

**A semiotic analysis of wordless picture books produced in the context of Kayamandi,  
Western Cape, South Africa**

by

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## Abstract

Picture books can act as a foundation to introduce knowledge and tell stories in education, as well as a way to utilise wordless picture books and the value thereof. This can lead to an improvement in learners' development. This study investigated how signs, symbols and signifiers serve many functions in human lives. The use of wordless storytelling is linked with the production of knowledge; not only knowledge and understanding, but also indigenous knowledge and way of knowing. Theoretical perspectives of semiotics, narratology, indigenous knowledge, social justice and diversity were used to inform the research.

A research design in the form of a case study was used. Qualitative data collection techniques and non-probability sampling were used. The sampling consisted of the stories written by and observations of 22 learners and four teachers in focus group sessions.

Five Grade 9 learners participated in four sessions, each writing their own stories, after which five illustrators illustrated the stories. A class activity was observed in which the wordless picture books were put into practice in a learning context. Four teachers were interviewed with regard to the semiotic use of the signs, symbols and signifiers in the wordless picture books. To understand the data collected, inductive content analysis was done.

The findings and conclusions include the importance of using the correct signs, symbols and signifiers when portraying indigenous stories and knowledge in wordless picture books. This should however be realised. The diminishment of indigenous knowledge in education needs to be overcome, and this can be done by introducing context-relative knowledge in previously marginalised areas. The implications of the findings and conclusions from the representation of the wordless picture books and self-reflection by the educators are presented. Further implications include the promotion of indigenous knowledge and storytelling in wordless picture books. Better exposure to indigenous knowledge is necessary in education.

## **Opsomming**

Prenteboeke kan as grondslag in die onderwys dien om kennis oor te dra en stories te vertel, asook om woordelose kinderboeke en die waarde daarvan te benut. Die ontwikkeling van die leerder kan hierdeur plaasvind. Hierdie studie het 'n ondersoek na die funksie wat tekens, simbole en aanwysers in mense se lewens vervul, behels. Die gebruik van woordelose storievertelling hou verband met die produksie van kennis; nie net kennis en begrip nie, maar ook inheemse kennis en die manier van ken. Teoretiese perspektiewe van semiotiek, narratologie, inheemse kennis, sosiale geregtigheid en diversiteit is gebruik om die navorsing te rig.

'n Navorsingsontwerp in die vorm van 'n gevallestudie is gebruik. Kwalitatiewe data-insamelingstegnieke en niewaarskynlikheidsteekproefneming is gebruik. Die steekproefneming het bestaan uit waarneming van die verhale wat geskryf is en die waarneming van 22 leerders en vier onderwysers tydens fokusgroepsessies. Vyf graad 9-leerders het in vier sessies hul verhale geskryf, waarna vyf illustreerders die verhale geïllustreer het. Tydens 'n klas-aktiwiteit is waargeneem hoe die woordelose prenteboeke in 'n leerkonteks aangewend word. Vier onderhoude is oor die semiotiese gebruik van die tekens in die woordelose prenteboeke gevoer. Ten einde begrip van die versamelde data te verkry, is induktiewe inhoudsontleiding gedoen.

Die bevindings en gevolgtrekkings sluit in dat die belangrikheid van die gebruik van die regte simbole in die uitbeelding van inheemse verhale en kennis in woordelose prenteboeke besef moet word. Die vermindering van die waarde van inheemse kennis in die onderwys moet oorkom word, en een manier om dit te doen, is om kontekstueel relatiewe kennis in spesifieke kontekste in te voer. Die implikasies van die bevindings en gevolgtrekkings in die voorstelling van die woordelose prenteboeke en selfbesinning deur die opvoeders word voorgestel. Verdere implikasies behels die bevordering van inheemse kennis en storie-vertelling in woordelose prenteboeke. 'n Beter blystelling aan inheemse kennis is in die onderwys nodig.

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## CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction and background

Educational institutions in South Africa were established with Western knowledge production as the supreme and only legitimate system (The Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Policy, 2004). A fixed concept was therefore formed in South Africa and other places in the world of what legitimate knowledge entails. The reality is that knowledge systems are formed from many influences over many years and no clear division can be drawn of what, for instance, is Western, Asian or African knowledge. During the colonial and apartheid times in South Africa, African indigenous knowledge (AIK) was deliberately repressed and cultures were relegated to a position secondary to that of the Western culture. The current promotion of AIK aims for it to regain its rightful place in the contribution to knowledge systems, but also to reclaim an African sense of identity (Waghid, 2010), thereby establishing confidence in the knowledge system.

In the current educational curriculum in South Africa, many examples from AIK are used regularly; however, there are a lack of indigenous African stories, specifically in wordless picture books in South Africa and elsewhere. It is well known in the educational field that children learn and absorb knowledge from their environment and that if, for instance, examples from children's environments are used in their educational curricula, they can associate with them and learning is enhanced.

This study collected stories and investigated their effectiveness among teachers, parents and learners of a predominantly isiXhosa-speaking community near Stellenbosch, South Africa. The youths from Vision AfriKa Primary School<sup>1</sup> collected stories in the Kayamandi<sup>2</sup> community. These stories were written, drawn, told or visually portrayed, and were then collated into wordless picture books. These wordless stories were then given to parents to read with their children. These parents were asked to attend meetings once a week (for five weeks) in order to collect new material to read with their children and to give feedback on their experiences. The progress of the parent-child

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<sup>1</sup> Vision AfriKa Primary School is a non-governmental organisation in Kayamandi, Stellenbosch.

<sup>2</sup> Kayamandi is a suburb of Stellenbosch.

reading of the wordless picture books, and the effect it had in the home, were monitored through the use of focus group sessions. The success of the signs, symbols and signifiers used in the books (that came from stories in the community), and the reaction the children had to the indigenous stories, were observed by me and the parents. The parents reflected on the stories and the extent to which the stories were used or not used in their homes. This was documented through interviews and focus group sessions with the parents and teachers.

## **1.2 Indigeneity, indigenous knowledge and indigenous stories in South African education**

There has been considerable debate on the use of indigenous knowledge to promote development in rural communities in parts of the world (Briggs, 2005:99). However, Briggs (2005) warns that indigenous knowledge might not be useful because people do not always know how to apply their own knowledge and do not always see the worth of their own/indigenous knowledge as a better way for development. It could be that, because of the strong dominance of Western knowledge systems in the previous hundred years, the value of diversity in knowledge systems is not recognised.

The theoretical framework used in this study included semiotics, narratology, indigenous knowledge, and the importance that social justice and diversity play in terms of wordless picture books as educational tools. This study semiotically investigated the signs and signifiers used in wordless picture books written by Grade 9 learners and illustrated by professional illustrators. It formed part of a larger project funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) conducted by Adrie le Roux, a lecturer at the University of Johannesburg. Le Roux's study included the use of wordless picture books to promote a culture of reading among preschool learners. Her study focused on promoting reading for educational and recreational purposes. My study was a follow-up on Le Roux's PhD study. A need emerged to specifically reflect and semiotically analyse the books produced in the projects. Whereas Le Roux's study focused mainly on the child's development and parent-child reading at home, my study focused on the use of signs and signifiers in the wordless picture books and how they affect learning and meaning-making.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The primary research question was: How are signs and signifiers used in wordless picture books in a South African context?

The secondary research questions were:

- How do the signs and signifiers contribute to meaning-making?
- How does the indigenous knowledge of a specific culture influence meaning-making?

The following research objectives were formulated to address the research questions:

- To investigate how signs and signifiers are used in wordless picture books in a South African context
- To investigate how the signs and signifiers contribute to meaning-making
- To investigate how the indigenous knowledge of a specific culture influences meaning-making

### **1.4 Overview of the research methodology**

This study was an empirical study and qualitative methods were used to collect data. I used an interpretative lens (Klein & Meyers, 1999), which requires reflection on how data are socially constructed. A case study research design (Creswell, 2003) was used to guide the research. Qualitative data were collected from four teachers through semi-structured recorded interviews and focus group sessions. Data included written notes, voice recordings and illustrations. The participants were sampled through the principal of Vision AfriKa Primary School, and the sample size was influenced by interest in the project. All participants from the school and the learners' parents signed consent forms. Confidentiality and data protection were important considerations in this study. Data confidentiality was maintained by using codes for the participants. Data and artworks were stored on my laptop and on a backup flash drive that was kept in my room. The research was only handled by my supervisor, my co-supervisor and the school principal. The data were stored in a safe place and access was given only to my supervisor and participants who requested to see the data. Inductive content analysis was used to analyse the data. Ethical clearance

was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanoria) of Stellenbosch University. A more detailed description of the methodology is given in Chapter 4.

### **1.5 Boundaries and limitations of study**

The limitations of this study included unavailability of participants, parents' working hours and transport disruptions. Other limitations that I faced included language barriers between me and the participants, as well as age and cultural differences. The school principal organised an interpreter to be present at all times if the learners did not speak or understand English.

### **1.6 Structure of thesis**

This orientation to the study serves as an introduction to the study in Chapter 1. This introduction placed the study in a South African context and stated the research question and aims and objectives of this study. Chapter 2 contains the theoretical framework of the study, which consists of the literature review. Semiotics, indigenous knowledge, narratology, social justice and diversity are discussed here as perspectives that influenced the study. The study is contextualised in Chapter 3, which consists of a brief overview of indigenous knowledge and education in South Africa. Chapter 4 explores the research methodology used in this research. Chapter 5 presents the collected data, the findings and the discussion thereof. Themes that emerged from the study were used as a framework to unpack the data. The data and discussion of the findings are presented in the order in which the study was conducted. The conclusions and implications in Chapter 6 summarise the research findings and discussions, and provide closing reflections on the implications of the findings for the value of signs and signifiers in wordless picture books and the effect they have on meaning-making. Some implications are included that may be relevant to further the success of wordless picture books and the way in which the signs and signifiers within the books communicate.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 2.1 Introduction

Semiotics, narratology, African indigenous knowledge (AIK), diversity and social justice are the main theoretical frameworks that were used in this research. Herman and Vavaek (2005:13) define narrative as “the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a causal or temporal way”. The tools of narratology are allowed, by this definition, to be used to analyse wordless picture books and explore oral storytelling. Furthermore, narratology can be applied in “a traditionally narrower use as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon” (Johnson, 2009:53).

Narrative is therefore a way of understanding and giving meaning and a role to semiotic text. Anything that signifies something else, or is regarded as a signifier, is denoted in a semiotic text. A sign has the potential to be anything and can be anything that shows meaning; however, it shows meaning within a specific culture or conceptual framework (Chandler & Ryan, in Shitemi, 2009:82). Abdi, Puplampa and Dei (2006:53) state that indigenous knowledge offers “local understandings of workings of social and natural systems to produce meaning of vision”. Furthermore, the word ‘local’ is described by them as a gesture of how knowledge is shaped by cultural norms and values in communities. ‘Local’ also helps to understand and communicate explanations of social realities. Indigenous knowledge can address the needs of a community and can be relevant as it grows and changes, with its different interactions with other knowledge systems proving its dynamism (Abdi *et al.*, 2006:54). According to Abdi *et al.* (2006:73), the impact on indigenous societies in Africa caused by globalisation can be described as adding to the relevance of using indigenous language and knowledge to create social understanding that combines literature with politics, culture, history and economics.

