

World in Crisis

It is a misconception to believe that picture books only ever portray an ideal world. Since the 1960s they have also addressed difficult and controversial topics. Thus both children and adults are confronted with historical catastrophes (such as 9/11) as well as with contemporary social problems (such as war). Readers' attention is also directed to environmental disasters and fictive visions of a blighted world. Concrete events, universal problems, or fictive catastrophes: how do picture books communicate the crises of this world?

First, one must examine the role of the observer in such situations. Is there a central character through whose eyes one is, as it were, drawn into what is going on (such as a child leaning against a doorpost), or is one an observer located at a safe distance? The spectrum of perspectives is manifold: the worlds of images open up visions of horror (*Auschwitz, Erikas Geschichte*), invite us to feel pity and empathy (*Wenn auf den grünen Hügeln*), overwhelm us through the sheer force of the representation (*Tsunami!*), or allow us to observe from a distance (*Migrantes*).

What is remarkable is the variety of stylistic approaches to these themes. Whether using collage or watercolors, whether in comic book or poster style, whether surrealistic or realistic—the books' different materialities always leave a strong impression on our senses. They engrave themselves deeply into our perception and memory, leaving us emotionally moved and full of unanswered questions.