

Alison K. Nemoto

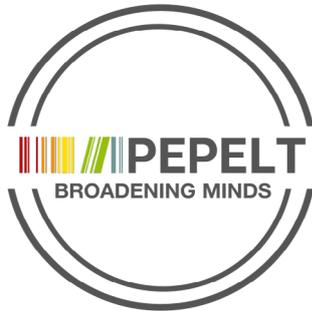


REVIEWS

Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching (PEPELT)

Created by Tatia Gruenbaum, Sandie Mourão, Gail Ellis and Anneta Sadowska

Reviewed by Alison K. Nemoto



Website: <https://pepelt21.com/>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/PEPELT21/>

YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-cPHEWqeXGUDV0LnB4JBooA>

I think most teachers of primary learners have a favorite picturebook and they will also have good reasons why they love it. Perhaps it's the storyline that is especially meaningful to them, or the illustrations and characters. Perhaps it brings back memories of the reactions or comments made by a particular class. In my case, I have shared Lio Lionni's, *A Color of His Own*, hundreds of times with children, teenagers, university students and teachers in workshops. Regardless of the audience, I have received fresh responses and original comments about this story every time.

Perhaps you have a favorite picturebook from your own childhood, with a story or characters that you can recall clearly even now? For me, it would be David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*. It is a very unconventional story which both surprised and fascinated me as a child because it opened the door to a new genre of children's stories - those without a 'happy' ending. For that reason, I enjoy sharing this book with young adults in my role as a teacher trainer at a University of Education in Japan, and my students are also generally shocked, then fascinated by the storyline and characters.

The longitudinal effect of picturebooks over time, combined also with their instant appeal, makes them an invaluable resource in the home or in the classroom. They can also be used multi-functionally for language development of both L1 and L2. But how can we expand our knowledge about picturebooks and their creators and learn how to enjoy them in new ways with children? Where can we get recommendations from other teachers and educational specialists for great titles that will thrill and educate us and our students?

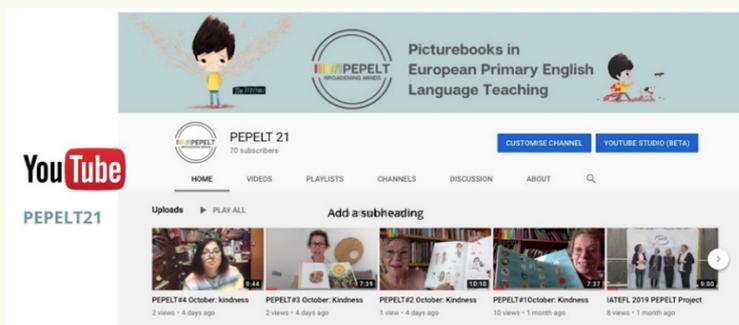
We'll look no further than **PEPELT**, which stands for Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching. First started as a Facebook page in October 2018, it has now expanded to a website and a YouTube channel. Through online videos made by four educational experts, we

are introduced in detail to a recommended picturebook each month. PEPELT has now evolved into an invaluable online resource of essential information and the Facebook page enables communication between teachers using picturebooks worldwide. In this review and on all PEPELT platforms, you will notice how the compound word 'picturebook' is used, emphasizing the fact that pictures and words are both equally essential in creating meaning and conveying the narrative to the reader in this medium.

The PEPELT website homepage greets us with the three underlying aims; 'Get inspired,' 'Find support,' and 'Discover more.' The format is very easy to navigate with large headings for the main sections and drop-down menus which lead us to a wealth of information. These cover a wide variety of topics starting with the selection of picturebooks, then move to planning and preparing to teach with them, including a checklist of practical read-aloud 'Top Tips,' and even a framework for evaluating your own performance after a picturebook sharing session.

The concise and focused videos from the four experts, Tatia Gruenbaum, Sandie Mourão, Gail Ellis and Annetta Sadowska are just what busy teachers need to facilitate professional development and build confidence. These videos can be easily accessed on a mobile device anywhere. The experts speak from their own backgrounds and experience on the Book of the Month which is chosen around a general theme, such as friendship or celebrating inclusion. Other sites may offer lists of award-winning books or recommended titles in subject groups or themes, but the individual titles are not explored in such in depth as we can find here, with informed insights from four different viewpoints.

