple representations of the father in *The Shape Game*. This opening shows that even the annoying "dad jokes" of the father can be redeemed creatively, and turned into in-jokes within re-imagined versions of existing paintings. This picture, which is the last response to an art gallery painting in the story, accumulates many of the running "in-jokes" that the family has generated throughout the gallery visit into one picture. *All* the characters look like Dad, including the dog. There are many opportunities to "spot the difference" including a ridiculous return to a sausage motif with an oversize fork and sausage in place of a pole. The sense that the family's creative engagement with the art gallery has reached its fullness at this point is confirmed by the fact that the next opening says "It was time to go..."

The “shape game” which Mum introduces to the family at the end of the story is a way of extending the family’s newly-found creative playfulness to their interaction with the real world. The difference is now that the creativity works in a new way: the game starts with a shape that makes no representational sense (“it’s not supposed to be anything”), and the idea is to make this shape into something that corresponds with reality (“the next person has to change it into something”). There are echoes of *The Dot* here, and the teacher’s encouragement to “just make a mark and see where it takes you”. However, the difference in *The Shape Game* is that the idea of the game is to bring an impulsively drawn, non-mimetic shape towards a representation of something from reality. *The Shape Game* ends with a preinventive form of creative generation from the Geneplore model of creativity. The sense of this ending is that this form of explorative and open-ended playfulness with visual patterns and diagrams, as engaged throughout one’s childhood, can be an important part of an accomplished artist’s formation.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The three texts can be read as encouraging the creativity of young students: *The Dot* encourages a young creative genius, *Art & Max* encourages the older artist to recover some youthful playfulness and enjoy the creativity of their apprentice, and *The Shape Game* encourages a parodic playfulness as a way into serious art. However, the apparent similarity of theme is deceptively facile. In fact, the texts provide encouragement toward creativity in many different directions, and this is partly because the definition of creativity itself is multivariate. One of the central points of tension in the scholarly framing of creativity is the extent to which it can and should be framed as an individual trait or as a social construction. The texts could be placed along a continuum, with *The Dot* focusing most heavily on the potential of the individual to cultivate themselves as an artist; *Art & Max* setting up an intimate and intensive one-on-one instructional relationship to cover the “swimming years” of artistic formation, and *The Shape Game* implying an audience of parents and educators who wish to facilitate access to cultural capital for all young people.

*The Dot* constructs the idea of a creative person as someone set apart from their audience, someone with a purity of purpose and an interest in abstract, rather than representational forms. Even though twentieth century abstract movements in art are referenced in the artistic form that is produced, the idea of the artist that is implied is linked to earlier Romantic and individualistic ideas of the creative prodigy and their unique genius. It seems that it is enough to tell a child that they are an artist in order for them to immediately generate work that demonstrates big-C creativity. The child is able to transform culture, not by refining skills within a community of practice, but by being given permission to enlarge their artistic bubble through creative contemplation and the self-conscious adoption of an artistic posture. It seems prudent to ask: will the artistic gatekeepers, the gallery owners, the art critics burst this artistic

bubble and downgrade big-C creativity to little-c creativity at some point? Is it counter-productive to valorise eminent creativity- what makes its way to art gallery walls- in the pages of a picture book that starts in a classroom?

*Art & Max* takes the traditional representational artist as a starting point, deconstructs this idea of an artist pictorially, and ultimately encodes an idea of creativity as having fun and messing about with the material means of an accomplished artist. It shows that both the Master and their apprentice can be mutually transformed by an understanding of the creative process that emphasises fun and action, and minimises or defers the necessity for a finished, quality product. However, the Master in this framework always retains an underlying authority as a gatekeeper within their creative field, even as their role within the community of practice is fashioned more as a guide and facilitator than as a traditional teacher. Learning is always mediated by tools in this environment, and the Master is there to supervise and to rescue the apprentice when they inevitably get into a tangled mess using these tools of the creative trade. The Master is also there to reign in and redirect childish impulses, but also to refresh themselves with a more childlike (if not childish) approach to their art.

*The Shape Game* encourages its young audience to engage with public domain art through parodic messing about with symbols. The idea that is encoded in this text is that the creative fun that a child can have playing with symbols and shapes will, over time, help them to cultivate the skills of a “serious” artist as they grow into adults. It shows how parodic engagement with visual storytelling can itself model a form of higher order creative language. *The Shape Game* shows how to creatively deconstruct, and then reconstruct, examples of big-C creativity. The everyday, non-capitalised shape game, is also a form of creativity training, which forces the player to search their semantic networks for unexpected meaning. The text lets the reader into the mind of an accomplished artist, and shows some everyday habits of mind that this artist believes has contributed to their big-C creativity.

These three picture books suggest that there is no uniform approach to engaging children with art, and no uniform understanding of what the creative process should be for a child. A teacher’s approach will, of course, depend on the instructional context. Has the teacher identified a student who is clearly artistically gifted, and therefore feels an educator’s responsibility to nurture the talent and introduce the student to the tools of a trade? Or does the teacher feel that there is a responsibility to facilitate equitable access to fine art for all their students, and to break down any barriers that might hinder students’ creative confidence in engaging with cultural capital in a playful way? Each of these picture books shows a possible path of student engagement, and possible hurdles along the way: in *The Dot* a lack of student confidence; in *Art & Max* student impetuosity; and in *The Shape Game* it is an ambivalent attitude towards eminent art. The texts also suggest that an educator needs to engage in

different forms of professional development to hone pedagogical skills: in *The Dot* the teacher needs to understand educational psychology and what will motivate a child to produce creative output; in *Art & Max* the teacher needs to understand the tools of artistic trade and to have technical skills; and in *The Shape Game* the teacher needs to have an understanding of art history as well as the ability to deconstruct it with sophisticated humor and playfulness. An educator or a parent needs to take care when selecting picture book texts that thematize creativity, to ensure that what is intended as an encouragement does not position a student at odds with the pedagogy of a teacher and the existing creative culture of a classroom.

