

NO WORDS, JUST PICTURES TO TELL THE HISTORY OF HUMANITY: AN ART CASE IN *BOCEJO*

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Abstract

Wordless books are traditionally associated with illiterate children. However, many of them have fragmented and dense proposals, assuming skills and prior knowledge that a young reader would hardly have. Thus, in research whose focus is on books for children selected by the Brazilian – National Program of the School Library (PNBE), we chose to study Renato Moriconi and Ilan Brenman's *Bocejo*. The book consists of apparent isolated scenes that, joined together, form a unique whole, dialoguing with stages that show the history of humanity – from Bible's Eve to the arrival of man on the Moon or from the act of an individual reader to the interaction with the book. Lack of words that could guide the understanding of the reader, temporal gaps between scenes and the multiplicity of elements which compose each picture lead to structure and thematic fractures that complicate the reception of the book by the beginning reader. The meanings of the story emerge by a picture and the articulation with the fact that the character represented is referring to. The proposal of the work prioritizes the emancipatory nature of the reader; however, in the case of young readers, mediation is necessary to help children in the process of comprehension, understanding the book and the art process involved in this humanity path.

Keywords: Wordless book; Art; Children's Literature.

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Childhood and Literature

When discussing literature for children aging from 0 to 3 years old, it is essential to point out which concept for child and childhood is being emphasized. Current definitions are critical to understanding the little ones as in Ancient times, or in the Middle Age, when a child was seen as a miniature adult. In the contemporary world, children participate collectively in society and are active subjects; that is, they are seen as social and historical beings; therefore, producers of culture.

However, such concept is relatively new. In what concerns literature, for instance, in the past years there have not been many productions exclusively aimed at children, who would read/listen to fables, mythological short stories, poems and stories that would circulate among the adults. It was only in the eighteenth century that childhood began to be seen in its specificity. Rousseau claims that childhood has “its own ways of seeing, thinking and feeling”, and that students should be treated “according to their age” (Rousseau, 2011). In the nineteenth century, education aimed at children used to be essentially focused on educational welfarism, based on a medical-hygienist tradition, according to which bath and nutrition were completely disconnected from and/or antagonistic to educational issues (Didonet, 2001).

Nowadays certain advance in laws that rule educational policies can be noticed, especially in some documents such as: *Constituição Federal do Brasil*¹ (Brazilian Federal Constitution, 1988), *Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* (Statute for Children and Adolescents, 1990), *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (Law Regulating Education in Brazil, 1996), and mainly the establishment of – RCNEI – *Referencial Curricular Nacional para a Educação Infantil* (National Curricular References for Early Childhood Education, 1998). The latter emerges with the purpose of overcoming the welfarist model adopted by *daycare centers and preschools*. RCNEI is regulated by the binomial “taking care” and “educating”, since taking care is essential when dealing with small children, but activities such as nutrition, hygiene, and diaper-changes must also be carried out with pedagogical purposes, once these activities are fruit of the interaction between an adult and a child.

Personal relations between adults and children play an important role in children’s development, since a series of discoveries and possibilities are open to the little ones in the first years of their lives. Mukhina (1995) states that major characteristics of development during the first year of life are marked by language assimilation, sensory-motor development and spatial orientation development. Some authors (Davidov; Leontiev) point out to a guiding activity or a main activity, and “... its change characterizes the succession of evolutionary periods” (Davidov p. 74). For the author, the main activities during the first 3 years in a child’s life are *direct emotional communication with adults and object manipulation activities*. As for the first, babies communicate with people since the early weeks of their lives and these situations create the need for interaction. As for the second one, which is characteristic in one-to-three-year-old children approximately, they take into account those actions carried

out in their relationship with the adults, at first reproducing social procedures, with the emergence of language, naming beings, and perceiving categories in the surroundings and concrete thinking (Davidov p. 74).

