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## **Confronting the Trauma of the Child Evacuee: Veronica Leo's *Squirrel Eyes* and Ulf Stark's and Stina Wirsén's *The Sister from the Sea* as Entrances to Visual Literacy**

**Mia Österlund**

### **Emerging Visual Literacy in the National Curriculum in Finland**

The nation of Finland, with its strong performance in assessments such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), has a reputation as a forerunner within the field of education (Simola 2015; Simola et al. 2017). However, there is a gap between curricula and praxis. This inconsistency serves as the framework for the discussion in this chapter, which demonstrates what two picturebooks with challenging topics and aesthetics can bring to the classroom in terms of subject matter (historical trauma) and aesthetics (first-person visual narration, and framed silence among other devices within visual literacy). This chapter first explores two picturebooks dealing with the topic of Finnish child evacuees during World War II. It then considers how these texts may promote visual literacy, especially within a school context. Finally, the chapter seeks to advocate for including picturebooks in the curriculum, not only for primary-school students but also for secondary-school students.

Revisions of national curricula are undertaken on a regular basis, building on recent research. In 2016, a new national curriculum for primary schools, with pupils of ages 7–16, was launched, and in 2020 for secondary school, ages 16–20 (Grundskolans läroplan, LGR 2016; Grunderna för gymnasiet nya läroplan 2020). Strikingly, in these steering documents the development of picturebook studies over the past decades is now emerging in the form of promoting visual literacy (see Nikolajeva 2003; Kümmerling-Meibauer 2014, 2016, 2018). However, although these new curricula stress the overall importance of using children's literature, including picturebooks, the understanding of picturebooks is still very limited in the national steering documents, mostly embedded under the umbrella term "multi-literacy." This unintentional slippage means that the use of picturebooks is not explicitly promoted in Finnish schools, although the intention is there. This is in accordance with the situation in other Nordic countries such as Denmark and Norway, where visual literacy is emphasized in the curriculum for both primary and secondary schools.

Still, with vague steering documents that do not specifically mention picturebooks, classroom praxis is at risk. For example, a sample of local curricula that schools have formulated based on the national steering documents show that recommendations concerning picturebooks

explicitly target grades 1 and 2, i.e. ages 6–8 (Åbo stads läroplan). Despite the overarching vision in the national curricula for using children’s literature in primary and secondary schools, many local steering documents in fact reveal a limited scope of how picturebooks are to be used in education. Although research shows that many picturebooks today belong to a crossover category and blur age boundaries, picturebooks are still commonly thought of as exclusively aimed at a younger audience, as the local curricula examined here reveal (Beckett 2012, 2018; Ommundsen 2014, 2018).

Nevertheless, there is an emerging tendency to address the benefits of integrating picturebooks at all levels of education in Finland, from kindergarten to university. This movement for anchoring challenging picturebooks in the curriculum is visible in teacher education and digital teaching aids, i.e. digital textbooks, which stress the need to teach multi-literacy skills in school, picturebooks included. For example, Ann-Louise Holmgren’s and Katrina Åkerholm’s *Tusen och en text* (One Thousand and One Texts, 2016) for upper secondary school, that is, pupils aged 15–18, shows how picturebooks can be used with older age groups. This digital textbook represents a pictorial turn in the Finnish school system: picturebooks are entering the curriculum, not merely for younger students, but also for adolescent readers. The schema for analyzing picturebooks in this textbook foregrounds picturebook studies, namely Maria Nikolajeva’s and Carole Scott’s *How Picturebooks Work* (2001). Visual literacy in the form of reading picturebooks is introduced via a sample of selected concepts such as symmetrical, complementary, expanding or counterpointing picturebooks. One example of visual narration used in the textbook is a crossover picturebook, Peter Sandström’s and Sanna Mander’s *Rööluuvån. En liiti hemsken saago* (Little Red Riding Hood: A Slightly Gruesome Fairytale, 2015). This is an adaption into a Swedish dialect, retold from Andrei Huhtala’s *Punis. Snadisti kuumottava stoori* (2015) which was written in Finnish slang. In the digital textbook, the crossover nature of Little Red Riding Hood is thus used as a means to bridge assumptions concerning for whom picturebooks are intended. Simultaneously, one of the most frequent intertexts in picturebooks, Little Red Riding Hood, is introduced (see Beckett 2012, 2018). Holmgren’s and Åkerholm’s digital textbook is a landmark in the implementation of picturebooks in the Finnish school system, because it specifically guides students in how to read challenging picturebooks.

