

HOW DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*'S ILLUSTRATION GIVES DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES TO READERS

(A case study of *Alice In Wonderland*'s Illustrations)

Ingrid Tedjakumala

Fashion Merchandising, Sekolah Tinggi Desain LaSalle.

Email: Ingrid.Tedjakumala@lasallecollege.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Reading the book, *Alice in Wonderland* remains the best way of exploring its full creative range, and since is the story of a dream and the book was a great favourite of the surrealist. The aim of this research was to analyse the two different approaches of illustrating *Alice in Wonderland*, one published in 2012 and illustrated in a contemporary style by Japan's surrealist artist, Yayoi Kusama; the other one, the classic literature illustrated by Sir John Tenniel, the original illustrator of the book.

The approach of the analyses were done by using the formal yet basic understanding of the elements and principles of design. As the principles are the organisational rules used in conjunction with the elements to create order and visual interest (Evans and Thomas, 2009), the outcome of the analysis are to explain how with different support of design elements and principles, the new illustrations using new ways of interpretations of scenes, can hopefully enchant a new readership.

The methods of structured interviews were conducted to gather data from experts like designer and illustrator from outside UK. And a more in-depth interviews were done to gather information from various readers with different educational, professional, and cultural backgrounds.

INTRODUCTION

Alice in Wonderland story is known for its classic's transformation from improvised oral narrative to gift-book manuscript to print, illustration, theatrical play, game, collectible, television, and cinema is particularly interesting for twenty-first century readers (Kerchy, 2017). But the interpretations from different artists for more than 150 years, including Salvador Dali, is what set this particular children's story apart.

Many consider the late nineteenth century to be a high point for book illustration (Vredevoogd, 2013). This time period, considered as the Victorian era, pre-dates the use of photography as illustration and publishing techniques were improved to allow many more readers to purchase books. Victorian era book illustration spans several distinct styles and employs various techniques, with wood engraving as the most common one.

When Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, also known as Lewis Carroll created his original manuscript for his child muse, Alice (British Library, n.d), Sir John Tenniel was later commissioned to do 42 illustration of the story. He worked out the illustration based on the manuscript and Carroll's guidance, and their collaboration produced an almost uniquely seamless joining of pictures and text (Kaplan, 2000).

Ever since the first edition of *Alice in Wonderland* was published in 1865, the book has never been out of print, with more than 150 artists have illustrated the stories in various editions for the past 150 years. Among the many historical styles that are used are cartoon, realism, impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism styles. And yet, since its first appearance on the first edition, Sir John Tenniel's interpretation remains the definitive interpretation (Parker, 2006).

Since it is a story of a dream, the book was a great favourite of the surrealist, including Japan's most celebrated contemporary artist, Yayoi Kusama who began her career as surrealist/expressionist style paintings in the early 1950s (Sumpter, 2013). Empson wrote in 1935 (Jenkyns, 2011) that Alice has become a patron saint of the surrealists, and so combining the story with the surrealist artist like Kusama, can be described as a good match.

To understand the main question on how different approaches to illustration give a different experience to the reader, this report is structured by using the literature and the primary research answers provided by these research questions:

1. How can the illustration itself makes the story appealing?

2. How different are the reading experiences from the classic book compare to Yayoi Kusama's version?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alice tales can be interpreted as picture books in so far as the illustrations constitutes an integral part of narrative meanings. The interaction between words and image will necessarily contribute to the textual fluidity by setting up an oscillation or shimmering of meaning in which neither element is prior to the other, since the pictures are about the text, and the text is about the pictures (Kérchy, 2016).

Review had been done in the past by Ann Kerchy (2017) when comparing creative re-readings of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* and *Beyond the Looking Glass*. Kerchy found that scholars weigh in the postmillennial discussion with exciting research agendas—such as the sociology of texts and publication history ludology combined with reception theory and the post-semiotics of subjectivity, or the study of antiquity. Understanding the sociology of texts, modifications, and re-purposings for different eras, locations, and interpretive communities, the entirety of the book is concerned not just with the cultural objects we call “Alices” but with “the stories surrounding their creation and use” (Kerchy, 2017).