Wordless picture books were analysed and discussed within the framework provided by the theoretical perspective. This framework was situated in a South African context and the theoretical point of departure was provided by semiotics, narratology, AIK, diversity and social justice. Although these frameworks overlap, they are discussed separately.

## 2.2 Semiotics

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ferdinand de Saussure founded semiology. Saussure was a Swiss linguist, and many researchers have based their research on his work. The science that studies signs and the role thereof was also explored by him, as well as the part that signs play in social, everyday life. Saussure's initial thinking reflects that structuralism can be linked to the origins of semiotics (Curtin, 2009:52). Thomas Sebeok (2001) writes that semiosis is the event that differentiates living things from inanimate objects. The term 'semiosis' refers to the natural ability of living things to produce and understand signs. In our lives, signs serve many functions, one of which is allowing people to recognise patterns in daily conventions. Signs allow living things to "signal [their] existence, communicate messages with one another and model incoming information from the external world" (Sebeok, 2001:3). Flowing from that, the term 'semiotics' studies these functions.

According to Sebeok (2001), what was used to lay down the course that semiotic exploration followed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Saussure's definition of 'the sign'. Sebeok defined semiotics as physical things (sounds, letters, gestures), called the signifiers, and images or concepts that the signifiers refer to, called the signified. The relationships between these two are called significations. Sebeok states that Pierce's 1995) definition of the signifier is that it represents something (something that does the representing), for instance the use of sounds and hand movements. Signs are therefore recognisable because they have certain predictable and regular properties and structures (Sebeok, 2001:6). Messages can be put together on the basis of single signs or combinations thereof (Sebeok, 2001:7). Non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, pouting, a raised eyebrow, crying and flaring nostrils, establishes a universal communication system. According to Sebeok (2001:21), eye work can be particularly substantial in understanding a range of human social behaviours.

According to Crawford and Hade (2000:66), wordless books became a clearly understood genre in children's literature over the past four decades. Over the history of man, people who did not have the ability to read or write recorded their stories, traditions and culture through their drawings. Silent films and virtual stories are examples of series of pictorial images that reveal a visual text that invites transactions from the audience with the story being displayed. These transactions ask of the viewers to use their individual understandings to find relevance in the illustrated story at which they are looking (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66). Similar traditions to these are followed by

the wordless picture book, as the message in a wordless picture book is given mainly by visual images. Texts such as these can be seen as invitations to which readers respond by bringing their own contextual understandings and knowledge or personal experiences to the text or visual representation, so as to make sense of their readings of the visual signs presented in the illustrations (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66).

Furthermore, narratives are then constructed by story-takers and story-makers on the foundations provided by these wordless picture books, creating unique narratives for individuals. Wordless picture books have been used by children, classroom teachers and also in the work of education researchers. The wordless picture book is like other picture books in the way that it combines images that allow the reader to walk away with a more enriching story (Crawford & Hade, 2000:67–68). What makes this book unique is that the content is solely communicated using illustrations. It should be possible to read the images in the book on their own, without printed text supporting them, and the author's intentions must be carried in the images. The attributes of signs, symbols and signifiers in the wordless picture book allow for these books to be read as open-ended, a process in which people read stories by using their contextual backgrounds and experiences to make sense of the visual images they encounter within the book. Crawford and Hade (2002:68) comment that “unlike words, even those fixed in a written text, visual images have almost infinite capacity for verbal extension, because viewers must become their own narrators, changing the images into some form of internalized verbal expressions”.

According to Barthes (1999), every society has developed its own symbol system, which at first glance by the outside observer seems as if it includes strange behaviours and objects, as though it has senseless meanings and brings forth odd, inappropriate patterns of thinking and emotions. When examined, individual symbol systems reflect cultural logic, as the symbols' main function is to communicate information between members of a culture, with some logic that can only be understood by members of the same culture. Cultural symbols almost have the same type of communications as with conventional language; however, symbols depend on one another for their meaning and their growth and value. These symbols are not languages; they are devices that people use to communicate ideas that cannot be articulated in everyday language or in conventional ways. Some ideas are too difficult, dangerous or inconvenient to articulate in language. Barthes (1999:2) states that the idea of compiling discrete vocabularies of symbols to present in a natural language seems impossible, as they do not have the regularities present in natural languages “that are

necessary for explicit definitions". Therefore, having a non-natural language that consists of symbols or gestures and that exists in certain cultures, function in its own ways in their own contexts.

According to Gerber and Golden (1990:205), semiotic theory provides a construct that helps us understand the picture book sign. This construct is the relation of the sign to its object. Pierce (1995, in Gerber and Golden, 1990:205) presents three categories of signs that have different relations to the object: the icon, the index and the symbol. The iconic sign refers to objects that are similar to it (Gerber & Golden, 1990:205). Rather than resembling the object, the sign is changed or adapted by the object. If a general idea represents a general object, the symbol refers to that object by rule. Examples of symbols that indicate an object include words, sentences and books. Gerber and Golden (1990:205–206) state that “[v]erbal language reflecting the symbol is integrated with the iconic signs present in the illustrations”. To reflect the order of narrative, iconic signs are arranged linearly. According to Gerber and Golden (1990:206), iconic signs are used in illustrations and symbols in verbal languages, and they each have the potential to represent other features of the sign. Curtin (2009:53) furthermore states that Pierce's ideas should be looked at critically, but that they can also be useful. The classifications that Pierce uses for the icon, index and symbol work best if they are applied to images and objects in a dynamic way.

What semiotics is concerned with is meaning, how representation (language, objects, images) can create and ascribe meaning and the processes that lead to meaning (Curtin, 2009:51). Semiotics needs to be understood with more than just symbolism in mind in order for it to be used as a means of communication. Semiotics requires more than just the study of symbolism. Concepts such as naturalism, realism and intentionality are challenged with the use of semiotics in the way that naturalism and realism refer to the idea that something can be objectively depicted by the meaning of images and objects. However, intentionality refers to the idea that images and objects have a certain meaning given by the person who created them (Curtin, 2009:51). The individual elements of the image or object, and the importance of the relationship between them, can be seen as primary to the notion of meaning in semiotic analyses (Curtin, 2009:51).

In effect, semiotic analysis acknowledges the inconsistent relationships that might be represented in books or other mediums, which leads to how images or objects can be understood as dynamic. Images or objects are not seen as important if they are understood in a one-way process from

image/object to the individual. Images and objects as they are represented in a medium should rather be perceived as the outcome of a complex inter-relationship between the individual, the image/object and other factors (Curtin, 2009:51). In discussions of semiotics, it is referred to as the study of signs and signifying practices (Curtin, 2009:52).

### **2.3 Narratology**

Sue Lyle (2000:46) argues that the way a narrative is understood should be considered the key aspect of meaning-making. Lyle's research draws from a variety of research in multiple disciplines, and her studies suggest that the importance of 'how narrative is understood' is a growing concept in terms of how children learn (Lyle, 2000:46). According to Lyle (2000:51), Mead (1934, in Lyle, 2000) believed that the foundation of individual social development is provided through experience gained in social interaction. This notion sparked investigations of how social interactions influence children's development. Mead suggested that children have powerful social tendencies that they live out in the world, which invites people to take part in the activities of the community.

According to Lyle (2000:51), it is through "social activity and exchanges that children are able to take on roles, put themselves in a place of another person and make inferences concerning the other's experiences". A way of meaning-making and learning is evident here in the way that the child is exposed to the experiences of others. Narrative understanding is an important cognitive tool through which all humans in all cultures make sense of the world, and this is shown in work or documentation in different disciplinary areas (Lyle, 2000:53). Lyle (2000) states that humans are wired/predisposed to organise experiences into narrative form.

Narratives from cultures (stories, myths, fairy tales, legends) have powerful meaning, and several writers, such as Bettelheim, Brunner and Egan, have called attention to this. This powerful meaning carries history and knowledge of different cultures and traditions. According to Lyle (2000:54), Rosen (1985, in Lyle, 2000) says that stories are predisposed products of the experiences of the human mind, and these stories are narrative experiencing that is transformed into findings that we can share and compare with the narratives of others, as we are social beings. The impulse that humans have to tell and share stories, and how experiences are shaped into narratives, point to the value of the narrative in the creation of meaning (Lyle, 2000:54). The value of the narrative is emphasised in the way that humans naturally tell and retell experiences in a narrative form, and

therefore they want to receive information in narrative form. The importance of the narrative is recognised by many scholarly research fields, and the demonstration of how narrative discourse influences how humans relate to others can be found in work from many disciplines (Lyle, 2000:55). How narrative is understood is also found within social sciences and is seen as vital to meaning-making; however, “its practical application in the classroom needs to be explicated” (Lyle, 2000:55). Furthermore, Egan (1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, in Lyle, 2000:55) is the most passionate and ongoing supporter of the understanding of narrative in educational research, and firmly claims that the primary form of understanding is narrative understanding.

Narrative is mostly associated with ‘the act of narration’ and is found whenever someone tells us about something (Fludernik, 2009:1). Humans are narrators of their daily lives in their conversations with others, and sometimes they are even professional narrators. Furthermore, research shows that the human brain captures various relations in the form of narrative structures because of the way the human brain is constructed to interact (Polkinghorne, 1988, in Lyle, 2000:55).

In a series of occurrences there is an evident relationship between the product and consequence, and this is what narrative is based on (Fludernik, 2009:2). The term ‘narrative’ has been used in a way that reflects its popular usage with more than one definition: Narrative as a story, narrative as a way of writing and narrative as a sequence of happenings. Turning to useful distinctions made in narrative theory (narratology), the type of narrative that is used in a story can be clarified (Fludernik, 2009:2).

Narrative derives from the word ‘narrate’, which refers to narration as a widespread activity among people. The act of speaking when narrating, and the narrator as a figure, are therefore closely linked to narrative. Hence everything narrated by a narrator can be defined as ‘narrative’ (Fludernik, 2009:2). Semiotics is included in the explanation of the terminology that is used in connection with narrative. In semiotics there is a distinction between three kinds of signs: a deictic sign, an iconic sign and a symbolic sign (Fludernik, 2009:102). Deictic signs point in a specific direction, or from one spot to an object. Iconic signs are defined as the signifier or object, because they resemble the signified in some regards (Fludernik, 2009:102). Fludernik (2009:102) states that, in the film genre, “gestures are iconic as they reflect and reproduce gestures in the real world”. Symbolic signs come

forth as unpredictable, as they make no mention of a link to the signified and are indistinguishable (Fludernik, 2009:102).

Narrative is both a method and a phenomenon, according to Gilbert in ‘Taking a narrative approach to grief research: Finding meaning in stories’ (Gilbert, 2002:224). Narrative brings diverse elements of experience, thoughts and feelings together and unifies them, connecting them to a central theme or purpose. Humans categorise their experiences through narrative, as it is a means of bringing order (Gilbert, 2002:224). Structure is provided to human experiences, as order is created in disorder and meaning is established in locations and surroundings that may seem meaningless. This is done simultaneously in the context of an imaginary audience, which in essence means we make meaning by creating and exploring our stories in the presence of interested parties (Gilbert, 2002:224).