Clearly, Finland is in the midst of a transition of implementing picturebooks widely in the school system, for 6–19-year-olds, via renewed teacher education and teaching resources promoting the use of picturebooks. For example, the Finnish National Agency for Education has launched an extensive program for further education called Gränsland (‘Borderlands’), in which visual literacy is central. Another aspect stressed in the 2016 and 2020 national curricula is that school subjects should be integrated. There is less research on the implementation of challenging picturebooks in the classroom when it comes to integrated school subjects (see Arizpe 2011, 2014; Evans 2015a). Consequently, the Finnish school system is undergoing a paradigm shift towards a systematic inclusion of picturebooks in education for wider age groups.

In the context of the emerging pictorial turn in the Finnish educational system outlined above, Veronica Leo’s *Ekorögon* (Squirrel Eyes, 1990) and Ulf Stark’s and Stina Wirsén’s *System från havet* (The Sister from the Sea, 2015), two picturebooks that depict the trauma of the Finnish child evacuee in the context of World War II, serve as examples of how challenging picturebooks may inform the classroom. I chose to include Ulf Stark and Stina Wirsén’s picturebook in this chapter because it is used in the Borderlands program. All translations of excerpts are my own. Parallel to writing this chapter, I have supervised Louise Nygård’s master’s thesis in which she examines how students in teacher training envision using *The Sister from the Sea* with 12–16-year-olds (Nygård 2019). Her results show that working with a challenging picturebook activates a plethora of possible gateways to visual literacy and can manifest a pictorial turn, as well as foster a diversity of learning strategies. Veronica Leo’s picturebook was chosen in contrast to demonstrate what the inclusion of a picturebook published much earlier can bring to the discussion with its similar themes and techniques.

Both picturebooks under discussion are so-called challenging picturebooks in the sense that they deal with sensitive themes and use advanced literary and visual devices. Janet Evans’ statement that challenging picturebooks can be considered an art form, “artistic multimodal, fusion texts, all of which exhibit high levels of creativity in their illustrative style and presentation”, provides a background for the discussion (2015: 20). Her definition is criticized for its openness, but here it merely serves to single out artistic complexity (Lassén-Seger 2016).

### **Addressing the Trauma of the Child Evacuee in Picturebooks**

The picturebooks under discussion here are challenging in multiple ways: on a thematic level since they address a national trauma, i.e. child evacuation, and on an aesthetic level since they use advanced literary devices. World War II cast long and dark shadows that have lingered on for generations, causing what Anastasia Ulanovicz calls ghosting effects manifested in second-generation memories (Ulanovicz 2013). Dealing with these effects is mandatory in Finnish schools. Moreover, the motif of the child refugee has seldom been as pertinent as in today's context, with millions of refugees, many of them children, fleeing their native countries in search of a future elsewhere (Nel 2018). News broadcasts of crowded ships and bodies of drowned children on the shores of Europe have become a matter of daily life. Consequently, the past decades have witnessed an increasing number of picturebooks that address traumatic war experiences and refugee children (Cummins 2013: 58–59, Helff 2017: 67; Hope 2008: 295–297; Levy 1999: 219–220; Nel 2017, 2018; Warnqvist 2018). Reading challenging picturebooks is one way to meet the need for complex reading material on such difficult subjects in education.

Set in World War II, Ulf Stark's and Stina Wirsén's picturebook *The Sister from the Sea* uses the Baltic Sea as a central referent when telling the story of a Finnish girl evacuee sent off to Sweden, while Veronica Leo's *Squirrel Eyes* tells a similar story, but in retrospect from a first-person visual perspective. Through the eyes of a girl evacuee, this story thematizes sight and perspective. Whereas Stark and Wirsén lack a first-hand experience of the events depicted, Leo's narrative is autobiographical. These two picturebooks portray traumatic war experiences on both a realistic and a symbolic level, and distill ideas of shared humanity into resonant images. The metaphorical and metonymical narration includes recurring images such as the sea, wartime items, darkness and gloomy colors, all strategies to cope with the dilemma of depicting trauma (Österlund 2016: 36; Warnqvist 2018: 65).