How illustrations are being positioned in books has also gone through series of researches. One one them, Edward Hodnett (1982) notes that images create the possibility for multiple reading experiences, as readers may encounter illustrations as they occur in the text, or may see the illustrations while they are flipping through a yet-unread book (Lim, 2016). The experience starts before the book was even purchased.

For some time, writers have considered that the complex ways in which visual images and verbal texts relate to each other. Nodelman (1998) argues that, since the words tell us things that the pictures do not, and vice versa, the relationship is necessarily ironic. However, this depends on a very broad definition of irony, which Nodelman never actually makes explicit (Sipe, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted through a case study. Case study gives a better prospect of getting valuable and unique insight and being being able to investigate things in a way that is different

from, and in some senses better than, what is possible using other approaches (Denscombe, 2003).

To achieve good result, from acquiring data from the secondary research, the next stage was to conduct series of interview. Interviews are a more personal approach to the study. And one major advantage of the interview is its adaptability (Bell, 2010). A series of structured interview were conducted by emails to graphic designers and a couple of readers outside the UK, and with a few enthusiasts to the classic literature combinations. With straight questions asking about their knowledge on the classic book and their take and interpretation on Yayoi Kusama's version by sending them images of the pages within one chapter.

More interviews were conducted with in-depth, semi-structured approach with several readers with different educational, professional and cultural background. Ranging from the ages of 20 to 35. The original interviews were done from UK with subjects living in the Birmingham area, then, continued again, end of November 2019, within the Jakarta area. Firstly, each reader will read one same chapter from each book, and then they would need to answer questions by email, acquiring them to express their reading experience. If they were willing to elaborate their experience in more detail, then a follow up interviews were conducted.

And finally, to get a different perspective and a clearer understanding of illustrations, a series of discussion were also done with an illustrator outside UK over several emails and skype.

There are several considerations to the interview methods, one is, they are time consuming. Some respondents took a long time to reply the emails. Leaving all the data collections to the last minute and analysing them into the findings. And then there is the danger of bias. One of the respondent is an enthusiast to classic combination of Alice in Wonderland, and so the interviewee became very defensive when providing the answers.

And there was also a limited answer that can be provided by designer who was involved in the creation of the 2012 version of Alice in Wonderland book, with no crucial information regarding the principles and elements of design. And with the word limitation, a detailed analysis could only be done over one or two illustrations only.

FINDINGS

4.1. HOW CAN THE ILLUSTRATION ITSELF MAKES THE STORY APPEALING?

“And what is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversation?” Even the first conversation on the first paragraph of Alice in Wonderland introduced the reader to the importance of illustration for the book.

Illustration is considered to be the first mark made the human kind (Zeegan and Crush, 2009). And other than to record, describe, and communicate, they also expand, explain, interpret, or decorate written text (Bodmer, 1992).

Christopher Booker (2005) categorised the story as the Voyage and Return plot. Where Alice, was thrown into a harsh physical journey to travel out of her familiar, into another world, wonderland, where she meets strange characters and animals in her journey. Booker divided each plot into five stages: anticipation, dream, frustration, nightmare, and achievement or miraculous escape, where Alice is jerked back into the reality of her familiar world by waking up and realises everything was only a dream (Appendix A).

And Tenniel’s illustration has created its own signature to the book. Page by page, each picture follows the storyline, where the images clearly visualises the story. With clear depiction on how each scene should look like relating to the story, and with only forty-two illustrations spread around the book, readers would incline to focus more on the text rather than the illustration.