In interactions that are symmetrical, words and pictures tell the same story, which critically repeats the knowledge in various forms of transmission (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000:225). In the interaction between words and pictures, pictures boost the full meaning of words and vice versa, where the words elaborate on the image so that a variety of knowledge can be communicated in the two modes. This produces a more dynamic perspective of the narrative (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000:225). Children get value from academic achievements, as well as being social and interacting with classmates and adults as they spend time in the classroom and at school (Heinsbergen, 2013:1). Through teaching, children gain knowledge and experience as they acquire skills in communication and spend time with others. Classrooms are beneficial and positive for learners, especially in their early childhood. In early childhood education, children learn a variety of subjects at school, and a large part of the syllabus that strengthens learner engagement, inspiration, learning and understanding is offered through picture books, when these are included in the syllabus (Heinsbergen, 2013:1). Picture books can be used with children of any age, as they can listen to the picture book being read to them or they can even read it by themselves and create their own stories. These books can also be used to introduce new topics and readdress old ones, to link to other books and interact at an advanced level of cognition. Picture books can be used as a medium to present difficult topics and conversations, and to introduce emergent readers and writers to literacy. In addition, picture books can introduce reading and writing processes.

As mentioned above, children benefit from picture books in their early childhood development, but picture books also benefit other subject areas. According to Heinsbergen (2013), classrooms and school libraries should have a variety of picture books available. It is very beneficial for a child to engage with advanced children's literature, and picture books provide an easy way to inspire and motivate learners to write. Sharing books in groups (large or small) can lead to significant writing conversations and approaches (Heinsbergen, 2013:16). Instead of focusing on skills in isolation, inspired and motivated reading can be implanted through the use of a gripping children's picture book (Heinsbergen, 2013:17).

## **2.4 Indigenous knowledge**

'Indigenous' refers to the production, growth and livelihood of something natural in a particular region or environment. It also connects to the words 'innate' and 'native'. Briggs (2013:231) states that indigenous knowledge has had very little impact on development practices in education thus far. A means around this deadlock may be the conceptualisation of indigenous knowledge as a way of knowing, or by applying it as a practice, with the focus on epistemology instead of a considerable focus on content. Some frustrations and disappointments exist in the realisation of indigenous knowledge in practice (Briggs, 2013:231). Indigenous knowledge systems seem to offer a radical alternative to the successful economic transformation of people's lives in that, by using these systems, people of particular regions and their own knowledge and work can be valued (Briggs, 2013:232).

The validation of Western knowledge, and how it was imposed on and affected indigenous people and their knowledge, are explored by Akena (2012:599). Akena (2012) states that there is a relationship between knowledge producers and the motives producers have in relation to the society in which they live. Akena (2012:599) further states that in society, politics and economics in non-Western contexts, this relationship affects what is regarded as 'legitimate knowledge'. Hybrid knowledge is created when interactions between knowledge producers, politics, class relations and group identity symbolically have an effect on one another in intricate ways. This hybrid knowledge remains a controversial issue in the study of Western knowledge, as colonial knowledge is a hybrid of local context, class and ethnic interactions (Akena, 2012:600).

Western knowledge that was influenced by Western ethnocentrism arrived in Africa with the colonisers and the result thereof was that a monolithic worldview was forced on people and gave power and authority to the Europeans. This withdrew the legitimate status of other ways of knowing and defined these ways of knowing as savage, primitive and superstitious. In order to understand how and why indigenous knowledge was marginalised, the knowledge producers and their social, economic and political positions within the colonial context need to be examined (Akena, 2012:600). Indigenous knowledge refers to the “multidimensional framework of understanding that has been viewed by European culture as inferior, superstitious and primitive” (Akena, 2012:601). For people in the specific areas in which they live, the term ‘indigenous knowledge’ communicates, informs and sustains the reasons for their traditions. Akena (2012:601) states that, from the perspectives of local people, “indigenous knowledge is a bridge between human beings and their environments”.

Local context-relevant knowledge is what is embraced by indigenous knowledge in a complex manner. This knowledge encompasses the nature of the stories the ancestors passed on, as well as the multiple histories and cultures of people and what the ancestors left behind (Akena, 2012:601). What is essentially represented by context-relevant knowledge is bold speaking about the way cultures are produced and put into categories and positions, the identities of cultures and their histories. According to Akena (2012:601), indigenous knowledge is a practical implement for indigenous communities to reclaim their contextual knowledge and ways of doing things that were previously pushed aside by Western knowledge and that have often been marked as less important or inferior. Indigenous knowledge, as a research topic, could possibly aim to methodically unravel dominant ways of knowing and power relations in the academy that were assured without consideration of indigenous knowledge (Akena, 2012:601). The idea to keep indigenous knowledge alive can lead to resistance and refusal, but also the transformation of our perspectives of knowledge (Dei & Kempf, 2006). The way in which knowledge is produced and obtained could be a point of contention, as the communication of knowledge can include traditional and cultural methods.

The value of indigenous knowledge should not be undermined by dominant Western knowledge, Western academics or global social relations, as the existence of indigenous contexts is crucial to communities. An external knowledge system that was produced outside a community and incorporated into the community’s educational frameworks or societal frameworks can become

biased and can negatively influence the people of the culture. Such a knowledge system can disempower and colonise (Akena, 2012:606).

Indigenous knowledge has previously been conceptualised in ways that tend to be naïve and unproblematic, as they have not asked critical questions about the structures it belongs to. This has resulted in indigenous knowledge playing a less helpful role as a development tool than hoped for. Indigenous knowledge can reflect idealised folk knowledge; however, when used in reality, the knowledge is not divided into individual compartments. Knowledge should be developed as a dynamic, even hybridised, and local element (Briggs, 2005:110). According to Briggs (2005:111), the challenge for the promoters of indigenous knowledge will be to decide between arguing for the furtherance of indigenous knowledge or for Western science and knowledge. There is therefore a choice between an entirely alternative practice, and a practice that has been developed as mainstream.

Barnhardt and Kawagley (1998) conducted a study on Alaska's indigenous knowledge systems and found that these knowledge systems that are embedded in the native cultures in rural Alaska have been imported to serve the educational needs of rural native communities. These indigenous knowledge systems include formal education systems (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998:1). According to these authors, native Alaskans experienced reoccurring rejected feedback from the external systems they had to use as they tried to incorporate local knowledge, and the relationship between them and the systems had a negative outcome. This resulted in their knowledge systems being pushed substantially to the periphery and their cultural integrity hitting a border as they had no space to practise or learn their indigenous knowledge and how to incorporate it into education (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998:2). An appreciation of the contribution of indigenous knowledge is growing in the world, particularly how it can make us understand different fields in human behaviour and educational practices. Knowledge systems that belong to the native people may often be diminished and pushed to the background, but these ways of knowing are still used in practice, therefore cannot be excluded (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998:2).

As mentioned before, in education it is better to view development tools as part of interactions and in a dynamic way, rather than focusing on the fields in isolation. However, attention should go further than the fields within the indigenous knowledge system, as one should consider links and interactions between people in entirety, as well as external systems with which the indigenous

knowledge systems interact. The formal education system that impacts every native child, family and community can be the most crucial and evasive system (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998:3).

The debate regarding indigenous knowledge education is explained by Aikman and May (2003:139) as:

The hegemonic construction and imposition of western knowledge and the concomitant delegitimizing of indigenous knowledges, particularly via education, is a central concern of many authors in the field, as well as a consistent feature in wider debates on indigenous education and indigenous political entitlements.

These authors seem to focus on formal education for indigenous people; however, their discussions are linked to a larger indigenous struggle that concerns democracy and social justice. These struggles relate to the political and educational diminishment of indigenous people and their languages and cultures. According to Aikman and May (2003:139), colonisation (largely European) is a result of this marginalisation. Indigenous people show a variety of significant inter- and intragroup differences that are not necessarily unproblematic, but what is important is what defines indigenous people.

There is a clear need among indigenous people for better linguistic and educational exposure or ownership. This is clearly a result of “colonial histories of cultural linguistic proscription, particularly within education” (Aikman & May, 2003:141). Leading from that, indigenous language was lost in education, and indigenous learners were set up for failure in education (Aikman & May, 2003:141). Education can be used as a foundation on which indigenous people can reclaim their language and give worth to their language and culture once again. Aikman and May (2003:141) state that, over a few decades, indigenous community-based educational enterprises have developed in indigenous communities where indigenous language and culture play an important role.

A contradiction exists between the role that formal education plays in schooling and the loss of indigenous knowledge and indigenous development applications in education (Aikman & May, 2003:142). Indigenous knowledge has been rejected by education and schooling, as these platforms

have been including indigenous people in a ‘national’ society at the peril of their indigenous identities (Aikman & May, 2003:143). Aikman and May (2003) state that indigenous people also want access to formal education that is indigenous. They further explain that it would be difficult to implement indigenous knowledge in national policies and formal school settings, or to standardise the use of indigenous knowledge, but for the sake of equality, this should be considered and overcome (Aikman & May, 2003:143).

## **2.5 Social justice and diversity**

The increasing ethnic diversity within nation states is necessitating the construction of new conceptions of citizenship and citizenship education, and is challenging understandings of citizenship that include racial and cultural integration. These different ethnic groups search for cultural recognition and rights, and they challenge the current understandings of citizenship (Banks, 2004:296). This increasing global cultural, ethnic, religious and language diversity has opened up conversations that question successful citizenship education.

James Banks (2004:296) states that, in the Western world, the social situation has become more diverse as a result of immigration and other circumstances since World War II. Banks (2004) further states that colonised people in regions such as Asia, Africa and the West Indies immigrated to Europe, which caused an increase in cultural diversity. These people immigrated to Europe for more labour opportunities and to better their economic status (Banks, 2004:296). A cultural and racial perspective of citizenship in education occurred in the democratic nation states of the West, before ethics in education was revisited and brought to life in the 1960s and 1970s. In these nation states, a main goal was to achieve a dominant cultural group in citizenship education that was portrayed as the mainstream culture. Banks (2004:297) states that native or immigrant groups had to leave their innate culture behind, and in fact were expected to do so, in order to fully take part in the activities of the nation state.

The development of multicultural education was a response to the concerns of racial, ethnic and cultural groups that felt pushed to the periphery in their educational areas (Banks, 2004:297). Cultural minorities have the right to protect and retain the important parts of their cultures and languages, and they have been supported by philosophers and educator for decades. Banks (2004:298) argues that “literacy as defined and codified in the high-stakes tests that are being

implemented in most states in the United States is often interpreted as basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics". Banks (2004) raises a concern about the idea that basic skills define literacy and that citizenship participation in global or local contexts is ignored. All learners should acquire basic education, but it is not always possible in our complex and diverse world. Citizens who are educated in a democratic, diverse society should be active citizens in an interconnected world (Banks, 2004:298). There should be a level of commitment, skill and knowledge required to transform the world into a fairer and more just place. According to Banks (2004), it is not uneducated people who cause the greater problems, but the greatest problem is that diverse people cannot come together to solve the problems of the world. Banks (2004:298) lists global warming, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, poverty, racism, sexism and war as examples of issues about which the world should come together to come up with solutions.