It is undeniable that language development will come from interpersonal – social and historical – relations. These relations take place especially in the interaction between adults and children, once it is through language that the child starts to take possession of human culture. So those moments of “taking care of” in Early Childhood Education are important in order to tighten the relationship between teacher/educator and child, providing emotional communication. Educators can make use of several moments of the daily routine to promote interaction among the children, given that the experiences lived by them in the institution are very rich. The more teaching activities are turned to human development, the greater the opportunities for children to dominate oral language and develop communication mechanisms.

With these assumptions, literary books have an important role in children’s constitution of language, since

To develop children’s language in the first infancy, both family and daycare centers should offer reading activities that present objects and words through books that can be seen and handled. Listening to words many times in the presence of images that represent them allows children to establish the relationship between the word and the object. These first experiences demand mediation by the adult who reads to the child, offering opportunities for situations so that the child can perform certain activities with the book. Activities which – at first – go through the organs of senses, such as looking, grabbing, touching, smelling, taking the book to the mouth, listening to its sounds. One could state that children’s prehistoric reading starts in their first months of life, and that it will be decisive for learning written language in school age (Souza; Bortolanza p. 77. Our translation).

Yet, for Chartier, Clesse, & Hébrard (1996), family’s reading attitudes and children’s access to written culture at home mark their entry into the world of written culture. They understand what is written because of the familiarity they develop with these contexts, although they are still illiterate and start to take possession of the reading practices surrounding them. In addition to the family, daycare centers and preschool are institutional spaces that should put children in touch with reading/literature. The presence of literature in childhood by means of its major media – the book – fulfills an irreplaceable and indispensable humanizing role for the full development of children’s personality.

In children’s literature, poetry and prose expressed in books made of words and illustrations start building the genre. In 1976, Brazilian readers are introduced to a book that will mark the paths taken by literature for children, with a new way of presenting itself to the audience comprised of children. Through Juarez Machado’s *Ida e volta*², these readers have access to the wordless book. Zilberman (2005) alerts that the presence of a title in the book prevents it from being

totally visual and points out that Angela Lago is one of the most fertile authors regarding deference to Juarez Machado's proposal. After *Ida e volta*, other books mark this trend in Brazil, and the genre consolidates with other authors who express a narrative sequence through illustration, which makes it possible for the beginning readers to understand visual/non-verbal text.

A few titles in the book market have been produced specifically for 0-3-year-old children and have been made in different *formats* (round, rectangular, in the shape of fruits or objects), *materials* (fabric, plastic, cardboard, flannel, special papers) and *styles* – fabric books, bath books, wordless books, pop-up books, toy books. Also, book policies in Brazil, such as *Programa Nacional da Biblioteca da Escola - PNBE* (National Program for School Libraries) – responsible for selecting the collections of books distributed to Brazilian schools – encourage production in the editorial market and promote contact of children at this age with several reading materials.

This study analyzes aspects in Renato Moriconi and Ilan Brenman's *Bocejo*, which was selected to be part of libraries in Brazilian daycare centers (for children aging 0-3 years old) through PNBE, 2014 edition. It is a wordless book. Thus, visual/non-verbal relations, intentionality of the book and, especially, temporal, spatial and thematic fractures diffused by visuality will be discussed.

Children's Literature in School

With one eye on editorial market trends for children and the other on schools, this study focuses on the book analyzed in a national policy for reading. PNBE, created in 1997, aims at promoting access to culture and encouraging reading among students and teachers by distributing a collection of literary, research and reference books. Service is rendered to schools in alternate years: on even-number years, school libraries receive books for Early Childhood Education, First Grades of Elementary School, and Adult Education; and on the odd-numbered years, priority goes to students on their final grades of Elementary School and High School. The Program is free-of-charge and considers all public schools for Primary Education registered in the School Census.

This study is interested in category 1 from the 2014 edition. This category selects books for children at the age of 0-3 years old (nursery schools). The solicitation notice issued by PNBE 2014 rules that publishers can apply their books only to one of the categories, which can be: **poetry** – “quatrain, nursery rhymes, chant, tongue-twister, poem”; **short text** – “children's literature classics, short stories, texts from popular culture”; **picture books** – “books that link images with words”; **wordless books** – “with different colors and techniques such as: drawing, watercolor, painting, among others” (Brasil, 2013, 1).

