

Photographs as Illustrations

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A photograph is simultaneously an expressive artifact and a frozen instant of history. Some photographs direct our attention to their own artificiality, most to their descriptive factuality, and a few to both. Like all forms of history, the photograph is constructed and ought to be examined critically before it is accepted as truth. Photographs can be said to fit on a continuum with two poles: at one end are those that are straightforward, direct, and realistic renderings of actual objects, people, or places; at the other end are those that are overtly and obviously directed, manipulated, and fictional, using props and models or actors.

Books written and illustrated for children increasingly are using photographs as illustrations, and these photographs fall throughout this continuum. These books can be divided by authors' and editors' intents into three categories: informational, developmental, and fictional. Children deserve the best that the photographic medium can achieve, and professional photographers working in fields other than children's literature have set standards that we can match with the efforts of children's book editors, authors, and illustrators. What follows is a critical sampling, from an aesthetic point of view, of some books for children that use photographs as illustrations, with particular attention paid to how and to what effect they are used.

Children's books that utilize photographs for informational illustrations stress the factuality of the medium rather than its artificiality. For example, Hans Reich's compilations of photographs by several photographers in *Children of Many Lands* (1958) is dependent on the factuality and credibility of its photographs. The book's effect is dependent on our seeing these children as real and living children in real and locatable places in the world. Its photographers and their sensibilities and skills are secondary to the pervasive theme of the book, so much so that credits for the photographs are small items in the front of the book and captions

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under each photograph identify the country where the photograph was made and not the photographer. The objectivity of the camera's lens is maximized, and the fact that these photographs are made by subjective individuals is minimized. Because the children in Reich's book are photographed in a straightforward manner, rather than painted or drawn, the viewer is assured that they exist in the world rather than in an illustrator's imagination or merely as ink on paper. Roland Barth's (1981) claim that "in photography I can not deny that the thing has been there" (p. 76) is apt for these photographs. The "thing" in these books are children, mothers, and fathers, and they are presented in rich and realistic detail. Tattered shirts and smudged faces appear tattered and smudged because they are, not because of the stroke of a brush or the smudge of graphite.

Reich is a photographer who also edited several photography books for children including *Laughing Camera 1* (1957), *Children and Their Fathers* (1964), and *Children and Their Mothers* (1964). As sources of information for children, these books have the educational value of presenting many diverse examples of what they intend to portray. In *Children and Their Mothers*, several mothers of various ages and looks from many lands are shown. If readers form generalizations about mothers, fathers, and children, their generalizations will likely be composites from several samples rather than from one. Similarly, as sources of developmental information and motivation, *Children of Many Lands* offers young viewers liberating, alternate viewpoints by showing a great variety of children in a great variety of lifestyles.

A caution, however, about Reich's books and any others that photographically portray in realistic style: they are seductive by their look of objectivity. The more realistic the photographs appear to be, the more ideologically persuasive they become; realistic looking photographs of real persons and real places tend to become "transparent" to the viewer. That is, the subjective photographer behind the lens tends to drop out, the objectivity of the mechanical lens masks the photographer's biases and beliefs, and we begin to grant unskeptically these photographs a "seeing is believing" truth. Parents or teachers may want to investigate with children what the photographer has done or not done, included or not included, so children come to realize that camera images, whether in books or on screens, are made by people with beliefs and biases who make persuasive images from their points of view.

Night (Keats, 1969), a book photographically illustrated by Beverly Hall and published about the same time as Reich's books, is in marked contrast to them. It is illustrated with flamboyantly manipulated photographs that are collages, reversals, double exposures, and high contrast prints from which Hall has eliminated all grays. Her technique is quite obvious and quite dependent on handiwork after the picture is taken. The snap-