Citizens should not only be literate in terms of their indigenous knowledge and skills, but in a democratic society they should be educated about multicultural societies through the development of multicultural literature. Literacy that is viewed as multicultural consists of different capabilities to approach different aspects of knowledge. Knowledge is created by someone, and is viewed from a specific perspective. Knowledge is used in a certain way and guides thinking to promote a more just world. When learners are taught to look at the world with critique, they learn to assess what is an injustice in society, and this should help them to come up with ideas to change these problems; to find solutions that are more democratic and just. Critiquing learners on their action and not providing them with hope or options can result in learners acting without agency (Banks, 2004:298). The increasingly diverse population of the world makes it more important for citizenship education to promote the rights of different groups of people (Banks, 2004:299).

Citizenship curricula should be reconsidered, revised and redesigned by educators; as such, education should be of help to learners to obtain the skills, knowledge and information needed to operate in a world that experiences globalisation (Banks, 2004:299). This should help to formulate an understanding of what is just in the world and what needs to be changed in order to make it just. According to Banks (2004), citizenship education is defined and treated differently in different parts of the world and in different contexts. Citizenship education is a challenged idea all over the world, where a solution could be to educate learners from different nations to operate in multiple national locations. There would be some shared problems, concepts and issues, but not all is shared. Shared issues should be identified and researched, and guidelines should be formulated by

international groups to educate people on dealing with such issues. “Citizens need the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to function in their cultural communities and beyond their cultural borders”, and the willingness of citizens to participate in community activities or structures can help further citizenship education (Banks, 2004:299). Self-acceptance acts as a requirement to accept and value others.

Learners who have been pushed to the periphery often struggle to accept the value of their own ethnic and cultural development. Such learners have historically been from racial or cultural minority groups. This discrimination goes beyond institutions or education, as it has resulted in a struggle of acceptance of people’s own ethnic cultural indigeneity. According to Banks (2004:302), difficulty in accepting their own culture is at play because of mainstream educational development.

There is a three-part view of social justice. In order to achieve social justice in higher education, different situations require careful thought for them to be understood from a multidimensional perspective (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:1). Bozalek and Leibowitz (2012) convey an important three-part-view in the light of achieving social justice. Martha Nussbaum (2002) approaches social justice and how social justice applies to higher education. She explores the value of education in producing individuals who are empathetic and critical and who can consider what it is to be human. The Socratic method emphasises how citizens should think for themselves and try to understand why it is good to show sympathy for the lives of others (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:2). Nancy Fraser takes a social justice approach that highlights contrasting theories that improve or emphasise each other, namely “politics of recognition, representation and distribution” (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:1). The third framework is based on Joan Tronto’s work and explores the political ethics-of-care approach. Virginia Held (2006:18), in *The ethics of care: Personal, political and global*, refers to Tronto and states that it would be beneficial for a society to restructure itself to welcome care instead of pushing it to the periphery of importance. This will result in a society that is not dominated by conflict, inattentiveness to economic gain or controlled by law. Furthermore, such a society might place emphasis on the prosperity of children and the “development of the caring relations, not only in personal contexts but among citizens and by using the governmental institutions” (Held, 2006:18).

According to Tronto (1993, cited in Held, 2006:18), it would be beneficial for a culture to develop in ways that illuminate and enhance human life instead of forsaking culture for the control of

commercial dealings. Tronto (1993, in Held, 2006:18) states that the ethics of care can have political implications, and seeing care as a political and moral ideal can translate to the highest social goal being to advocate for meeting the needs of others. Furthermore, current arrangements for care seem unacceptable, as caring activities are “devalued, underpaid, and disproportionately occupied by the relatively powerless society” (Tronto, in Held, 2006:18).

Social justice in education requires of learners to treat others equally in diverse settings. This will result in equality among a diverse group of learners. Fraser’s (2009, in Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:4) main view on social justice is that of equal participatory education, referred to as ‘participatory parity’. This refers to the interactions between peers in equal ways, such as when they are socialising. Fraser contributes an important perspective on equality in development. This perspective has three parts: “the importance of resources being distributed differently to reach participatory parity as full partners, the politics of recognition and the politics of representation and belonging” (Fraser, 2009, in Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:3). Putting the assumption of conforming to the norm aside, social justice provides a framework that replaces the view of equality with the value of equality of participants (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:5).

Bozalek and Leibowitz (2012) focus their study of social justice mostly on the context of higher education; however, they state that social justice also requires a broader gaze at the educational system. A broader gaze at society is also needed, as “educational systems are a product of socio-cultural and economic phenomena” (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:9). Fraser defines this as the “politics to interpretive needs”. Transformation in the direction of meeting diverse people’s needs should be deliberately planned; however, education should not be taken for granted or catered for bureaucratically (Bozalek & Leibowitz, 2012:10).

## **2.6 Synthesis**

This chapter has provided a broader understanding of semiotics, narratology, indigenous knowledge, social justice and diversity in a South African context. Semiotics is used by all living things to understand signs. Semiotics is the study of signs and is used to understand communicated messages. People use their personal knowledge and experience to make sense of visual signs. Narratology is said to be when ‘meaning-making’ is understood and entails that humans have an inherent ability to tell and relate stories. Narrative understanding is needed to make sense of the

world and the way it works, and experiences are mostly organised into narrative forms. Stories are predisposed experiences that are relayed in narratives. Every culture has its own stories and indigenous understanding of certain symbols and experiences. Some stories seem more familiar to people who belong to the same indigenous group. Indigenous knowledge refers to something that is natural or innate in a certain region or environment. The knowledge produced by indigenous groups is called local content-relevant knowledge. Indigenous people have a need for better linguistic and educational exposure to their own indigenous knowledge as a means of learning and understanding. Social justice and diversity therefore play a role in the way that citizenship education should be considered. Leaving one's innate culture to fit into a globalised view of citizenship seems wrong. Multicultural educational development serves as a response to the concerns of racial, ethnic and cultural groups. Citizens should be literate in more than their indigenous knowledge and skills; however, indigenous knowledge is very important and should be emphasised, and democratic societies should receive education about multicultural societies. The research design and methodology are discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

### 3.1 Wordless picture books

Wordless picture books have become their own genre over the past four decades (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66). People have communicated by means of visual images for centuries without the use of written text. Crawford and Hade (2000) refer to Stewig (1988), who writes that cave drawings were a way for pre-literate people to visually share their culture, history and stories and henceforth preserve them. Stewig (1988, in Crawford & Hade, 2000:66) further states that the appearance of wordless picture books is “an antecedent of ancient forms of communication which were used by our ancestors to narrate daily events, stories and outings on different materials such as caves, tapestries and stained glass windows”. The tradition of wordless picture books operates in the same way, as the entire message is portrayed through visual images only. Crawford and Hade (2000:66) state that these wordless picture books are texts that can be responded to by readers understanding the visual signs depicted in the illustrations by using their own context. Wordless picture books have become a platform where people “can construct meaning and build their own narratives” (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66).

The volume of titles published attests to the growing popularity of wordless picture books. The impact left by wordless picture books in the 1990s is evident in the advocating for this literature by professionals who use these texts in the classroom (Crawford & Hade, 2000:67). According to Crawford and Hade (2000:67):

Practitioners and other interested educators have advocated the use of wordless picture books as a means of promoting the concept of story structure [...], developing comprehension [...], supporting children’s attempts at storytelling [...] and teaching visual literacy [...]. Wordless picture books have made their way into our curricular areas and have been used with children from a wide variety of backgrounds, abilities and experiences [...].

Furthermore, the use of wordless picture books in educational studies was brought to attention to educators and researchers have examined many aspects related to the reading of these stories. Dowhower (1997) conducted studies to show that the ancient modes of communication through

visual images came in four forms in Etruscan and Roman art (urns, Pompeian walls, columns and coffins carved in marble). Dowhower (1997:58) concludes that, based on the dominating role played by these four forms in classical antiquity, visual signs have always been an important means of communication.

A wave of wordless picture books for all ages has emerged in the last four decades (Dowhower, 1997:59). These books frequently appear in sets that are published by major book companies, as well as by individual illustrators (Dowhower, 1997:59). These sets of books were proposed as new material, distributed and, according to Dowhower (1997:59), they were often accompanied by teacher guides and preschool foundational reading series.

A wide variety of wordless picture books exists, in addition to story-based narratives. These books can be found in the form of unrelated textless series of pictures and sets of illustrations that are linked thematically or sequentially. Wordless picture books can also give expository information that might be difficult to explain in words, as interactions between people and objects are experienced differently by people from different contexts (Dowhower, 1997:60). A sign or picture might allow the reader to understand concepts or stories better than words could. These books also allow the reader to interact with the visual illustrations. Readers can have a general understanding of what the picture might depict, but can insert their own detail into the sequential signs and pictures conveyed.

### **3.2 Wordless picture books in South Africa**

In order to consider wordless picture books in the context of South Africa, literacy, reading and education in South Africa must be considered. Before the Dutch colonists arrived in the Cape in 1652, the land in the South African region was populated by the San and Khoikhoi (Abdi, 2002:1). The traditional African society in South Africa did not have any formal organised systems of learning prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The Dutch emphasised their tradition of religious education, which resulted in South Africa emulating Western traditions of education. Educational provision in South Africa was limited until well into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and was generally under the control of the Dutch Reformed Church (Abdi, 2002:2).

Early settler education programmes for natives consisted of an amalgamation of quasi-formal<sup>3</sup> and informal programmes of teaching in which the natives learned how to read Dutch so they could be converted to Christianity. The aim of African education was primarily to facilitate the colonisers' control over the lives of the indigenous populations, as well as to create ingrained tools to enhance the continuous socio-cultural dispossession of natural economic resources (Abdi, 2002:23). Furthermore, the coloniser controlled the people of the land and the land's resources. The politicisation of education in the apartheid era was evident in the way the population was controlled by the different policies and rights.

In South Africa, Nelson Mandela was released from jail on 11 February 1990. Two years after his release, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa was established and, after lengthy negotiations, apartheid was officially dismantled and Mandela contended for full rights for all South Africans. With the dismantling of apartheid, basic educational policies were also withdrawn (Abdi, 2002:109). According to Abdi (2002:109), the National Party argued "that diversity has to be accommodated on the basis of internationally recognised and educationally relevant basic human rights such as mother (tongue) education, freedom of religion and the practice and transmission of one's own culture". The African National Congress (ANC) recognised the importance of education for community development and for the country's deprived and marginalised (Abdi, 2002:110).

South Africa has a high level of illiteracy and skill shortages (Molawa, 2009:5). There is a contrast between developed and developing countries in the world, and Molawa was part of a study that used South Africa as a case study and in which it was found that the country was in a good position in terms of resources; however, in terms of illiteracy and skill shortages, South Africa falls short compared to developed countries (Molawa, 2009:5). These shortages fall under the category of the socio-economic challenges faced by South Africa. Among other research, Molawa did extensive literature reviews of printed material such as books. It is through these reviews that Molawa came

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<sup>3</sup> 'Quasi' in this sense refers to government-created and -funded organisations, therefore the natives were held accountable to the government for education.

to his information about South Africa's digital divide and uneven distribution of resources (Molawa, 2009:2).