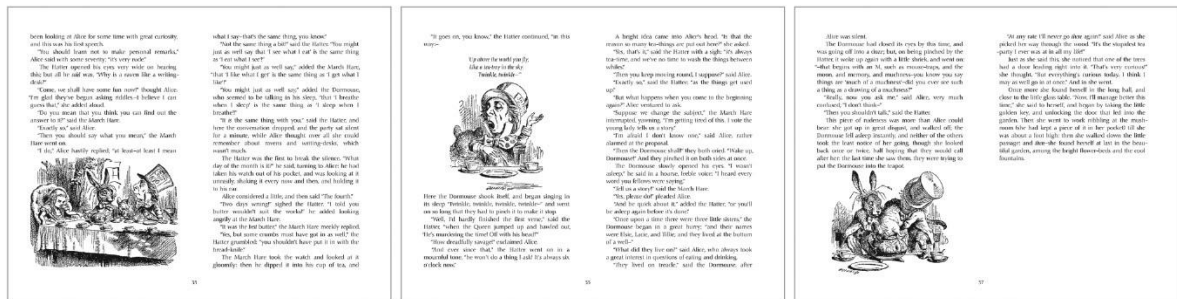


Figure 01 – Tenniel’s illustration on Mad Tea Party chapter.

The other approach, the combination of Lewis Carroll’s literary work and Yayoi Kusama’s contemporary artwork, is like creating a story book in two different languages, literally. She mixes her Japanese culture into her artwork by using cold drinks and watermelon instead of the traditional tea to illustrate the Mad Tea Party chapter. Even watermelon splitting game on the beach is considered as traditional summer activity in Japan (JNTO, n.d). See Fig 01 and 02 as comparison to the illustrations’ approaches.

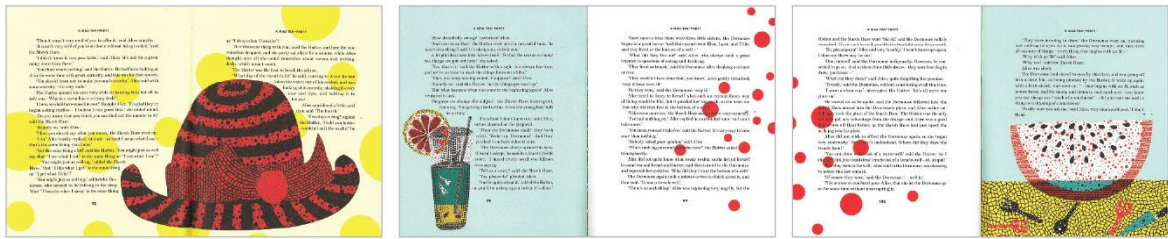


Figure 02 – Kusama’s version of the Mad Tea Party chapter.