Both picturebooks tell the story of the extensive evacuation of Finnish children, when between seventy and eighty thousand children were sent to Sweden. Most of the evacuated children were children of working women, and some children were sick and famished. The majority of them were under the age of ten, and some were even infants. The evacuation was debated in both countries already during the war and the tearing apart of families was questioned. Finnish authorities censored the growing criticism, and after the war ended many legal disputes regarding where the Finnish war children should live, in Finland or in their new homes in Sweden, were undertaken (Kavén 2004). These historical events constitute a national second-generation trauma. Via their content and aesthetics, these picturebooks can

inform a classroom discussion of these historical events in the broader context of displacement, migration, and refugees, and deploy an ethics of care (see Dudek 2018).

### **Studying Trauma and Visual and Verbal Literary Devices in Picturebook Format**

Drawing on Lydia Kokkola's theory of framed silence in the narration of traumatic war memories for children, Anna Fornalcyk-Lipska's model of picturebooks depicting war in autobiographical picturebooks, and on Marloes Schrijvers' studies on war in picturebooks (Fornalcyk-Lipska 2018; Kokkola 2003; Schrijvers 2014), this chapter demonstrates how challenging picturebooks meet the demand for visual literacy in education.

Framed silence, the technique of leaving out and substituting traumatic content, is a concept coined by Lydia Kokkola in her research on Holocaust narratives for children (2003: 25). According to her, silence and information gaps are an effective means by which to address trauma. It is not merely a question of reduction and omission; on the contrary, the device presupposes that the reader becomes aware of the practice of silencing. She further develops Ernestine Schant's concept of *contour avoidance*, presupposing that only a reader who has previous knowledge of the historical context can grasp what is missing (Scharlant 1999). Silencing and gaps are not about misleading and smoothing out traumatic events, but rather silence is used both in verbal and visual narration as a filter, sheltering against provocative material (Kokkola 2003: 26). Sheer reduction itself constitutes a narrative device with a strong emotional appeal.

In addition, Anna Fornalcyk-Lipska, in an overview of linguistic and visual representations of war in picturebooks, considers the use of gaps and distancing devices. She states that gaps "fulfill a protective function, helping to balance the need to tell young readers about traumatic events and to account for social and pedagogical norms in operation" (2018: 60). Certain aspects of the narrative considered too traumatic to reiterate for a child audience are therefore silenced. Fornalcyk-Lipska provides a host of linguistic and visual narrative devices employed in picturebooks depicting war: "the use of toy protagonists, euphemistic descriptions, references to embodied emotions, metaphors, retrospection, verbal silence, rhetorical questions on the verbal level; the use of colour, allusion, counterpoint, visual metaphor, visual silence, substituting animals or toys for child protagonists, saturating the

story with technical details on the visual level” (2018: 72). In addition, an autobiographical narrative perspective accompanied by paratexts are used to emphasize authenticity (72). Most of the devices Fornalczyk-Lipska brings forward are important for this study, and pinpoint what a challenging picturebook can bring to the classroom where visual literacy is on the agenda.

Moreover, Marlores Schrijvers’ thoughts on how an autobiographical contract is manifested in crossover picturebooks by the use of traumatic memories of the author’s childhood experiences offer a platform for examining the construction of the past and memories of trauma (2014: 1).

Underpinning the motif of war trauma in picturebooks are social norms dictating what is educationally, morally, emotionally, and cognitively suitable for children (Fornalczyk-Lipska 2018: 62). Scholars have shown how essential it is to consider how children are addressed when faced with traumatic content (Fornalczyk-Lipska 2018; Galbraith 2000; Kokkola 2003). Picturebooks have often been optimistic, light-hearted, and just: “social norms as well as protective concern for what a child can bear, dictate that childhood trauma be presented in picture books only in such a way that upbeat and culturally sanctioned messages are promoted, while raw and threatening content remains latent or suppressed” (Galbraith 2000: 338). One can certainly ask where the limit for such smoothening strategies is drawn. Consequently, since the 1980s, children’s literature dealing with trauma, and scholarly debates of this literature, have been topical (Kidd 2005: 120). Kenneth Kidd, drawing on Elisabeth Baer’s idea of “a new algorithm of evil”, detects a shift away from the notion that children should be protected from evil to the convention that they should be exposed to it (Kidd 2005, 2011; see also Baer 2000; Belcher 2008).