Choosing the books that will make up the collection is carried out considering 2 special aspects: = (a) the criteria required in the solicitation notice and (b) the material submitted by the publishing companies to be assessed in order to form the collections. After reading and analyzing the titles selected for daycare centers

in the 2014 edition, this study classified the following as wordless books:³

Table 1: Wordless book –4-and-5-year-old preschool children

Title	Author /illustrator	Publisher
<i>É um ratinho?</i>	Guido Van Genechten	Gaudi
<i>É um gato?</i>	Guido Van Genechten	Gaudi
<i>Quando os tam-tans fazem tum-tum</i>	Ivan Zigg	Nova Fronteira
<i>Douglas quer um abraço</i>	David Melling	Salamandra
<i>Ida e volta</i>	Juarez Machado	EDIOURO
<i>O menino e o peixinho</i>	Sonia Junqueira	Autêntica
<i>Maria que ria</i>	Rosângela Bezerra e Rosinha Campos	Araguaia
<i>O jornal</i>	Patrícia Bastos Auerbach	Brinque Book
<i>Bocejo</i>	Ilan Brenman e Renato Moriconi	Companhia das Letrinhas

Source: PNBE 2014 book collection

From the titles indicated in the chart, *Bocejo*, by Renato Moriconi and Ilan Brenman, was chosen due to the complexity of the images that compose it and also for being a book of large dimensions (27cm x 37 cm). The book can be defined as a *big book*, which is ideal for small children and, according to Strickland and Morrow (1990), effective in engaging small children because of its large size and its great illustrations (Figure 1).

Bocejo Between Constancies and Fractures

Renato Moriconi, *Bocejo*'s illustrator, has published more than 40 books in Brazil, France and South Korea. He has received a few awards for his books, such as "The best wordless book", in 2011, and "The best book for children", in 2012, granted by *Fundação Nacional de Literatura Infantil e Juvenil* (FNLIJ - National Foundation for Children and Juvenile Literature). The partnership between Moriconi and Ilan Brenman has been holding itself, once they also authored *Caras Animalescas*, *Telefone sem fio*, among other books acclaimed by specialized critics.

Bocejo presents illustrations that occupy the entire sheet and which are done with acrylic and oil on canvas painting techniques. The book is comprised of 32 pages. Each page is formed by a large image in the foreground and a few other small illustrations in the background, distributed on the sides of the main character who is yawning. The proposal made by the title is maintained – pages on the left are black colored in their base and from the third illustration on (the cave man) the interjection "oooohhhhhh..." is repeated on every page, suggesting the sound of a yawn. On the right-hand side, there is always a being in evidence – a human,

mythical or historical character, yawning, and that can either mean they are sleepy or bored, or even contagiously affected by the yawn from the previous page.

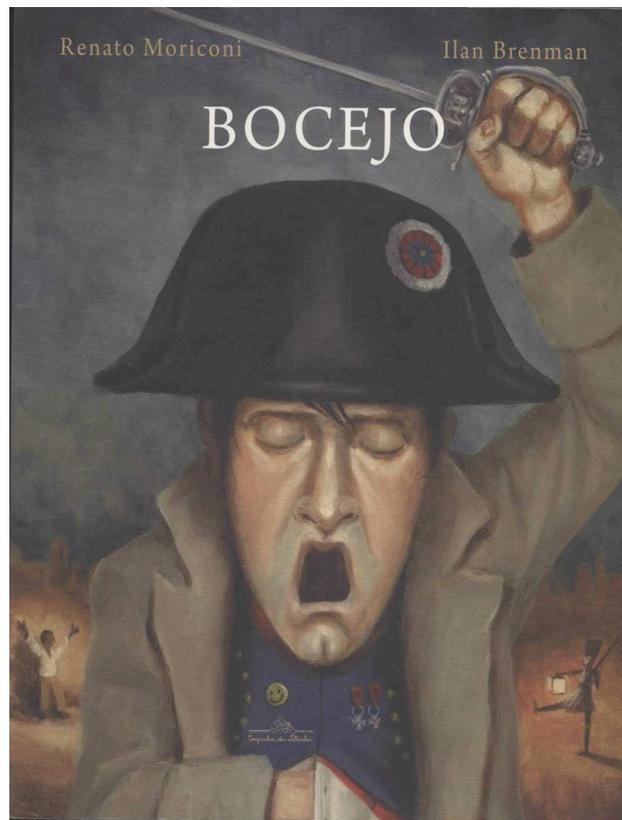


Figure n.1: Cover of the book. Source: Moriconi e Brenman (2012)