4.2 HOW DIFFERENT ARE THE READING EXPERIENCES BETWEEN THE CLASSIC BOOK COMPARE TO THE YAYOI KUSAMA’S VERSION?

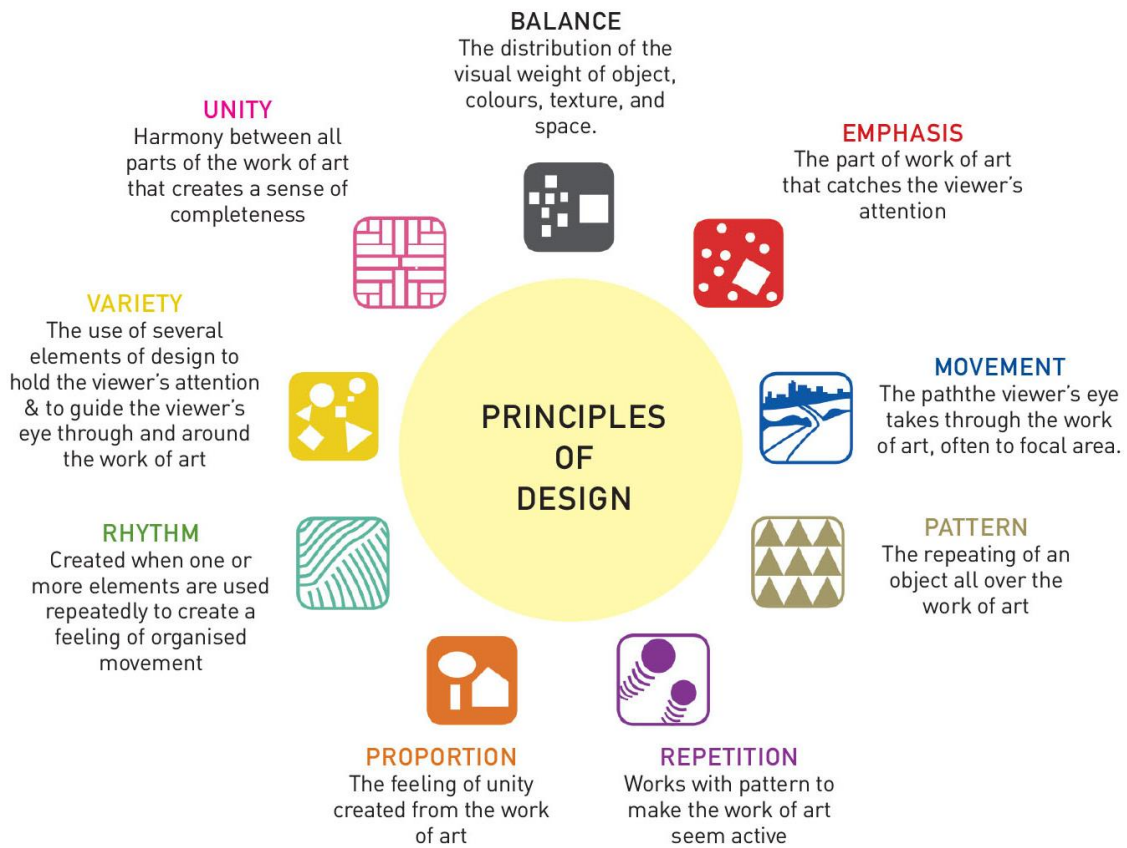


Figure 03 – Principles of Design © 2011 J. Paul Getty Trust

In illustrated books, a strong instinctive or emotional reaction sets in when illustrations are encountered. Although the illustrations meant to be "read" at where they are positioned, no one

can help leafing through the book, soaking up the sense of the story through the illustrations (Bodmer, 1992 cited in Fang, 1996).

And the different approaches of the illustrations can affect the different experiences of reading the book. The application of the principles of design theory, like rhythm and movement, pattern, focal point or emphasis, unity and variety, are the building blocks used to create work of arts.

4.2.1. First approach, John Tenniel's illustration

From the point of view of illustration style, the Alice books are very much products of their period, with text and illustrations alike exhibiting a typically Victorian eclecticism.

One aspect of Tenniel's formality has to do with the composition of his designs, which often echo the structure of the stories by means of a symmetrical, enclosing sense of balance (Stoker, n.d). This is achieved, for example, by placing Alice between the mock turtle and the gryphon, the mouse and the crab's position during assembly by the riverbank, or from the intended space between Alice and the queen at the croquette ground even created a sense of balance.

Variety is necessary to create visual interest (Evans and Thomas, 2008). It is also to guide the viewer's attention through the work of art. Although Tenniel illustrated multiple characters into one illustration, there is always a clear emphasis on the illustration. Other than that, variety in one illustration must have a sense of unity. Unity is the control over variety, often giving the feeling of harmony (Getty, n.d). Tenniel's illustration with Chesire's head's appearing on over the several different characters in chapter eight, is a good example of variety, emphasis and unity's placement in one illustration. The many different characters do not overwhelm the illustration itself, the good proportion as well as the emphasis of the illustration takes the reader's attention to the strong character within the illustration.

In Tenniel's illustration, the reoccurring object that shows up in his series of illustrations that created patterns are the playing card suits (cloves, heart, spade and diamond). While repetition works well with pattern to make the work of art seem active (Getty, n.d). And the repetition enforces an idea of what and how we recognize certain characteristics. The suits show up in different character in the story like the soldiers' and the white rabbit's costume, and the queen's and the king's sceptres. For some, the pattern and the repetition created from this suits became an iconic image that would refer the reader back to the classic book.