The study of child evacuees touches upon several theoretical fields, such as memory and trauma studies. For example, Anastasia Ulanowicz anchors the study of war trauma in children’s literature within the emerging theories on memory, and she discusses second-generation memory. As she stresses, “Within the past decade, much critical attention has been paid to the representational strategies employed by authors to communicate ‘difficult’ or ‘delicate’ topics to ostensibly sensitive young readers” (2013: 2). In addition, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (2010) addresses how autobiographical stories are turned into picturebooks.

Trauma narratives also carry a disciplining function, which suggests that a middle-class readership is exposed to circumstances at the risk of strengthening national ideologies instead of fostering a global community (Tribunella 2010: xxiv). In addition, many children's books are distinctly biblio-therapeutic (Kidd 2005: 170). Moreover, reading about trauma has been expected to be traumatic in itself, since children cannot otherwise comprehend atrocity or gruesome content (162). From these examples of scholarly discussion, it is clear that challenging content attracts a multitude of agendas and devices for addressing the core question of how childhood is related to trauma, defined as a wound, a deprivation caused by an event (Schrijvers 2014). In children's literature studies, discussions of trauma have focused on the Holocaust and have taken a psychological approach (Schrijvers 2014). There is an apparent divide between the supposedly sheltered Western child and others, but the material used in this chapter focuses on white Western child evacuees facing trauma.

Distancing devices are a key trait in narratives of child evacuation during World War II (Boëthius 2010; Druker 2017). While there was a compact of silence in mainstream Nordic literature from the 1940s to the 1980s, a flood of autobiographical narratives emerged in the 1990s. In contrast, there has been an unbroken line of war-child narratives for children. This might suggest that there is no filter restricting traumatic content in children's literature dealing with war trauma, but that is not the case, as the overall pattern in this kind of narrative is the frequent use of framing silence and distancing devices. In addition, the dramaturgic curve of the "home-away-new home" story is central to children's literature narratives about child refugees, and projects the re-installment of safety (Warnqvist 2018).

The balance between content and aesthetic form is central to the poetics of the child-refugee narrative. Drawing on contemporary picturebooks depicting refugees, Phil Nel states that the picturebook format is an "ideal medium for voicing that unsettling feeling when something unbelievable suddenly becomes true" (2017: 2). He points out that "visual metaphors render difficult emotions clearly, and illustrate children's literature's ability to express dark realities in the language of the fantastic" (2). The books discussed here fit the description of visual metaphors, for example, the depiction of the Baltic Sea, but the language of the fantastic is not used. Instead, these picturebooks advocate a child perspective, distancing devices, reduction and framed silence in order to address traumatic content.

### ***Squirrel Eyes: Through the Autobiographical Lens of an Emerging Artist***



Veronica Leo's picturebook *Squirrel Eyes* offers a great variety of traits that foster visual literacy. Most importantly, this picturebook bridges a historical gap, erases imagined borders such as ethnicity, and is thus suitable for integrated teaching. In a Western or Nordic context, the conventions around depictions of child evacuees follow a pattern of memories and distancing devices, as is obvious in Veronica Leo's case where the narration is retrospective. The book draws on Leo's experiences as a child evacuee, depicting an autobiographical story based on her memories. Constructions of the past and the self in traumatic and nostalgic autobiographical picturebooks are filtered through memory as well as through conventions of how to address traumatic topics in picturebooks (Schrijvers 2014). Leo's picturebook follows the common pattern of child-evacuee stories – depiction of life in Finland including war experiences, separation from parents, the journey to Sweden, first meeting with foster parents, traumatic integration, return and traumatic reunion, and longing for an eventual return to Sweden (Boëthius 2010: 18) – but the choice of first-person narration both verbally and visually makes the picturebook stand out.