### References

- Barbot, B., Besancon, M., & Lubart, T. I. (2011). Assessing creativity in the classroom. *The Open Education Journal*, 4 (1), 58-66.  
[https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2174/1874920801104010058](https://doi.org/10.2174/1874920801104010058)
- Bocola, S. (1999). *The art of Modernism: Art, culture, and society from Goya to the present day*. Prestel.
- Brandt, A. (2021). Defining creativity: A view from the arts. *Creativity Research Journal*, 33(2), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2020.1855905>
- Browne, A. (2003). *The shape game*. Random House.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). Implications of a systems perspective for the study of creativity. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 313–335). Cambridge University Press.
- Evans, J. (2009). Creative and aesthetic responses to Picturebooks and Fine Art. *International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 37(2), 177-190.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004270902922094>
- Furst, G., Ghisletta, P., & Lubart, T. (2012). The Creative process in visual art: A longitudinal multivariate study. *Creativity Research Journal*, 24(4), 283–295.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2012.729999>
- Gilhooly, K. (2007). Creative thinking: the mystery myth. In S. Della Sala (Ed.), *Tall tales about the mind and brain: Separating fact from fiction* (pp. 172–190). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198568773.003.0013>
- Grønstad, A., & Vågnes, Ø. (2006). What do pictures want? Interview with W.J.T. Mitchell. *Centre for Visual Studies*. <http://visual-studies.com/interviews/mitchell.html>.
- Horng, R.-Y., Wang, C.-W., Yen, Y.-C., Lu, C.-Y., & Li, C.-T. (2021). A behavioural measure of imagination based on conceptual combination theory. *Creativity Research Journal*, 33(4), 376–387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2021.1943136>

- Kenett, Y. N., Anaki, D., & Faust, M. (2014). Investigating the structure of semantic networks in low and high creative persons. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8(407), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00407>
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Mace, M.-A., & Ward, T. (2002). Modeling the creative process: A grounded theory analysis of creativity in the domain of art making. *Creativity Research Journal*, 14(2), 179–192. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1402\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1402_5)
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Muhovic, J. (1997). Linguistic, pictorial and metapictorial competence. *Leonardo*, 30(3), 213–219. [doi.org/10.2307/1576452](https://doi.org/10.2307/1576452)
- Mumford, M. D. (2003). Where have we been, where are we going? Taking stock in creativity research. *Creativity Research Journal*, 15 (2), 107–120. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj152&3\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj152&3_01)
- Prager, P. A. (2012). Making an art of creativity: The cognitive science of Duchamp and Dada. *Creativity Research Journal*, 24(4), 266–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2012.726576>
- Reynolds, P. H. (2003). *The Dot*. Candlewick.
- Rostan, S. M. (2010). Studio learning: Motivation, competence, and the development of young art students' talent and creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 22(3), 261–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2010.503533>
- Runco, M.A. (2015). A commentary on the social perspective on creativity. *Creativity. Theories - Research - Applications*, 2(1), 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ctra-2015-0003>
- Scott, G., Leritz, L. E., & Mumford, M. D. (2004). The effectiveness of creativity training: A quantitative review. *Creativity Research Journal*, 16(4), 361–388. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1604\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1604_1)
- Sosa, R., & van Dijk, M. (2022). A computational interrogation of “big-C” and “little-c” creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 34(3), 295–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2021.1992195>
- Sternberg, R. J., & Lubart, T. I. (1999). The concept of creativity: Prospects and paradigms. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 3–15). Cambridge University Press.



Stone, D. L., & Hess, J. (2020). School students' implicit theories of creativity and their self perceptions as artists. *Creativity Research Journal*, 32(4), 369–377.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2020.1821555>

Ward, T. B., Smith, S. M., & Finke, R. A. (1998). Creative cognition. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity*, (pp. 189–212). Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511807916.012>

Weisner, D. (2010), *Art & Max*. Clarion Books.

Yohlin, E. (2012). Pictures in pictures: Art history and art museums in children's picture books. *Children's Literature in Education*, 43(3), 260-272.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-012-9170-7>

### **About the Author**

Danielle Terceiro is a high school Learning Support and English Teacher in Sydney, Australia. She is a PhD candidate at Alphacrucis University College, and her research explores how multimodal texts such as picture books and graphic novels create meaning through the interaction of word and image.

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

<http://IJEa.org>

ISSN: 1529-8094

## Editor

Tawnya Smith  
Boston University

## Co-Editors

Kelly Bylica  
Boston University

Jeanmarie Higgins  
The Pennsylvania State University

Rose Martin  
Norwegian University of Science and  
Technology

Merel Visse  
Drew University

## Managing Editor

Yenju Lin  
The Pennsylvania State University

## Associate Editors

Betty Bauman  
Boston University

Alesha Mehta  
University of Auckland

Christina Hanawalt  
University of Georgia

Leah Murthy  
Boston University

David Johnson  
Lund University

Tina Nospal  
Boston University

Alexis Kallio  
Griffith University

Hayon Park  
George Mason University

Heather Kaplan  
University of Texas El Paso

Allyn Phelps  
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

Elizabeth Kattner  
Oakland University

Tim Smith  
Uniarts Helsinki

Allen Legutki  
Benedictine University

Natalie Schiller  
University of Auckland

## Advisory Board

Full List: <http://www.ijea.org/editors.html>

---

*This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).*