Even though they were two-dimensional illustrations, Tenniel knew exactly how to create movement in his illustrations. He created a combination between scale and proportion in his compositions and also a combination between positive and negative space (further explained in

chapter three) to create the sense of movement. Like when he illustrated the white rabbit running away from Alice in chapter two, or Father William doing a back somersault in chapter five, or how he rendered the lines on Chesire Cat to create the sense of disappearing in chapter six.

The greater proportion of the illustration to the text, the greater the influence the illustrations have in the creation of the story. Tenniel's detailed and balanced approach on his illustrations are clearly visualising each plot, giving the reader the ease to follow and understand the story. Reader read the classic version because of the content of the literature inside, the text, the story within the story, and the poems, but at the same time the continuous and heaviness of the text combined with illustrations both in black colour could be overwhelming and causing eyestrain.

4.2.2. Second approach, Yayoi Kusama's illustration

While Yayoi Kusama, is being regarded as one of Japan's most revered contemporary artist (Popova, 2012), she has always been fascinated by childhood and the way the adults are capable to see things the way children do. And this became a central concern when she was creating the Alice books (Penguin, 2012).

One of the strong principles of design that occurs in Kusama's illustration is rhythm. Rhythm is created when one or more elements are used repeatedly to create a feeling of movement (Getty, n.d). Like the figures below, the sense of movement was created by the repeating the polka dots patterns, illustrated over several continuous pages, giving the reader the feeling of movement, going down the rabbit hole.

Kusama's interpretation of variety and unity has a more contemporary approach. For example, the watermelon illustration in chapter seven, was illustrated by combining different elements like shapes, forms, colours and even play of pattern within the illustration. But the watermelon is still the emphasis of the illustration because of its size, and the sky (blue) colour background that unifies the illustration.

When Yayoi Kusama expresses the idea of minimalism in her work, she uses the simplest elements to create the maximum effect. And Yayoi's minimalism is by using an abundance of dots, or her abundance of objects to create a larger object (Guiberson 2012). And her abundance of dots became the strong pattern components to the book (Interviews 2, 6 & 8) and Kusama has created her own version of a polka-dotted trip down the rabbit hole (Sutton, 2012). And from her pattern, Kusama, then created her repetition in some of her artwork by using the dots and

created them into either an artwork or a recognisable image, like the repeating image of the mushrooms in chapter five.

And at the same time, Kusama's also creating her own sense of movement on her mushroom illustration in chapter five. The different sizes and proportion of the mushrooms, and their placement give a sense of movement, floating, taking the reader to want turn to the next pages.

Although some believes that Kusama's approach on illustrating Alice seems far removed from the original text, those illustrations can still act as a genuine representation to the story. Intended or not, illustrations sometime tell a slightly different or even contradictory story than the text (Lukens, 1990 cited in Fang, 1996), and Kusama's interpretation of the characters in the book are not by actually illustrating the them onto the pages, but rather by taking the reader and showing them how wonderland looks like in her perspective as Alice. And even though you are not a first time reader of the book, but her approaches has given the sense that you are reading the book for the first time, again.

Even though the illustrations can be distracting to some readers, by reading the Kusama version first, the contemporary illustrations sparked the imagination, thus making the reading more enjoyable and sometimes faster. And then using the classic version to reconfirm whether the imaginations were coinciding with the way it was originally intended.

CONCLUSIONS AND INSIGHTS

In illustrated story books, text cannot stand on its own without the illustrations. Being one of the most famous combinations of literature and illustrations of all time, it is hard to try to separate the two together. And the entirety of the principles and element of a visual art such as lines, colour, balance, shapes, repetition, variety and unity are fundamentals to creating illustrations. Bearing in mind that Tenniel's style of illustrations are more detailed, crucial to the time period style of printing process, while Kusama's artwork is more colourful and still strongly influenced by her cultural background.

Audience Theory or Reader's Reception Theory emphasizes the reader's response to literary works in certain situations and reception theory also gives the reader the right to criticize and give an assessment of literary works. It has been claimed that reception research takes its theory from the humanities and its method from the social sciences (Littlejohn, S., Foss, 2009). The audience receives the creative work done and perceives to its content in either similar or

different. The meaning of the message can change in the way they see it fit according to their social context.