The story also depicts Leo's development into a visual artist. Both visual and verbal narration oscillate between gruesome content and escapism into artistic re-visioning. This is possible since Leo describes the war experience from a child's first-person visual narrative perspective. The cover picture immediately gives away the first-person visual narrative perspective by showing the protagonist's hand holding a piece of chocolate, while a group of children with address tags around their necks look at her. Here, the piece of chocolate softens the war scene, while the address tags metonymically evoke the trauma of the child evacuee. The child's gaze on everyday life during war, such as playing among the ruins of bombed buildings, or hiding in bomb shelters, dominates the scene (Lassén-Seger 2010: 26). However, the pointillist style of the illustrations and the clouds outside the windows of the airplane that transports the children to Sweden evoke a dreamlike atmosphere, and suggest a retrospective perspective or memory (26). Despite the war setting, Leo stresses hope through the autobiographical perspective, while depicting her development into an illustrator. This ability to view harsh, traumatic events through a comforting lens of art promotes optimism.

The title of this picturebook, *Squirrel Eyes*, gives away the thematic focus that is view and vision (26). This perspective or way of looking at the world takes concrete form in a squirrel-like figure in a piece of glass art in the entrance of the house where the protagonist lives. The glass animal's shining red ruby-like eyes work as an emblem for the child perspective, as well

as for the division, or split reality (detecting beauty in the midst of horrific war scenery), which the girl protagonist experiences when she confronts the infringement of war. The girl's desire for the squirrel's eyes is blended with doubt. She considers the squirrel a guardian of "all that is awful out there" and borrows its gaze to give the unsafe reality a magical shimmer. Thus, the girl protagonist gains agency via art (26). After the bombing of her hometown, she picks up a red glass shard and uses it as a lens to look at her surroundings: "Whole blocks collapsed and became raggedy landscapes of stone and distorted metal. The imposing glass porch lay spread all around in glittering drifts in the grass and gravel. [...] There were blue, white and red. It was only to pick and collect" (Leo 1990). As the text states, "Seen through a fiery red piece of broken glass the world became beautiful again!" This statement is followed by a wordless spread, where the reader enters the same position as the girl and views the world through her eyes, as the following spreads continue. Leo uses the colorful palette of an artist in the making as a contrast to the grayness of the war. As Fornalcyk-Lipska has pointed out, the use of color is very significant in war narratives (2018: 72). Through the first-person visual narration, where the red shard filters the harsh reality, an artist's vision is thus promoted when the red color spreads over the page covering the gray. Leo's challenging picturebook easily lends itself to integrated teaching, where subjects such as art, history, philosophy, and literature can be brought together. Challenging picturebooks provide complex teaching material in this way since they offer a dense but multi-layered narration that invites several contexts, such as historical, artistic and so on.

Moreover, attention is drawn to the affordances of paratextual elements as Leo draws parallels to refugee children of the 1980s, and dedicates her picturebook to them, thus inviting a discussion about historical contexts. Fornalcyk-Lipska underlines that the use of paratexts is common in visual representations of war (2018: 72), and Leo's afterword is no exception. On the contrary, it consists of a story of its own covering two whole spreads in landscape format consisting of four pages, two vignettes, and one full-page picture. The afterword resembles a letter in its format, with date and place. Leo uses first-person visual narration also in her afterword. A female soldier in uniform holding hands with two children accompanies the verbal narration. The opposite page depicts an elegant woman carrying a small suitcase holding hands with an evacuated child. Here the handing over of child refugees is implied. In addition, the verbal text is told in first person, and narrates how the picturebook artist Leo, aged 8, was sent off to Sweden for four months in 1944. Consequently, this paratext strengthens the autobiographical basis of the narration.

Finnish curricula stress tolerance and democracy, and the challenging picturebooks discussed here invite self-reflection, while showing a Nordic white child refugee in a war setting. The time of publication is pivotal; both picturebook examples were published during times of an ongoing refugee crisis. A tendency to strive for universality dominates war narratives (Warnqvist 2018: 63). The undercurrent of the chosen picturebooks is therefore to show flight from war as a universal trauma, also for the white Western child, thus underpinning empathy and solidarity.

