Second Reaction: Not Just Reading: How a Wordless Picture Book Can Promote Activity of the Self

Jay, Alison. *Bee and Me*. Candlewick. 2017

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Books can be a wonderful resource for exploring complexity in a safe, vicarious environment. I highly recommend *Bee and Me* as a book for young children through which they can grow to view themselves as environmentalists by engaging with the story. *Bee and Me* is a wordless picture book with an imaginative storyline and beautiful illustrations that tells the story of a bee who becomes a little girl’s friend and inspires her to explore different perspectives.

One concept that helps us think about what allows children to shift perspectives during reading is dialogic self-theory. Hermans, a Dutch psychologist, proposed the idea of the dialogic self and defined it as a dynamic self-community with multiple relatively independent positions or identities. I - positions might be best imagined as different voices, and according to Hermans and others, the complex continuous dialogues among them constitute the existence of the self. *Bee and Me* invites young readers to engage in the dialogue among multiple self-positions throughout the story.

In the initial encounter with the bee, some aspects of the little girl experiences are a series of fluctuations and changes. For example, at the beginning of the story the little girl was reading a book about plants, which leads readers to speculate that the little girl was full of curiosity and affection for nature. Therefore, one of I - positions of the little girl could be *I - the big fan of nature*. However, when the little bee accidentally flew into the little girl’s room and tried to communicate with her, she screamed in panic and tried to escape from the bee. The appearance of the bee created uncertainty for the little girl’s position, *I - the big fan of nature*. 
In addition, there is now a dialogue between at least two conflicting positions of the little girl: *I - fear of bees* resulting in desire to kill the bee and as *I - the big fan of nature* wanting to save the bee. We can imagine that a similar dialogue may be ongoing in young readers’ minds, such as, "I think the little girl should help the bee because it didn’t hurt anyone, and it tried to seek her help;" or "the little girl shouldn’t capture the bee because I learned from the book that the bee is a beneficial insect." This dialogue shifting between perspectives or I positions plays an essential role in how young readers comprehend the story when they experience the girl shifting her positions as she reacts to the presence of the bee in her life.

As we can see, the dialogue that occurs among different internal positions in the self can create contradictions. For example, the dialogue between the girl’s internal positions grows even more conflicted when the bee begins to miss its home. This change in the bee, wanting to go home rather than stay with the girl, creates a new dialogue between her multiple positions. First, "as a big fan of nature," the girl understands that the bee would want to be free of the apartment building and return to the fields. But the girl’s other position as *the friend of the bee*, hopes that the bee will stay with her. In other words, there is an irreconcilable contradiction between her positions. In this case, two positions of the little girl during the interaction with the bee, *I- as big fun of nature* and *I- as friend of the bee*, have been strengthened and gradually create a new position. At the end of the story the little bee and the little girl together transform the urban landscape, sowing the seeds of various flowers and trees from the sky. The new position of the little girl, *I - environmentalist*, has been established and becomes a central position for the girl, promoting growth of the self (Hermans 12).

As I think of *Bee and Me* from the position of an educator, I value the opportunities it provides young readers to enter transformative dialogues with the text, and to confront multiple aspects of themselves. Humans have a complex and multifaceted relationship with the natural world. Exploring the many aspects of that relationship through books like *Bee & Me* can not only help them understand the relationship between man and nature, but simultaneously help them understand the complexity of their own personhood.

**Works Cited**