Nkechi Christopher (2010) states that the pursuit of multiple educational programmes and curricula is to enable South Africa to rise in the literacy front; however, the book industry and readership development in South Africa do not meet the progress other countries are making. According to Christopher, literacy poses a problem in that it grants more emphasis to the lack of indigenous reading and publishing culture. Christopher's study recommends that "literacy development programmes in African countries should emphasise strategies that promote functional literacy and healthy reading habits among Africa's increasingly literate populations" (Christopher, 2010).

Indigenous wordless picture books can be used in homes and in education to promote reading at home and at school for recreational and development purposes. Indigenous knowledge plays a critical role in storytelling, as it adds a conceptual element of story recognition that can enhance development in children.

### **3.3 Wordless picture books in Kayamandi (reading in Kayamandi)**

In the 1940s, Kayamandi was developed as an independent community that had all the required social organisations, such as a school, church, clinic and police station. Among other variables, schools were constructed, and Kayamandi was seen as a model location by the municipality of Stellenbosch at the time (Rock, 2011:49). Only a primary school was constructed initially, with a high school being built in 1993. As the population of Kayamandi grew, so did school attendance. During apartheid, a law was passed called a 'pass law'. This law determined where people lived, employed or not, and they would be relocated as the municipality deemed fit. Kayamandi was built to serve as a housing community for all the workers who worked on farms and in factories in and around the Stellenbosch area, which influenced their sense of community, as people could not decide themselves to stay in Kayamandi or to move. They were forced to live in or move from this area, thereby gaining or losing connections with the people with whom they lived during their time in Kayamandi.

The Kayamandi school (primary school and high school) was fairly disciplined, with corporal punishment still in use; however, the school "teachers and principals had a shaky spot within the

context of urban Black environments in South Africa" (Rock, 2011:51). According to Rock (2011), this was a symptom of an attempt by the apartheid government to use the education system to maintain white supremacy. In South Africa between 1945 and 1953, the percentage of individuals attending school and their pass rates grew tremendously, which added to the advancement of black education (Rock, 2011:51). Although these advances showed great promise, there were still many individuals who never attended school or completed primary school. The learner numbers became greater and learner numbers in classes grew, and hence the quality of teaching decreased. It is important to be cognisant of the fact that the immensity of the current educational problems still emanates from carefully orchestrated apartheid policies (Abdi, 2002:122). According to Rock (2011:51), the well-kept environment unified people and created a strong sense of community identity against the repression presented by apartheid.

Wordless picture books support an old form of communication, as these texts narrate events and are responded to by readers experiencing the books through their own context, social histories and personal experiences (Crawford & Hade, 2000). These contexts add to the understanding of the visual signs portrayed in the book. People's own narratives and valuable cultural knowledge can be shared on the platform that the wordless book creates for them. Wordless picture books can therefore operate as a platform in which these narratives can be written, read and shared.

### **3.4 Synthesis**

In this chapter I discussed the context in which this research took place. Wordless picture books are books that consist of pictures and illustrations with no use of words. As there are no words, the symbols and illustrations used can serve as a meaning-making platform because each person uses his/her own contextual knowledge when viewing these stories. Readers can understand the picture in a general manner; however, one's own details are added to the sequential signs and pictures conveyed. Before the arrival of Europeans in South Africa, there was no formal organisation of learning. South Africa has a high level of illiteracy and skills shortages, and indigenous wordless picture books can serve as a tool to promote reading at home and for developmental purposes. The Kayamandi community in Stellenbosch was affected by apartheid, as the sense of community was broken because Kayamandi was used to house workers who worked on farms nearby. As the job contracts or seasonal employment ended, the workers had to move, creating a misconnection of community. The next chapter discusses the research methodology used in the study.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research methodology is discussed by considering the research question, how are signs and signifiers used in wordless picture books in a South African context? An interpretive method was used to examine and observe how Grade 9 learners wrote stories and how these were translated into wordless picture books. The interpretive approach refers to data being constructed socially and was explored through a project that included qualitative data collection methods. Ethical consideration was vital, as the project involved Grade 9 learners (15 years old), parents and teachers. The collected data were analysed interpretively and the aim was to achieve validity and truthfulness.

### 4.2 Research approach

An interpretive paradigm is useful for investigating the use of signs and signifiers in wordless picture books. This paradigm operates from the perspective that human interaction is meaningful. Lyle (2000:51) states that social interaction and experience are the foundation for social development. The influence and interaction between researcher and participant are emphasised through a transactional theory of knowledge. For collaborative knowledge to be created, the knowledge that the researcher possesses and the knowledge the participants possess was taken into consideration. Participant interaction and experience were emphasised within this specific case study.

### 4.3 Research design

The most common way to go about qualitative inquiry, according to Stake (2000), is through the use of case studies. According to Yin (2003), the use of case studies for research purposes is one of the most challenging social science endeavours. Yin (2003) further states that case studies are used to “understand complex social phenomena and that is why case study methods allow investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events”.

This research was conducted in line with the following statement by Hartley (2004:323):

[Case studies] consist of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context, [with the aim being] to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied.

Data for this study were collected over one year within the context of the Vision AfriKa Primary School in Kayamandi. A systematic information-gathering method was used. The book-creation project was done in order to determine how stories from the community, written by people from the community, are received by the community and how successful indigenous stories in wordless picture books are. This entailed being engaged in the social world of the study (see Seale, 2012). Taking into consideration that research is a multicultural process, as race, gender, ethnicity and class shape the inquiry process (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), my own position as a white researcher working with and interviewing learners, parents and teachers of different racial backgrounds could have resulted in bias, and I therefore was very aware that I had to minimise the effects. The next section discusses the sampling used in this research.

#### **4.4 Sampling**

To invite participants and inform them about the project, letters were sent out to the youth division of Vision AfriKa Primary School and the grade R class. The supervisor of the youth division met with me and stated that five Grade 9 learners were interested in taking part in the first phase of the project, the story-writing part. Letters were sent out to the parents and the volunteers to inform them of the details of the project and what would be expected of them, and they were provided with a contact number of the facilitator of the project in case they had any questions. The researcher was also the facilitator. The five volunteers were invited to meet for an introduction session, which was held at Vision AfriKa Primary School. At the introduction session, we read through the letters together and I encouraged questions and interaction. For the first phase of the project, a fellow learner who speaks isiXhosa came with me to set the volunteers at ease. I encouraged them to speak in whichever language they preferred in order for them to be comfortable. The volunteers took the printed version of the consent form home to be signed by their primary caregiver. The learners were also asked to sign assent forms that gave permission for their participation in the project. The forms were provided in English, and an interpreter was present in all of the sessions with the volunteers.

The sample size of the participants was based on availability. The principal of Vision AfriKa Primary School organised and asked volunteers to take part in the study. The chosen Grade 9 learners were suggested (by their facilitator) based on their schedule and availability in the afternoons. The project took place at the Vision AfriKa Primary School in Kayamandi so as to be convenient for the participants to attend the activities of the project. All of the Grade 9 learners normally attend after-school care classes on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. The wordless picture books project, facilitated by me and the principal, ran for four weeks every Tuesday and Thursday at the after-school care setting at the school. These stories (see examples in Chapter 4) were then changed into wordless stories, told through illustrations. This process was done by professional illustrators, as experience and skill are required to change a written story into a wordless picture book. The books were then printed and bound.

The next phase entailed testing the books with children, parents and teachers. The principal contacted the parents of the Grade R class group via e-mail and SMS, explained the book-reading project and invited them to take part. Once again, the number of participants varied according to availability and interest the volunteers showed in the programme. In the second phase, focus group sessions were held. The focus group consisted of three parents with their children (each with one child) who were from Kayamandi and born into and practised the Xhosa culture, and four teachers from Vision AfriKa Primary School, who were also born into and practised the Xhosa culture. The writers of the stories (Grade 9 learners from different Schools in Kayamandi who joins the Vision Afrika project in the afternoons) were also born into and practised the Xhosa culture, but the five illustrators were from different cultures, including the Xhosa, English and Afrikaans cultures. This phase occurred after work hours in the Vision AfriKa Primary School hall and ran for two hours in order to accommodate the parents. The main interaction for the second phase of the project was with the parents. They were shown how to read and interact with the wordless picture books, which they could then apply at home with their child. The story-reading part was explained to the parents in an introductory session during which they received their first wordless books to take home and read with their child. The following sessions later in the week included short reflection questions on how the reading session between the child and parents went at home, and to give the parents new material to read with their child. The sessions ended with a focus group discussion on the overall experience of the project, during which the signs and signifiers used in the books were analysed. The NRF project was funded for only one year and the collection of the stories, their translation into the wordless picture books, and the printing and assessment of the books occurred

in a very limited timeframe and therefore not enough time was left to source specifically Xhosa illustrators, hence other illustrators were also used. I suspected that some misinterpretations between the writers and illustrators might have taken place because of their cultural differences, and therefore this study was done to assess to what extent the misunderstandings influenced the meaning of the stories.

#### **4.5 Data collection and capturing**

Qualitative data were firstly gathered from the five high school learners by using drawing, painting and storytelling during four art and story-writing classes (one hour each). The Grade 9 learners told, wrote and painted their stories, which reminded them of Kayamandi or the villages in the Eastern Cape province from which they originated. Empirical data were collected through the use of qualitative methods. This data were collected through observation, discussions, analysis of the books written and created, and verbal reflections. Secondly, data were collected from four teachers in semi-structured interviews during which semiotic analysis was done of the indigenous wordless picture books. Data were recorded mainly through the writing of notes, observations and recordings. The study consisted of two phases, the first phase being the story collection project and the second phase the semiotic analysis of the books.

The first phase of the project asked of the Grade 9 learners to meet twice a week for the book-creation sessions. In each one-hour session, ice-breaker questions were asked about their favourite colours and the subjects they do at school. During the session, the volunteers were given paper and crayons, watercolour paint, brushes, pens and pencils to depict their stories in any way they preferred. They were given the space to tell, write or draw any story from their context or surroundings. They could ask their parents or grandparents to share stories, or they could write their own. The sessions lasted over a month.

After the stories were written and illustrated, they were sent to professional illustrators, who corresponded with the storytellers and illustrated the stories, which were made into five wordless picture books. Sessions were scheduled in this time so that the progress drawings could be communicated by the writers to the illustrators before the illustrations for the books were finalised. There were five consultation sessions.

The second phase of the project was the semiotic analysis of the books. In this phase of the project, a focus group session and semi-structured interviews were held with three parents and their children, and four teachers, during which the wordless picture books were semiotically analysed. Books were donated to the Vision AfriKa Primary School and I was invited to observe the grade R class as the teacher handed out the wordless picture books and asked the learners to read them and individually tell what they read. There were 22 learners in the class. The five books were randomly divided, but each learner at a table had the same book. The learners at each table could share their story with their group and then individually share it with the whole class.

There were circumstances that influenced the second phase. During the planning of the project, evenings were considered to be a concern in the reading programme in the sense that some parents could not attend all the focus group sessions because of work obligations or travel delays. School holidays and the winter season also obstructed participant attendance of the reading project. Finally, data were collected by also conducting recorded interviews with the teachers, during which the teachers analysed the wordless picture books and the use of symbols in them. Four teachers participated in the focus group sessions and semi-structured interviews, and the recordings of these sessions were transcribed.