### **Reduction and Framed Silence in *The Sister from the Sea***

Similarly, *The Sister from the Sea* demonstrates specific traits of visual narration that fosters visual literacy, mostly framed silence and reduction of traumatic content. The picturebook is told via two girls: Sirkka, a child evacuee from Finland, and Margareta, the daughter of the Swedish family who takes Sirkka in as their foster child during the war. Margareta longs for a dog but, to her total surprise, receives a foster sister instead. The narrative foregrounds both the experiences of the refugee child and the emotions and reactions of the recipient, Margareta.

On the cover, these two girls sit on a black stone glancing nervously at one another. A dark sea and a boat are visible in the background, and the sky is filled with dark clouds while a light of hope lingers on the horizon. Consequently, the war trauma is reduced, told via metonymic images of the Baltic Sea, while the text encompasses the growing sisterhood between the girls. The strongest impression of war is mediated through images showing the dark, hostile sea and a correspondingly dark ship. Dark colors recur throughout the book, for example as threatening clouds, in order to signify the hardships of war or the worries which the girls experience (Österlund 2016).

Historically, the transportation of Finnish child evacuees across the Baltic Sea during World War II took place in complete darkness. This reality echoes in the picturebook: “Outside is the sea. They cannot see it. But they feel it, because of the rocking. [...] – You have to stay quiet, says a lady wearing a white apron” (Stark and Wirsén 2016: 14). Narratives of child refugees commonly follow a pattern of metonymies, where selected objects stand for larger entities. Wordless pages, which depict the dangerous journey over the Baltic Sea, are the key images in this book. These depictions of the sea recur throughout the narrative, and gain effect via reduction, a main marker of framed silence. The pictures are dominated by darkness, compact

and massive chunks of sea and sky, equally dark and threatening. This reduction mitigates or cushions the traumatic experiences of war. The use of negative space, such as a blank background instead of a detailed landscape, also highlights the war experiences. Wirsén uses a sketch-like drawing technique with open contours to underline a sense of something unfinished. Her use of ink creates a stain-like texture, almost as if tears have stained the pictures. The ink also connects to remembrance work and recollection, and the effect Wirsén thus creates is similar to Veronica Leo's choice of pointillist style in *Squirrel Eyes*.

As pointed out, the awareness of paratextual narration is part of what challenging picturebooks bring to the educational context, and the paratext is also of importance in *The Sister from the Sea*. The paratext appears on the back cover, where a black stain repeats the imagery of the dark Baltic Sea and the sky presented on the front cover. Both girls are portrayed, one to the left and the other to the right, which implies their different nationalities: Finland in the east, Sweden in the west. The waves of the sea melt into the portrait and connect the girls with the seascape and the boat. The shape of the blue stains surrounding Sirkka's head suggests the map of Finland, and thus underlines her nationality. Interestingly, Finland is not mentioned explicitly in the paratext on the back cover, nor in the verbal narrative. Instead, Finland is vaguely referred to as a place "in the east" (Stark and Wirsén 2016: 5, 8). Stark and Wirsén avoid tying the narrative to a specific historical event. This is further underlined by the motto on the endpapers: "To all children, now and then, who are forced to leave their families. This book is dedicated to you." Thereby, they open up the narrative to relate to more recent refugee crises. An inviting photo of Stark and Wirsén on the back cover posing in the archipelago, strengthens the connection between now and then, and presents the picturebook's authors as well-intentioned, robust adults. Moreover, the endpapers depict the boat that appears on the cover, but enlarges the ocean with a large-scale curve, suggesting the contours of the globe and clearly underlining the connection to migration as a global phenomenon. As Janet Evans underlines, challenging picturebooks that deal with migration are "inextricably linked to international, national, and regional issues of politics, power, religion and the economics of any particular country" (2015b: 244).