MacMillan's (original publisher to *Alice in Wonderland*) brief on redesigning the book, has parents of girls aged five to nine in mind as their primary audience. While Penguin, the publisher to Kusama's version, was targeting adult, fans of Yayoi Kusama, and the collectors of Alice in Wonderland books. With this in mind, albeit the book was designed for adult, with the new approach of the illustrations, other than reaching art enthusiasts, it has also reached all-ages of audience who enjoy the book only from the illustration. With Kusama's background and contribution, her approach on illustrating the book, has the advantage not only to reach a broader target market, but also introducing the younger children to the classic literature.

But keep in mind that there are also consumers who are still interested in the traditional approach of the book. Consumers who prefer to read the book for the story itself, where it is easier to read, with easily understood illustrations explaining each story plot on the page.

Whichever approach of illustration the publishers choose to do, previous to even creating the creative brief, it is best to analyse the profile segmentation in different variables, such as age, gender, and the socio-economic group (Jobber and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). Implementing the result from the profile segmentation data can help better understand the consumers within each segment and strategically targeting the right consumer.

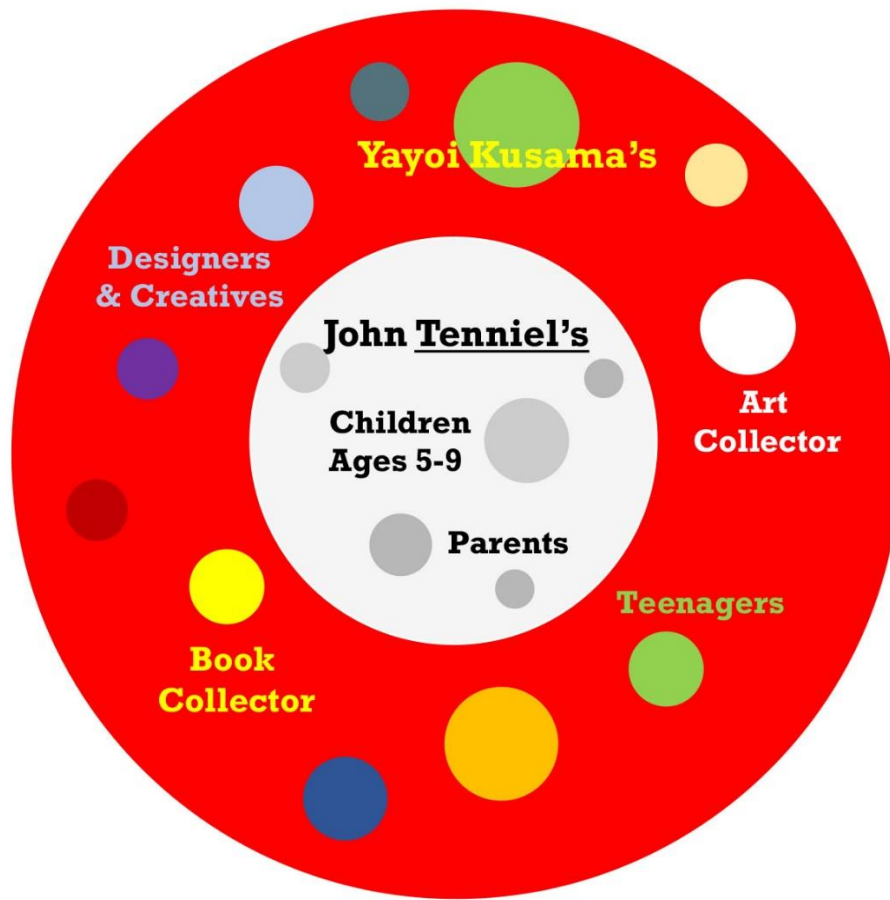


Figure 04 – Cluster of Market

From a creative point of view a lot of interpretation can be made since the plot and the characters are very strong, and the classic book enthusiast would not have to worry about losing the true essence of their beloved character. If both illustration approaches can work while maintain the appreciation to the classic, and expanding a wider array of market to existing one, then these are advantages that publisher should consider while adapting the classics into a modern interpretations.