The graphic design carries a structure that repeats itself throughout the book in its diagramming, in the black background on the page on the left-hand side, in the yawning of the figure that is in the foreground in the illustration and also in its composition in which foreground and background are articulated. Also, the suggestion coming from the title of the book stands out guiding reader's perception to the act of yawning, which is present in every figure throughout the book. These constancies can guide the readers as well as grant them some safety in their interaction with the book. However, because it is a literary piece, the text presents a few fractures, in order to challenge the reader to interact with the proposal enunciated. Among the fractures given, a few in the scope of temporal, spatial and thematic fractures are pointed out by the authors of this study.

Temporally, the book displays a long period of time (from darkness, from the beginning of humanity to the advent of conquering the Moon), which may be seen as a fracture on the way children's literature presents itself, given that a book for children from 0 to 3 years old would usually present a brief narrative. The first five pages include paratext elements, with mandatory data from the catalographic card to authors' biodata and, on page 5, there is a dedication. The plot, itself, starts on pages 6 and 7, where there is a complete overlaying of the color black without any details, depicting the darkness that precedes the emergence of life in the universe (suggested by the next page whose image is a

tree trunk that is yawning). Then, the focus of each set of 2 pages is a human figure, going from the image of Eve, a character in the book of Genesis, in the Holy Bible, to a sequence of other figures – all of them yawning – until the last one is shown where an astronaut is seen.⁴

Breaking the orientation that temporality is a difficult concept to be constructed due to its multiple facets, the book comprehends the history of Western civilization, embracing it since the emergence of mankind until the end of the twentieth century. The following chart synthesizes aspects that make up the book, considering the pictures that comprise it:

Table 2: Historical aspects of the composition of the book

Page	Foreground	Background	Historical aspects
7	Total darkness	Black page	Previous to the emergence of human life.
9	Picture of a tree	Unicorn drinking water and a Harlequin	Emergence of life on Earth.
11	Biblical picture of Eve	Apple tree, serpent and a traffic sign indicating prohibition	The creation of the world – mythical/biblical explanation.
13	Picture of a cave man	Bananas and a monkey.	Evolutionism, Stone Age (3 million years BC).
15	Picture of a Pharaoh	Pyramids and sphinx with Mickey Mouse's ears.	Egyptian civilization (XXXII century BC).
17	Statue of Venus de Milo	Temple with Greek columns, Icarus, Faun, Parthenon, and a person with a slingshot.	Greek civilization (VI century to IV BC).
19	Roman Centurion	She-wolf with Romulus and Remus, Little Red Riding Hood, Coliseum	Roman civilization (II century BC).
21	Armed Viking man	Viking boat and Santa Claus on skis	Nordic civilization (VIII century).
23	Witch	Armed Knight from the Crusades and a stone house in the forest. Allusive to Jack and Jill's home.	Medieval civilization (XI century).
25	Napoleon Bonaparte	Detail of Goya's painting "The third of May", and an image in which Toy Soldier and the ballerina are merged (allusive to Andersen's book "Toy Soldier").	End of the French revolution (XVIII century and beginning of the XIX century).
27	Charles Chaplin	Factories with chimneys and Lenin giving a speech to the audience. Allusive to the film "Modern times".	Industrial revolution (XIX century).
29	Albert Einstein	Ostrich, cuckoo clock, Alice's rabbit, and references to Salvador Dali's melted clocks. Allusive to the atomic mushroom.	Beginning of the XX century, 1945-bomb.

