



The Wonder of Wondering

by LESLEY FARMER

“I wonder...” is a powerful start for lifelong learning and accomplishment. And books are wonder-ful portals to the world. I wonder what paths you’ll take as you wander through books and start wondering about the world.



LITERACY CHAMPION: DR. LESLEY FARMER

Dr. Lesley Farmer, Professor at California State University (CSU) Long Beach, coordinates its Teacher Librarianship program, and was named as the university’s Outstanding Professor. She also manages the CSU ICT (Information and Communications Technology) Literacy Project. A frequent presenter and writer for the profession, she is a Fulbright scholar and has garnered several state, national, and international honors. Dr. Farmer’s research interests include digital citizenship, information and media literacy, and data analytics. Her most current book is *Impactful Community-Based Literacy Projects* (American Library Association, 2021).

One to Know: Know Your Book

Take one book. Get to know it. Savor it. It could be a new best friend. Books are a way to connect minds and hearts across the ages and around the world. Every book is some distillation of a person: a person who takes a big risk, permanently sharing his or her thoughts, beliefs, and values, with perfect strangers—or potential friends.

And like a new friend, you want to know more about that person—and, in this case, that person’s book. You start to wonder: *Why did the author write the book? What are the author’s interests? How personal is the book? Are any of the characters actually the author in disguise? How does the author relate to the setting? How does the book reflect the author’s worldview? What else did the author write?*

The same kind of wondering happens with book illustrations. *I wonder how the artist decided what images to create and share? What personal meaning do they have for the artist? Are the images realistic, cartoonish, abstract? Why? What does that say about the artist? How did the artist create the images? Why did the artist choose this medium; is it the artist’s favorite way to illustrate? What is special about the colors that the artist uses; are they the artist’s favorites? What mood do they evoke?*

I wonder what the artist was feeling? What emotions does the artist share through the shapes that were used: peace, anger, joy, fear, surprise? What is the point of view of the artist: flat or 3D, looking up or looking down? Did the artist illustrate other books; are they different in the choice of images, format, or style?

What to Do: Practice Wondering

This may sound like big adult stuff; it works with almost any good book, including children's books. Let's take *Goodnight Moon* (a video of the book may be found [here](#)). Right from the cover, you start to wonder. *Looking out the window: Where's the ground? Is the room on the second floor? There's another moon-lit sky with a cow jumping over it. What is real, and what is fantasy? I wonder if the author and illustrator know each other? (They DO, which is a good little research task.)*

The book opens upon another part of the room; what seems to belong and what doesn't? *Why did the artist put in a balloon, and why is a bunny in a human-type bed? I wonder when the story was written; some of the objects seem really old, especially the telephone—did they really look like that once upon a time? (so one can check out the copyright date). The colors are primary colors and flat, but the room isn't; that's curious. I wonder why the artist did that? There are more nursery stories embedded in the picture: the three bears and kittens near mittens. Who is the old lady, and why is she knitting? That's a big room for a little bunny, but it IS full of objects; I can see why the two-page spread is needed to see everything. When just one object is named, the page shows it in isolation; that's interesting.*

I wonder why all these objects are being named—and then I find out why: The young bunny is saying good night to each of them. *Who is saying good night: the old bunny or the young bunny? I notice that clocks and socks were mentioned at first, but they are said goodnight too; I wonder why the difference. By now I figure out that objects rhyme, so maybe that's why there is a balloon; what else rhymes with moon that could be in the room? Noon doesn't make sense. Raccoon? I notice that things are moving: the moon is going down, and the mouse moves around. I wonder why the kittens don't pay attention to the mouse. The ball of yarn rolled to the floor; I wonder if the kittens will pull the knitting, but then the ball returns to the lady bunny's lap. At the end, the lady bunny has left, and the young bunny is asleep— and quiet so there is no more noise, except maybe the fire. The lamp is turned off, but the toy house lights are still on; I wonder what is lighting it. And the moon rose again. I wonder if the bunny says good night to the objects because it wants to stay awake. I wonder if the bunny does that routine every night?*

I wonder why the constant repetition of the phrases, and then I sense how calming it sounds if read aloud; it makes me want to relax. Aha, the author is very clever; this is a goodnight book for reading aloud so that kids will get sleepy. I wonder if the author is a mom who found a clever way to get her children to sleep.

You can see how adults (and older children) can share a picture book with a younger child, and wonder together. Building on *Goodnight Moon*, the story experience can be extended by starting the tradition of saying goodnight to the objects in the child's sleeping space—or by reading the book every night. The family might read or listen to other nursery stories or draw pictures of them to put on the wall. The family might look for other stories by the same author and illustrator, and they might look for other bedtime stories (e.g., <https://www.tell-a-tale.com/best->

[20-bedtime-night-time-stories-children-indian-american/](#)). The family might research where rabbits might really sleep, or watch the movement of the moon over the course of the evening. All this for a little picture book; think of the possibilities for other books.

There are so many ways to wonder—and to satisfy that wonderment. And wondering doesn't have to cost a cent!

More to Know and Do

This process of wondering is one technique of engaging with reading material, connecting the readers' own personal experiences and thoughts with those of the author. This process can become internalized so that readers can self-reflect with any text, and then act upon the wonderings, thus expanding their worlds.

The sharing aspect of wonder-ful reading can lead to shared reading experiences with peers, with each person bring unique senses of wonder. That experience with a shared text can also lead to reading buddies with other shared interests.

Such wondering, self-questioning techniques are a mark of expert readers—and researchers. They also develop one's imagination. Authors, inventors, scientists, scholars experience something in their environment or in their reading that causes them to wonder and then pursue the answer to that wondering question. That pursuit often results in original ideas and products. No wonder!

How to Reach Dr. Farmer

Lesley.Farmer@csulb.edu • <https://www.csulb.edu/teacher-librarian-services-credential/page/lesley-farmer> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lesleysjfarmer/>.