Semi-structured interviews were held as a detailed semiotic analysis of the wordless picture books and the symbols depicted. In these interviews, the parents and teachers elaborated on their experience in Kayamandi and how it related or did not relate to the experiences depicted in the books. The effectiveness of picture books and the type of illustrations used were also explored. During the interview process, the participants did not hesitate to offer opinions and suggestions regarding the stories. Both difficult and free-flowing discussions regarding each book commenced naturally in the course of the conversation. Information gathered from the conversations proved valuable during the data analysis process. The data collection techniques, participants, time and duration of the research is illustrated below:

Table 4.1: Data collection techniques, participants, time and duration

	Technique	Participants	Time / slot	Duration	ID coding
1	Story-writing sessions	Five Grade 9 learners	April to August 2019	Four sessions of one hour each	S(1): Written story 1 S(2): Written story 2 S(3): Written story 3 S(4): Written story 4 S(5): Written story 5
2	Illustration of books	Five illustrators	August 2019	Three weeks	(I1)SS: Illustrated story 1 ( <i>Stella's Story</i> ) (I2)RM: Illustrated story 2 ( <i>The Responsible Mother</i> ) (I3)TMG: Illustrated story 3 ( <i>The Monster and the Granddaughter</i> ) (I4)WB: Illustrated story 4 ( <i>The Woman and the Baboon</i> ) (I5)NGU: Illustrated story 5 ( <i>Don't give up!</i> )
3	Observation	Twenty-two learners	September	45 minutes	(L1-22): Learners 1–22

		One teacher			P(1): Teacher 1
4	Focus group sessions	Four teachers  Three parents with their children	October	Four sessions of 45–50 minutes each	P(1): Teacher 1  P(2): Teacher 2  P(3): Teacher 3  P(4): Teacher 4  PA (1): Parent 1  PA (2): Parent 2  PA (3): Parent 3

Data confidentiality was maintained in the study. Data and artworks were stored in a drawer and scanned and saved on my laptop and on a backup flash drive that was kept in my room. The data were only handled by me, my supervisor, co-supervisor and the school principal. Learners or parents had the opportunity to change the data provided by them, which included written notes, voice recordings and illustrations.

#### 4.6 Data analysis and validity

The qualitative data (interpretation and observations) were analysed for the purpose of doing a non-numerical examination to discover “underlying meaning and patterns in relationships” (Babbie, 2010, cited in Schurink, Fouche & De Vos, 2011:39). Therefore, an inductive content analysis method was used. Categories and themes were produced in order to reduce the data captured through the qualitative research. The data content was examined thoroughly, which resulted in the identification of situations that linked people, including repeated language (frequently used language), notable themes and patterns in responses. Raw data could therefore be ordered into small quantities of categories and could be easier managed, as seen in Figure 4.1.

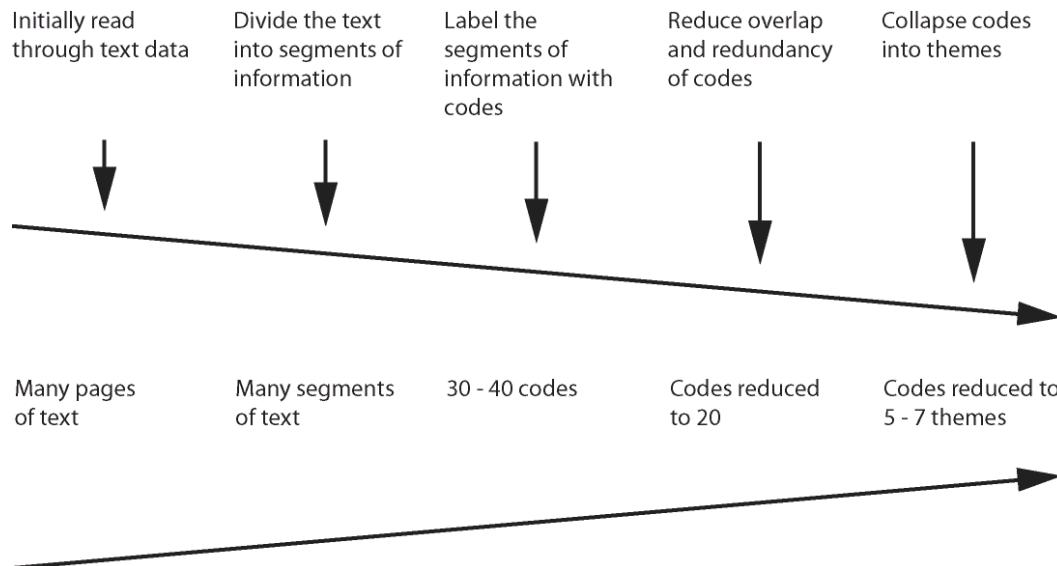


Figure 4.1: The coding process in qualitative research (Creswell, 2003:238)

#### 4.7 Ethical considerations

This qualitative study aimed to be credible, transferable, confirmable and dependable. It is credible in the manner that the evidence is shown empirically and due to the triangulation method used, which refers to a variety of methods that were used to collect the data. The data were captured by writing stories, and photos were taken of these stories.

The interviews with the children, parents and teachers were recorded and transcribed. This documentation serves as proof of the reliability and credibility of the findings. Reference has also been made to different authors who dealt with similar types of material relating to the current study.

This research study is transferable to a certain extent and can be applied to other contexts, such as using the same process or methodology in other suburbs in Stellenbosch or other cities/towns. This study was done in Kayamandi; however, it can be applied to different contexts where different cultural groups can be the point of study. Enough information is given in case other researchers want to obtain their own findings using the same methods as used in this study.

The volunteers were given informed consent forms addressed to them for their parents to sign. The Grade 9 learners' parents also signed consent forms, as the learners were younger than 18. The

second part of the project included parents and their four- to five-year-old children. The parents were given informed consent forms. There was an interpreter present in the introductory sessions who explained if anything was unclear regarding the form. The informed consent forms stated that all participants had the right to withdraw from the study and the researcher reiterated the participants' rights to withdraw from the study. Confidentiality and identity protection were provided, and anonymity was kept. The principal was present during the book circulation and feedback sessions with the parents. Both the principal of the school and the manager of Vision AfriKa invigilated and ensured that the Grade 9 students did not experience discomfort.

The findings are based on the participants' responses and I tried to minimise my personal bias and motivations. I am aware of the fact that I am a white researcher who investigated racial groups different from my own, but I tried to take that into consideration when working with the participants and analysing the data. The aim was not to skew the participants' reactions to fit a certain narrative. The transcribed recordings and written text serve as proof of authenticity (see Addendum A for the transcribed interviews). This provides an audit trail to establish as much confirmability as possible.

#### **4.8 Synthesis**

In this chapter I discussed my research approach, the research design, sampling, data collection and data capturing, data analysis and ethical considerations. Because the study entailed human interaction, the interpretative paradigm was used to investigate signs and signifiers in wordless picture books. Collaborative knowledge consists of the knowledge the researcher possesses and the knowledge the participants possess, therefore a case study is the most common way to go about qualitative inquiry. In the context of Vision AfriKa Primary School in Kayamandi, data for this study were collected over one year using a systematic information-gathering method. Sampling was done by sending out letters to parents and volunteers. The first and second phases of the project followed accordingly. After the first phase of the project, during which the volunteers created the stories, the illustrators had time to illustrate the stories and put the words into visual narratives. The second phase of the project consisted of semiotic analysis of the wordless picture books and focus group sessions. Qualitative data were collected through observation, discussions, analysis of the books, written and verbal reflections and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative research was analysed using an inductive content analysis method. Ethical considerations included the

qualitative study aiming to be credible, transferrable, confirmable and dependable. In the next chapter I present the data, followed by a discussion thereof.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data collected in the research. The theoretical perspectives in Chapter 2 provide a framework for this chapter, as the perspectives are used to further discuss these topics.

This study aimed to explore the signs and signifiers used in three wordless picture books produced in the context of Kayamandi, South Africa. Five books were produced in the research, but only three were analysed and are discussed as part of this thesis.

The following research objectives were formulated, and in this chapter these objectives are addressed and discussed.

- To investigate how signs and signifiers are used in wordless picture books in a South African context
- To investigate how the signs and signifiers contribute to meaning-making
- To investigate how the indigenous knowledge of a specific culture influences meaning-making

Semiotics and narratology were used as the theoretical framework for the study. A collective case study was used as the research design, which allowed personal communication with individuals in the sample group. Observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants for the research. The sampling consisted of high school learners in Grade 9 who were enrolled at Vision AfriKa Primary School, learners between the ages of four and five and their primary caregivers or parents who were willing to volunteer as participants, and lastly four teachers who taught at Vision AfriKa Primary School.

## **5.2 Collections and illustrations**

During the story-collection project, five Grade 9 learners enrolled at Vision AfriKa drew, wrote and told stories from their culture. These stories were sent to illustrators so that the stories could be illustrated into wordless picture books. The illustrators were chosen based on availability and their portfolios.

### **5.2.1 Collection of stories**

The participants were given the option to use any medium to tell a story that is indigenous to where they are from. The participants chose to write their stories in an essay format, and each had a unique story that had a positive outcome or view. Emphasis was placed on their context, as well the idea that their stories can be shared with people from their community, who would then be able to identify with their stories or the signs and symbols in them. Gilbert (2002:224) states that diverse elements of experience, thoughts and feelings are brought together by narrative, which unifies and connects these elements to a central theme or goal. The stories written by the Grade 9 learners were documented and are presented in the following figures.



Once upon, there was a girl named Stella who lived in the dusty streets of eQhitas Village with her grandmother. Stella was a kind, friendly and intelligent girl, even at school she was a top achiever. Her grandmother was very old, in an extent that she was blind and they lived happily with the pension and grant money. Her grandmother used a walking stick to get go to town, garden, toilet and other places. Stella was doing Grade 10 and she was intelligent and she was passing with flying colours. Her parents died 4 month 5 years after she was born. After their death they lived a poor life.

One day when her grandmother was coming from town to collect her pension money, she got robbed and the robbers left her there to death. By luck some business man who was passing by saw her end took her to the hospital. He saw the details her details in her bag and he searched for Stella and he found her. Stella was not happy at all about this in the extent that she lost weight and her marks were dropping. Her grandmother stayed in the hospital for 2 months and the doctors found out that

she had a stroke. Stella had to live alone although it was not easy but she managed because she was independent. Her grandmother came back after 2 months and 5 months later she died. Stella had to go and live in the orphanage. In the orphanage she was not happy at all. She got raped by some men who works in the orphanage. She was not happy at all and her marks were dropping and her teacher noticed that. Her teacher called her to ask what was wrong, she was shy to tell but her teacher kept on asking until she told her the whole story. Her teacher took her in her house because she saw that Stella had a potential and she had suffered a lot. Stella lived with her teacher and she passed her Grade 12 with flying colours. She applied for a bursary and went to the University to study Law. Years later she got a Law Degree and she became a well-known lawyer. She got married and had children. She lived happily ever after.

Khanya Xhegwana.