Sandie Mourão focuses on the picturebook peritext in her videos, which is defined as 'what makes a book a book.' On the site there is also a glossary with explanations of all the specialized terms Sandie uses, so we can all become more familiar with peritext too. **Gail Ellis** focuses on multiliteracies, these are defined on the site as including, 'visual, emotional, cultural, natural, digital, moving image literacy and 'learning literacy,' which go beyond the traditional view of literacy.' **Tatia Gruenbaum** shares how we can prepare student teachers to teach confidently with the book of the month. **Annetta Sadowska** shows us what actually happens when using the picturebook with children in the classroom. First, she uses the book of the month with a number of classes at a state primary school in Poland, then she introduces her resources, talks about the experience, and shares children's work or feedback in her videos.



In addition to the various insights into the book of the month, other books are also introduced around the theme of the month. For example, in May 2019, when *The Tadpole's Promise* by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross was introduced on the PEPELT site as a book to explore the theme *Love is in the air – Unusual Friendships*, four more books were also introduced which could be used to expand this theme. Another advantage for busy teachers is that all recommended books are labelled for Younger Primary Learners (YPL), Older Primary Learners (OPL) or All Primary Learners (APL) and links to authors' websites or other resources are also included on the same webpage. Finally, what site on picturebooks would be complete without a special section for such author / illustrators such as Eric Carle, John Burningham or Judith Kerr, and they are of course featured in a special section.

Personally, I have found using such picturebooks by Eric Carle and others very effective in teaching English in the primary classroom, enabling children to acquire new language easily in a meaningful context. Over the years, children have drawn beautiful pictures and written interesting sequels to stories I have introduced. They have also played games or made roleplays based on the characters and topics in picturebooks. But, also through my own research using questionnaires before and after story sessions, I have learnt that by actively using picturebooks in a well-scaffolded and interactive manner, children's attitudes to learning English can even change too, from a negative one before reading picturebooks together, to a more positive one afterwards. As a follower of PEPELT since its beginning, I have been able to expand my personal picturebook library as well as learn about many new aspects of picturebooks, especially peritext details that I wasn't aware of previously. I have also gained specific techniques for becoming a more effective mediator, to help children predict and construct meaning and then use English actively for communication.

In her innovative book, *Reading Picture Books with Children: How to shake up storytime and get kids talking about what they see*, Megan Dowd Lambert (2015) draws our attention to how a picturebook can be used to create 'a meeting space, that 'playground for the mind,' for children and adults to interact with one another on a common ground of words, pictures and design' (p. 35). I'd like to say that PEPELT, also takes on that role of being an important meeting space, for picturebook fans worldwide, some who may be experienced teachers like myself or newcomers looking for inspiration and guidance.

Alison K. Nemoto gained her B.Ed. in Primary Education in the United Kingdom before moving to Japan in 1989. She has 30 years' experience of teaching English and has used picturebooks widely. She has an M.A. in TEYL and is Specially Appointed Professor at Miyagi University of Education in Sendai, Japan.

References

Lambert, M. D. (2015). *Reading picture books with children: How to shake up storytime and get kids talking about what they see.* Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Talking about PEPELT

In addition to Alison's main review of PEPELT, we are including a short Q&A with another PEPELT user based in France. As Alison is in Japan, this 'mini extra' offers readers an insight into how broad reaching the online resource is and how it has global appeal. This short chat took place at the YLTSIG Showcase during the IATEFL Liverpool Conference in April 2019 where our Reviews Editor, **Joan Kang Shin (JKS)** caught up with **Laura McWilliams (LM)**.

JKS: How long have you been following PEPELT?

LM: Since the very first Facebook video! Having everything collated in one place on the website now makes it easier, in case I don't notice a new video in my feed.

JKS: What do you like most about PEPELT?

LM: I really love being introduced to new picturebooks I haven't come across before. I have to say it's not been too healthy for my wallet, though - I've been buying a new book every month!

JKS: What have you learned and/or been able to use in the primary English classroom?

LM: I've learned a lot of new technical vocabulary from Sandie's videos. In my

current job I support other teachers and I think Tatia's ideas are always fantastic too. My favourite theme was 'Celebrating Inclusion' featuring *Perfectly Norman* by Tom Percival because it's a topic dear to my heart and one we are promoting in our school. The website has some great resources to support work with this book.

JKS: What else would you like to see the PEPELT team do?

LM: The themes tend to be connected to calendar events (e.g. Anti-Bullying / November) and as such they come out a little too late for my context. By the time I've got hold of the book, the date has passed. It would be great if themes and book titles could be announced in advance.

Laura McWilliams is a teacher and teacher trainer and currently works as Senior Teacher for British Council France, having previously held the same role in Egypt. Prior to becoming an English teacher, she worked in theatre and brings her love of drama and storytelling into the English language classroom.



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