31	Astronaut	Machine on the Moon, boxer shorts instead of a flag, and an extraterrestrial. Allusive to the film "Star Wars".	Man's arrival to the Moon in 1969.
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Source: Organized by the researchers, 2017.

The elements in the foreground are a sign of one of the stages of human (r)evolution, from the absence of life on Earth, given by darkness, followed by the creation of the world, both from the creationist view of the Holy Bible (p. 11) and from evolutionism (p. 13) up to man's arrival to the Moon (p. 31). However, this understanding cannot be reached by 0-3-year-old children. Hence, what will they read? Children's reading will be more associated to the literal sense than to the ironic one announced by the title. These children cannot reach the historical trajectory of the book and will probably only notice several characters with their mouths open, without establishing any affinities among them. They might not even notice the smaller images displayed in the background. Ultimately, readers' eyes may go straight to the center of the page, to the leading figure, due to its dimensions and the repetition of the same action. Some comments enumerating the characters' clothing and the images in the background might be made by small children. The astronaut's uniform, for example, has a toothbrush, a soda straw, and a mirror similar to the ones used by dentists. In that sense, fractures are also present in the images that mix contemporary elements with the epoch of the event. So, by exploring the Moon, Louis Armstrong marked a territory, unknown until then, with his country's flag – the US –and not with red polka-dot boxer shorts. These visual elements of strangeness (toothbrush, soda straw and mirror) depict humor in the narrative, but they can also lead readers to the inference about whether those objects were used or not by the astronaut on the Moon.

Opening one's mouth with their eyes closed, keeping one's arms up can also call one's attention, since all the central figures are in that position and in the same visual perspective – facing the reader. If taken for granted that yawning can be contagious, it can be stated that the position held by the characters in evidence, facing the readers, is meant to be contagious, leading them to a yawn. Other details such as the witch's wart, the fact that Venus de Milo is a statue, Einstein's crazy appearance with his tongue out, the separated teeth and dirty aspect of the cave man and of the Viking can also be a reason for comments and laughter.

Although in the little ones' prior knowledge there might be a few characters known by them, such as the Little Red Riding Hood, the little Toy Soldier, Alice's White Rabbit, or even an extraterrestrial – they also appear on pages where historical connections can be made. For example, on page 19, in the background, on the left-hand side, the reader can notice Little Red Riding Hood holding her basket with treats and the She-wolf breastfeeding two children. That image composes the page of the Roman civilization in the second century B.C., whereas Perrault wrote the classical story of the little girl who disobeys her mother in the

seventeenth century. The allusion to Romulus and Remus who are fed by the she-wolf marks the beginning of Roman civilization. This temporal distance may be more related to Capitoline Wolf (she-wolf), character that gives life to the twins and, in Perrault, the wolf that takes life away from the girl with the red hood.



Figure n.2: Aspects of Roman civilization. Source: Moriconi e Brenman (2012)

Taking page 25 as an object for reflection, in which Napoleon Bonaparte can be seen in the foreground – a picture which has already been displayed on the cover – there are several elements challenging the attentive reader. The character is adorned with garments that make it possible to recognize him. However, underneath the shirt that resumes the colors of the French flag, there are badges that are not only the known ones. Irony is accentuated when Napoleon yawns and, on his clothes, a pin depicting a familiar North-American symbol can be seen – the smiley, a yellow round pin with eyes and a large smile. In the background, on the left-hand side, there is an African-American, with his arms up, maybe resembling freedom from slavery – but for the experienced reader the reference is to part of Goya’s painting “The firing squad on the third of May” – painted in 1814, currently exhibited in Madrid at the Sofia Museum. On the right-hand side, the picture blends in traits of a soldier and a ballerina because it presents a Toy Soldier wearing a tutu, a piece of information that makes it possible to associate with Hans Christian Andersen’s tale “The Brave Toy Soldier”. In this portrait, images belong to the same historical period once Goya painted the picture in 1814 and Andersen wrote the tale in 1838. The fracture can be noticed by a more experienced reader as for spatial issues. After all, “The Brave Toy Soldier” was

written in Denmark, Napoleon was an emperor in France, and Goya depicted the shooting of rebels who fought against Napoleon's troops in Madrid, Spain.