Figure 5.1: Story 1, S(1): *Stella's Story*, by Khanya Xhegwana

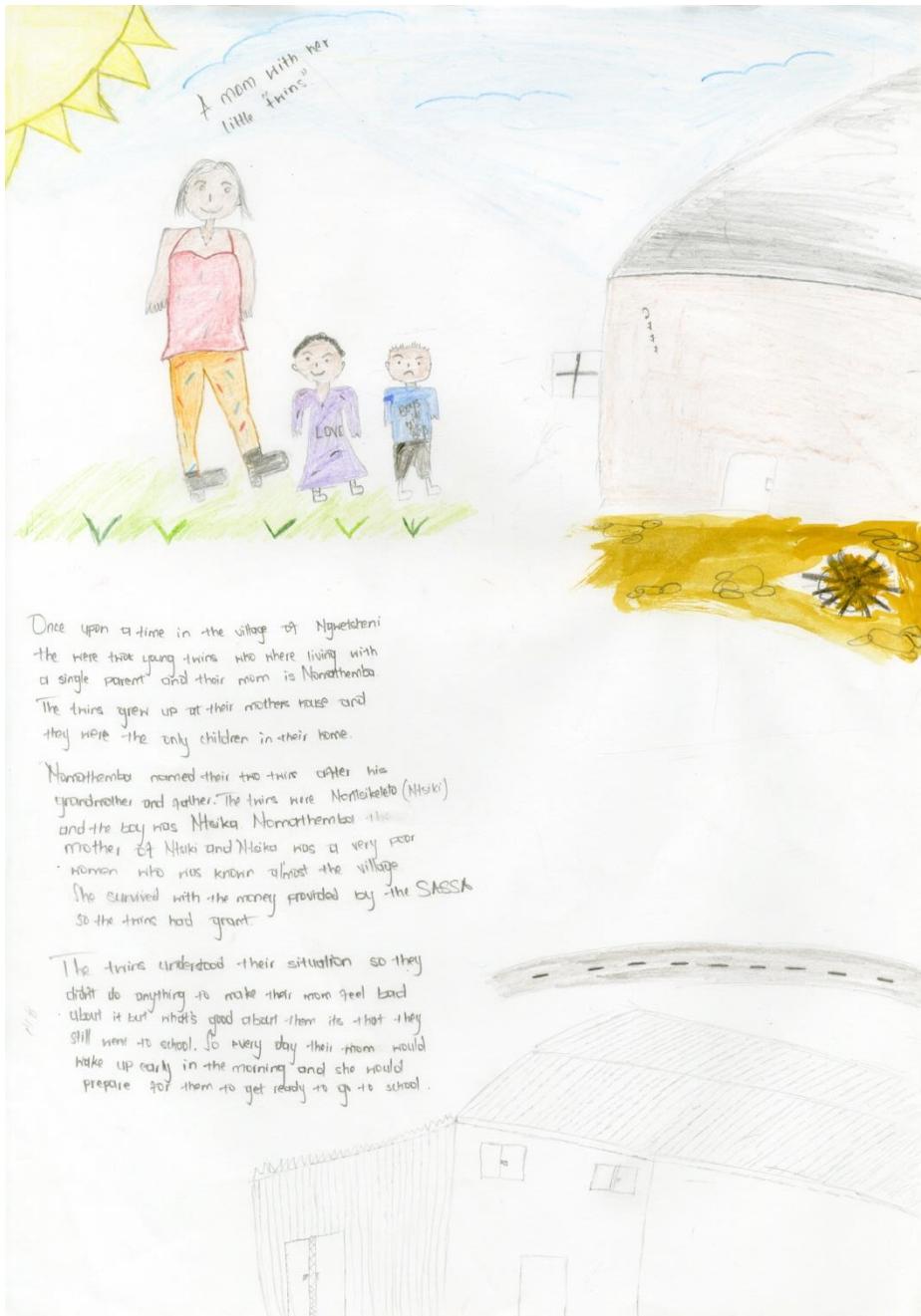


Figure 5.2: Story 2, S(2): *The Responsible Mother*, by Lisa Mrosoro

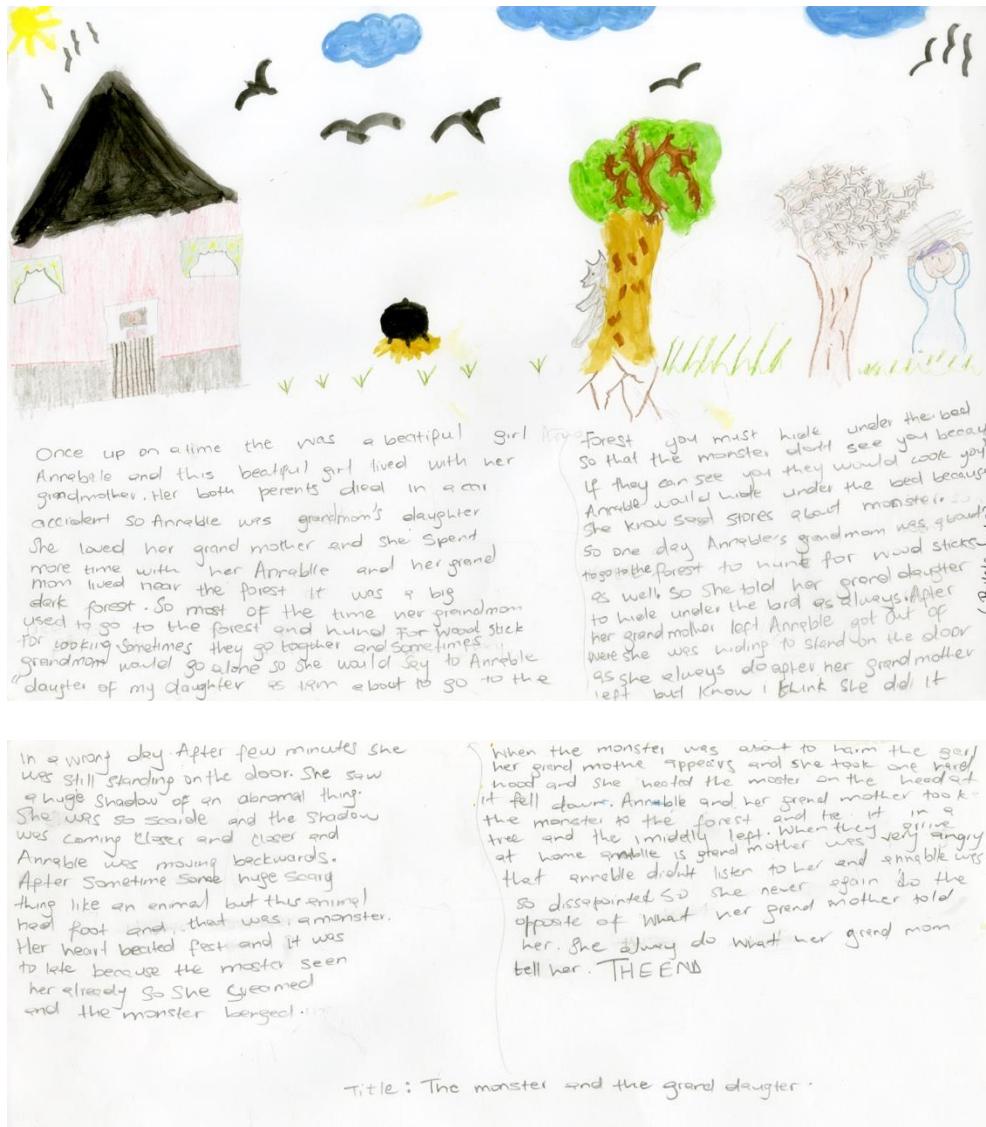


Figure 5.3: Story 3, S(3): *The Monster and the Granddaughter*, by Bulela Sonka

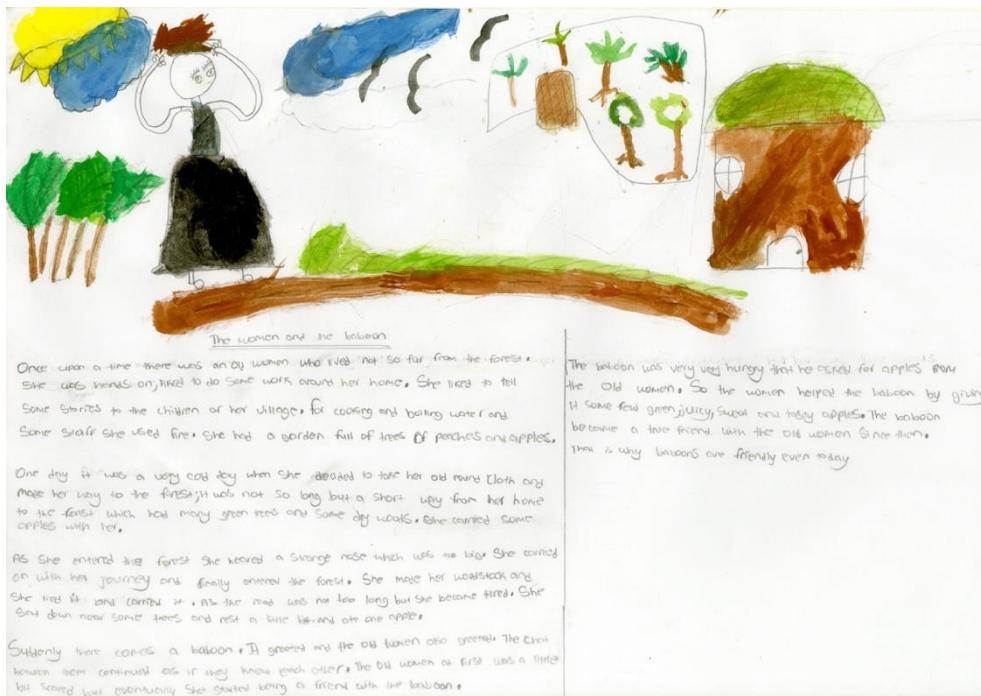


Figure 5.4: Story 4, S(4): *The Woman and the Baboon*, by Akhona Mwretyana

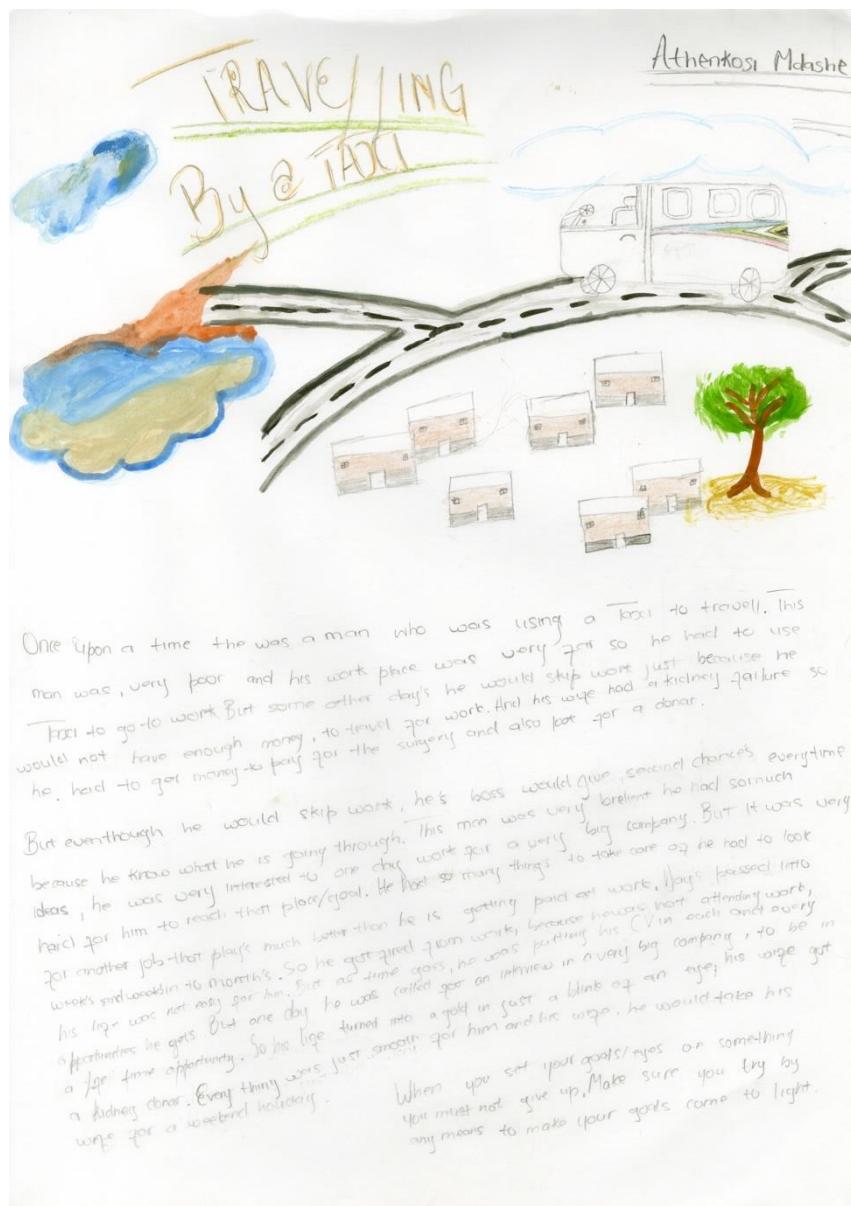


Figure 5.5: Story, 5 S(5): *Don't Give Up!* by Athenkosi Mdashé

## 5.2.2 Process

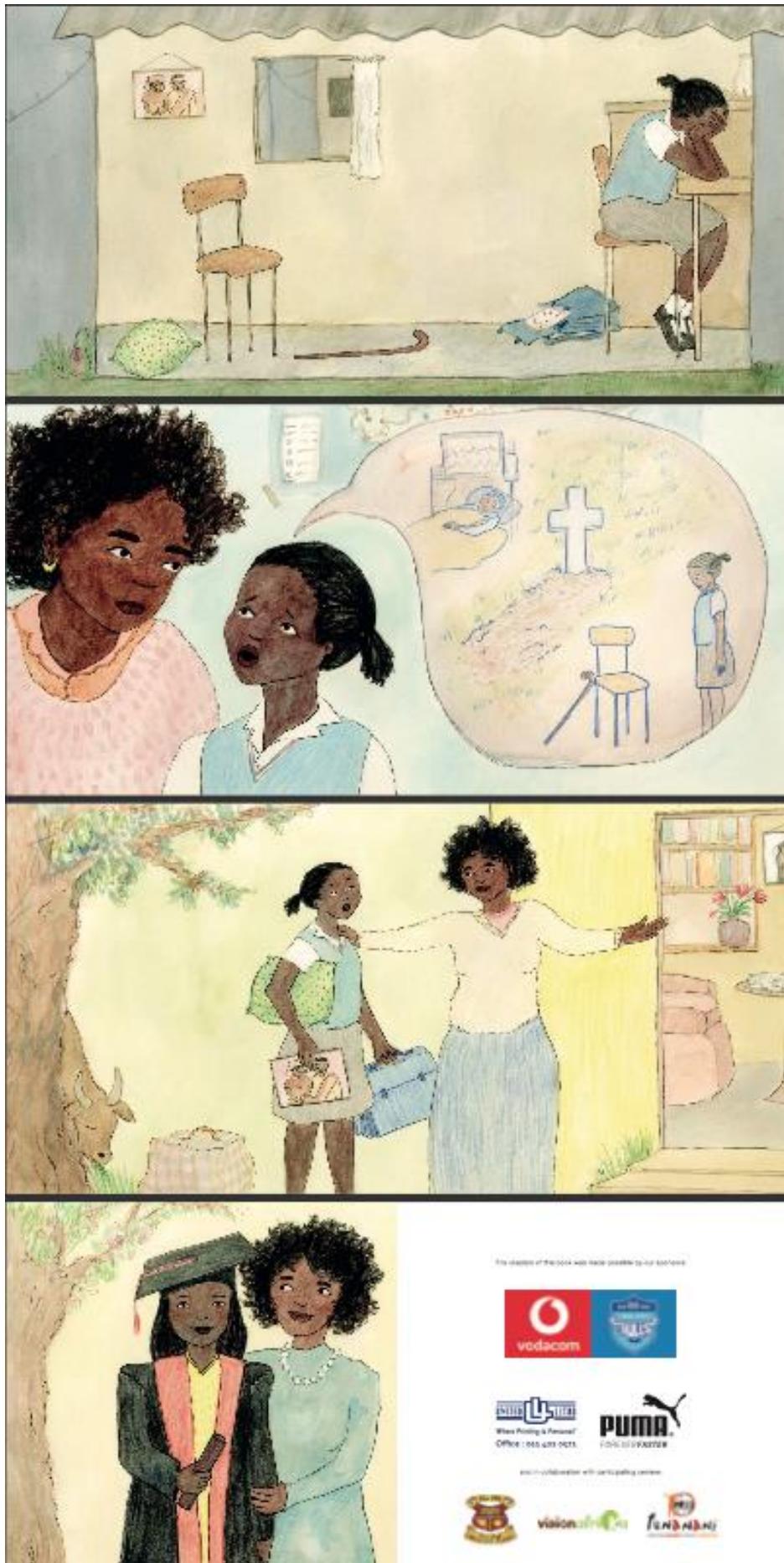
After the story-telling and story-collection process, the stories were sent to the illustrators. Correspondence between the researcher and the illustrators was collected and it was noted that the final