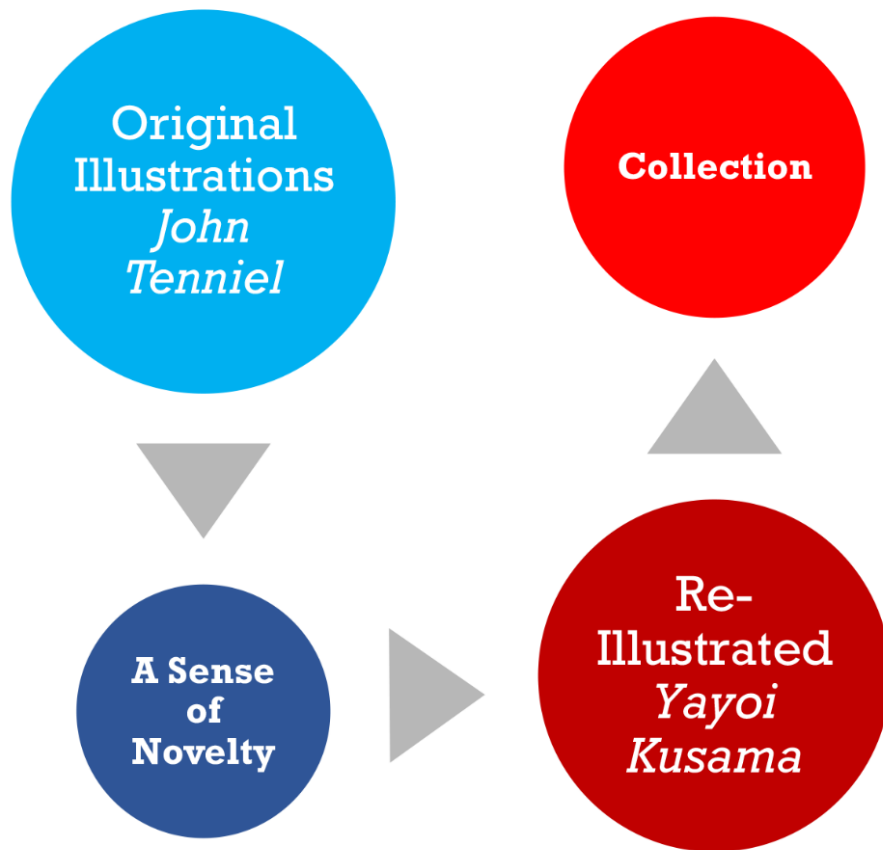


Figure 05 – Adjustment of Experience & Buying Habit

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

All the classic illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland* are courtesy of aliceinwonderland.net

Begg, A. 2015. *See New Illustrations of Alice in Wonderland by Rifle Paper Co.* Vanity Fair. Available at: <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/02/alice-in-wonderland-rifle-paper-co-illustrations>

Bell, J., 2010. *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide For First-time Researchers In Education, Health And Social Science.* United Kingdom: McGraw-Hill Professional Publishing.

Berman, J. 2011. *The Evolution of Alice in Wonderland: A Book Cover Odyssey.* Flavorwire. Available at: <http://flavorwire.com/146497/the-evolution-of-alice-in-wonderland-a-book-cover-odyssey>

Birrell, A. 1994. *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland.* The Guttenberg Project

Bodmer, G. 1992. *Approaching the illustrated text.* In: G. E. Sadler (ed.), *Teaching children's literature: Issues, pedagogy, resources* (p. 72-79). NY: The Modern Language Association of America.