This subtle visual narration provides opportunities for discussions in a classroom setting where sophisticated narrative techniques merge with topical content. Historical facts and archival material can enrich this context. For example, in the 1940s, Swedish press and weekly magazines were filled with adverts appealing to Swedish families to host Finnish child evacuees. Some of these adverts depicted naked, famished white child bodies, equivalent to

those used in similar contemporary campaigns for child starvation in later decades, thus erasing the border between the white European child and others. The slogan “Finland’s struggle case is ours!” was grounded in centuries of a common history and excessive migration within the Baltic region (Byström and Frohnert 2013: 34). This trait of the challenging picturebook opens possibilities for using archival material such as advertisements.

It is also through newspapers that the decision to host a Finnish foster child is presented in *The Sister from the Sea*. One evening, Margareta’s parents comment on the situation: “Dad turns a page in the newspaper. – It is war now in the east. – Yes, what will become of the children over there? – Some of them can come here. Mum and Dad look at each other. And then they nod” (Stark and Wirsén, 2015: 8). The visual chronotope indicates that the story is set in the 1940s, by depicting clothes and objects, such as a radio, typical of the period. For example, in another episode Margareta’s father listens to a radio broadcast that instructs him how to perform physical exercise. The incident strengthens the difference between war-torn Finland and Sweden in a state of emergency planning where it is still possible to focus on national health. Students thus get a sense of how temporality is shaped by both ideology and artifacts.

In a classroom context, the use of framed silences mediates the harsh content of this challenging picturebook. A few chosen iconic wartime items are effectively used to signify the epoch in question, such as the address cards attached to the deeply anxious child evacuees, which alludes to a broader context of suffering and exposure. Other obvious items such as blackout curtains or ration cards do not appear, which is an example of framed silence, i.e. a reduction and concentration on only a few markers of war. As part of the framed silence, bomber planes are depicted, visually and verbally, only once. The visual narration corresponds with authentic archival material consisting of child drawings. The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, a scholarly society for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge about Finland-Swedish culture, has produced the book *Krigets barn* (The Children of War, 2014), which offers contextualizing material for a discussion of the Finnish child evacuee for schools. In this material, which consists of school essays, letters, and school drawings, authentic, historical child voices are heard, both verbally and visually. Wirsén’s visual connotation to such child drawings, as well as the visual dramaturgy, underlines the child-related perspective. The use of this realistic effect is further highlighted by her use of collage, where photographs of real bomber planes are inserted in the picturebook.

Not only does this challenging picturebook illustrate how war experiences can be told, via framed silence, reduction, and authenticity markers, but it also fosters complexity and visual literacy. In her later work, Stina Wirsén has built on authentic memories from the Holocaust together with Heddi Fried in *Historien om Bodri* (The Story of Bodri, 2019), where similar framing devices are developed, in this case by foregrounding the protagonist's dog.

### **Conclusion: An Emerging Pictorial Turn Brings Challenging Picturebooks to the Classroom**

Including challenging picturebooks in the curriculum offers a means to develop visual literacy, as well as a means to address thought-provoking topics such as child experiences of war, evacuation and flight. The picturebooks under study fit into the Finnish curriculum also because they provide material for integration between school subjects, such as history, art, geography, and so on. The available extracurricular archival material can foster good practices for source criticism and knowledge-producing practices. As Phil Nel states, the refugee child embodies our shared humanity and underlines that, although art can be ideologically ambivalent, careful readings can resist lies, misinformation, and scapegoating (2018: 358f.). As a pictorial turn is taking place in the Finnish school system, discussions on what challenging picturebooks do are pivotal. The question of child evacuees or refugees is and has been one of the key topics of children's literature, effective as an imperative to question a range of hierarchies within humanity.

To reiterate, among the most striking narrative devices in the verbal and visual narration of the picturebooks of both Veronica Leo and Ulf Stark and Stina Wirsén is the tendency to reduce the war context and partly leave out items and scenarios connected with the war. The device of framed silence is employed in both picturebooks in order to enhance complexity, as well as to protect child readers from traumatic contents. While *The Sister from The Sea* stresses sisterhood, *Squirrel Eyes* displays the development of a visual artist – two possible paths to overcome war trauma. Both picturebooks also perform a double task since they relate to current refugee crises in their paratexts while narrating stories about white Western, Nordic children experiencing war and evacuation. This focus on whiteness serves to mediate distance by showing how Nordic countries not too long ago witnessed child evacuation.

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