In addition to temporal fractures at every couple of pages, they can be noticed in other images, such as the creation of the Earth, for example. In the center of the page, a large tree yawns; in the background, on the left, a unicorn drinks water while, on the right, the reader comes across a small lifebuoy – a contemporary element – which is also in the format of a unicorn, floating in a river where there is a person dressed as Harlequin. The strangeness of this image suggests a trip through the reader's previous knowledge. When it comes to a small reader, for whom the book was selected (0 to 3 years old), this cultural background will have to be discussed and built with a more experienced mediator.

Mixing Albert Einstein, the German physicist, with Salvador Dali's melted clocks and the White Rabbit with a pocket watch from Alice in Wonderland, by Lewis Carroll, there is a fracture in our own interpretation of time and rationality.

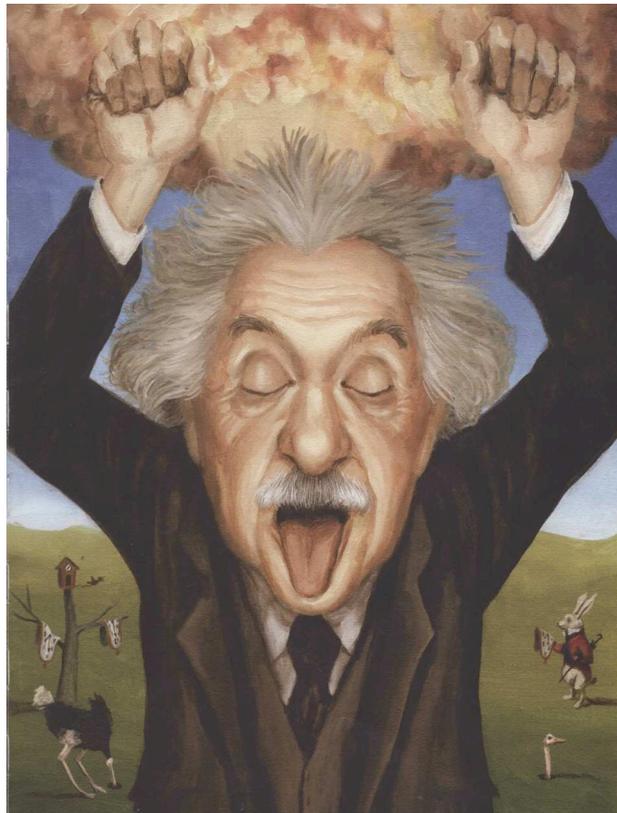


Figure n.3: Ruptures : temporality and rationality Source: Moriconi e Brenman (2012)

After all, Einstein is not just any physicist; he is the author of the theory of relativity. In the meantime, Dali's clocks challenge our rational understanding of the physical world. The White Rabbit, who is responsible for Alice entering to Wonderland, warns us about the relativity in temporal issues. Merging all these characters on page 29 – in *Bocejo* – calls our attention not only to the relativity of things, but also for the distinction between reality (expressed with Einstein) and imagination (depicted by Dali and Lewis Carroll). Also, the image of an ostrich with its body on the left-hand side and its head stuck in a hole and overlaying

on the right-hand side of the page might be related to traits of real and fictitious, brave and coward characters, such as the White Rabbit and courageous ones, such as Einstein, who challenged his own time.

Temporal, spatial and thematic fractures are present in every page. Even if that happens in the background, there are contemporary elements such as traffic signs, skis, Mickey Mouse hats next to myths such as the Capitoline Wolf breastfeeding the twins Romulus e Remus, and also the figure of Santa Claus. These elements of strangeness will only make sense if the reader or the reading mediator is aware of history of mankind and knows how to bring such items to the discussion of the imagery text. Despite the fractures presented in *Bocejo*, the book is comprised by a structure that repeats itself: on the page on the left-hand side, with a black background, the expression *oh!* is connected with the figure on the right-hand side that is yawning. On that page, the larger image yawns and there are several details in the background.