Booker, C. (2005) *The seven basic plots: why we tell stories.* 1st edition. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Brazell, D. and Davies, J. (2014) *Understanding Illustration.* United Kingdom: A & C Black Publishers

Browne, J. 2015. *Anthony Browne: how I re-imagined Alice in Wonderland.* The Guardian. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/gallery/2015/mar/29/anthony-browne-alicein-wonderland-lewis-carroll>

Carroll, L. and Kusama, Y. (2012) *Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: With Artwork by Yayoi Kusama.* London: Penguin Classics.

Craig, A. 2015. *Alice in Wonderland: 150 years on, what's the secret of its success?* The Independent. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/alice-in-wonderland-150-years-on-whats-the-secret-of-its-success-10128720.html>

Denscombe, M. (2003). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects.* 1st ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Fang, Z. (1996). *Illustrations, Text, and the Child Reader: What are Pictures in Children's Storybook for?* Reading Horizon (e-journal). Available at:

http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1280&context=reading_horizons

Getty, J.P. n.d. *Understanding Formal Analysis*. J. Paul Getty Trust. Available at:

http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html

Hodnett, Edward. *Image and Text: Studies in the Illustration of English literature*. London: Scolar Press, 1982.

Jenkyns, R. 2011. *What Alice did*. Prospect Magazine Available at:

<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/features/alice-in-wonderland-lewis-carroll-legacy-surrealism-art>

JNTO. N.d. *Fruits of Japan*. Japan National Tourism Organization. Available at:

http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/attractions/dining/food/jfood_11.html Accessed date: May 1, 2015.

Jobber, D. and Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2012) *Principles and Practice of Marketing*. 7th edn.

London: McGraw Hill Higher Education

Kaplan, J. 1997. *Indestructible Alice*. American Scholar. Spring 2000. Available at:

http://ezproxy.bcu.ac.uk:2764/searchFulltext.do?id=R00806578&divLevel=0&queryId=2855787217914&trailId=14BDA98991F&area=abell&forward=critref_ft

Jessica W.H. Lim (2016) “‘And What Is the Use of a Book... without Pictures or Conversations?’: The Text- Illustration Dynamic in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’, *Forum for World Literature Studies*, 8(3), pp. 46–66.

Kerchy, A. (2017) ‘Three Times in Wonderland’, *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, 55(3), pp. 42–45. doi: 10.1353/bkb.2017.0046.

Kérchy, A. (2016). *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland*. Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Littlejohn, S., Foss, K. (2009) *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, SAGE Publication onc. SAGE Publications. Inc.

Sipe, L. R. (2012) ‘Revisiting the Relationships Between Text and Pictures’, *Children's Literature in Education*, 43(1), pp. 4–21. doi: 10.1007/s10583-011-9153-0.

Lidwell, W., Holden, K. and Butler, and J. (2003) *Universal principles of design: 100 ways to enhance usability, influence perception, increase appeal, make better design decisions, and teach through design*. Gloucester, MA: Rockport Publishers

Lovett, J. 1999. Design and Colour. John Lovett. Available at:

<http://www.johnlovett.com/test.htm>

MacMillan, 2015. *Creative Challenge, Create new illustrations for Alice's Adventures in Wonderland's 150th anniversary year*. Available at: <http://www.ycn.org/awards/ycn-student-awards/2014-15-ycn-studentawards/briefs/pan-macmillan>

Parker, C. 2006. *Sir John Tenniel. Lines and Colors*. Available at:

<http://linesandcolors.com/2006/03/18/sir-john-tenniel/>

Popova, M. 2014. *The best illustration from 150 years of Alice in Wonderland*. Brain Picking.

Available at: <http://www.brainpickings.org/tag/alice-in-wonderland/>

Stoker, G. (2015). *Tenniel's illustrations for Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. Lenny's Alice in Wonderland site. Available at: <http://www.alice-in-wonderland.net/school/alice1021.html> Accessed on 15 April, 2015.

Sumpter, H. 2013. *Interview: Yayoi Kusama*. Time Out London. Available at:

<http://www.timeout.com/london/art/interview-yayoi-kusama>

Zeegan, L. and Crush (2006) *Fundamentals of Illustration (Fundamentals)*. Switzerland: AVA Publishing SA