Fractures that Enlarge Repertoires

Readers from the twenty-first century bring along with them a little of their ancestors and keep trying to evolve and interact with the text in a way that is freer and freer from socially imposed principles. Children are, above all, a social being and their practicing as readers will influence and be influenced by the society they are part of. From the role of listening reader that had been assigned to them, they become readers who can hold the object – book – in their hands to see, think and say. Now, children do not just need to see the book through the eyes of the adult reader; they can see it for themselves and start their stumbling steps towards a path that leads to introspective reading.

In that sense, offering *Bocejo* to small children, allowing them to go through the pages; and notice details is a possibility for the mediator reader. Role-playing the act of opening their mouths or yawning, discussing about the fact that yawning can be contagious can also be part of a talk about the book. Calling children's attention to the differences among the central characters with the purpose of making them aware of a temporal evolution is a viable alternative. Ultimately, in the contemporary world, reading presupposes interaction, and every other day the book makes it possible for the reader to – in addition to handling the object – be able to position oneself about it, constructing meaning. The presence of the book in a child's hand, through National Program of the School Library (PNBE), contributes for children to take over their role in building the story along with the text with which they are interacting.

However, the diversity of visual elements that comprise the title generates an ironical proposal that cannot be perceived by a beginner reader who has no knowledge about history of mankind. Recognizing figures of different historical periods, as well as the possibility of inferring in relation to other images that compose each scene will make it possible for mediator and the little reader to enlarge their repertoire. In that sense, a book that would initially not be indicated

for 0-3-year-old children can make a difference when taking into account that it is in Early Childhood Education that small children are more propitious to enlarge their cultural, visual and linguistic repertoire. Wordless books make countless entries possible and the richer their existence and experiences with those books, the more likely these children will be able to create and use their imagination.

Therefore, temporal blanks between the images displayed on the odd pages and the lack of words seem to require an even larger intervention from the reader. By exploring images as language and consequently as a way of expressing oneself and producing meaning, the mediator can have children communicate their emotions and act over the title. By sensitizing the eyes of the little ones so as to participate in the story that is being read/shown, the educator can transform that child into a producer of culture and meaning. Thus, a more experienced reader can help to increase the repertoire of readers under construction, showing them several situations to read a wordless book, especially when it comes to *Bocejo*.

Notes

1. Translator's note: Since some of the documents, events, and official titles mentioned in this article are only available in their original version in Portuguese, an informal translation has been provided in parenthesis to help reader's understanding.
2. According to *Fundação Nacional do Livro Infantil e Juvenil* (the National Foundation for Children's and Juvenile's Books), this book has already been granted with the following awards: *Láurea "Altamente Recomendável - Criança"* - 1976 - FNLIJ (A Laurel for "Highly recommended for children"), *Prêmio Associação Paulista dos Críticos de Arte - Categoria Infantil* - 1976 (Award granted by the Art Critics Association in São Paulo, Category "Children"), *"Diplôme Loisirs Jeunes"* - under the category for "Wordless books" and "First reading books" - 1976, Nakamura Award in Japan - 1977, *Luís Jardim Award - "O Melhor Livro de Imagem - 1981"* - FNLIJ (Best wordless book), *Projeto Ciranda de Livros/FNLIJ - (Ciranda 4)* - 1985, It is part of the selection of the IBBY Documentation Centre of Books for Disabled Young People (Oslo University - Norway), for the *Exposição de Livros de Qualidade para Crianças e Jovens com Deficiências* (Exhibit of Quality Books for Children and Youngster with Special Needs). Source: <http://www.fnlij.org.br/site/pnbe-1999/item/227-ida-e-volta.html>. Retrieved Jan 6 2015.
3. In this study, wordless books are understood as those titles that are organized without words being present in their core. Text is constituted only in a visual nature, from colors, traits, and images among other elements, generating - in this case - a narrative thread.
4. The commercial edition of this book has one more sheet, in a total of 34 pages. This sheet is thicker than the others, in aluminum paper, resembling a mirror, so that readers can see themselves in the book. Inserting this page enhances the temporality of the book at each act of reading, once the reader's image is reflected on it.

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