illustrations of the books were sometimes different from the stories the participants wrote. This matter is discussed in the following sections. The illustrated books were received really well by the writers of the stories, however, and they enjoyed seeing their books come to life.

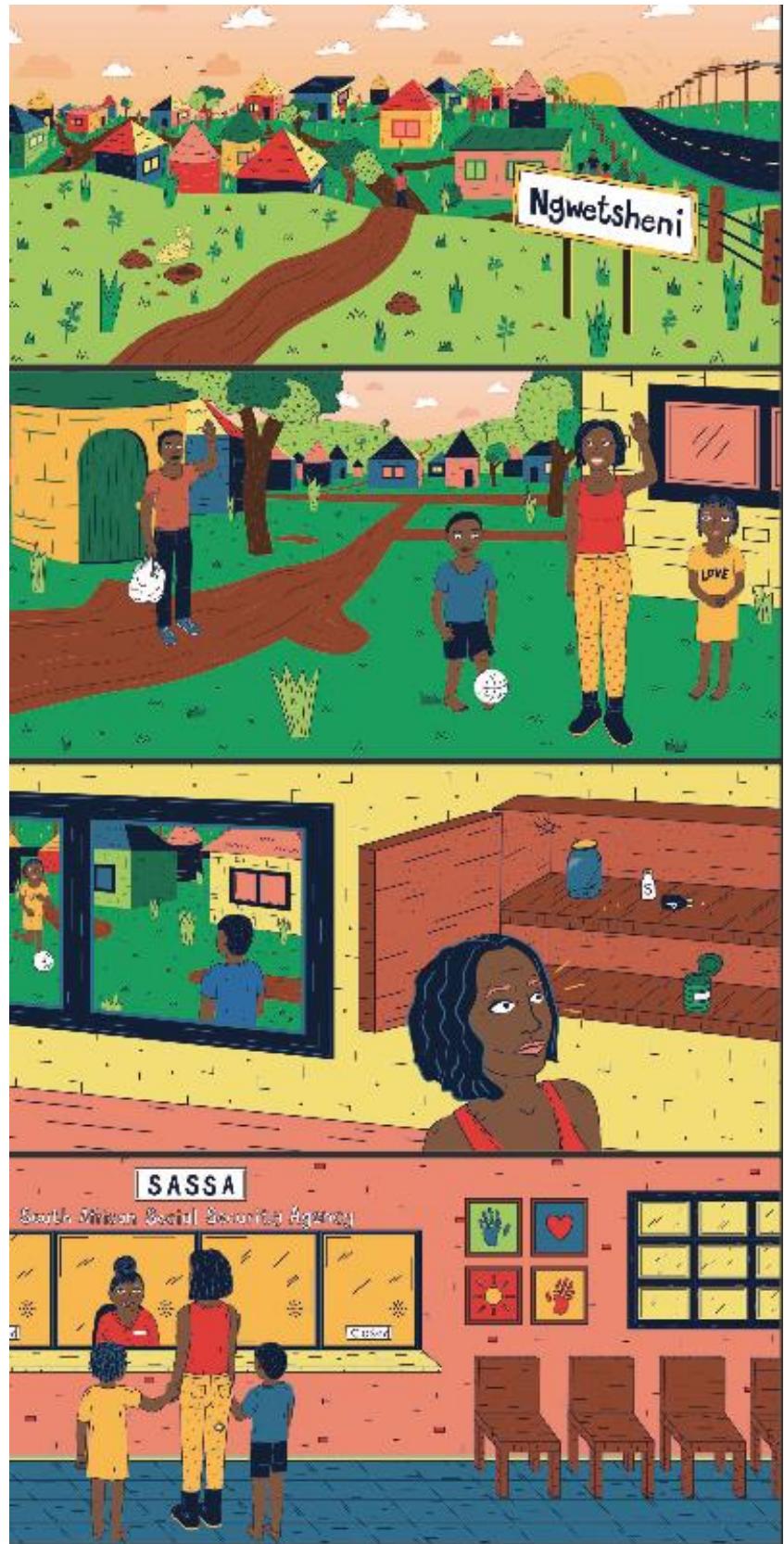
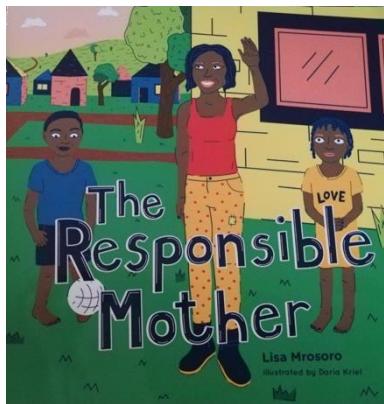
The key aspect of meaning-making is how narrative is understood (Lyle, 2002:46). Looking at the original version of the story as it was written and comparing it to the illustrated version of the story raises questions. The cultural backgrounds of the illustrators were mixed, but some misunderstandings clearly emerged when the books were analysed. These are discussed in detail below. Lyle (2005:53) argues that narrative understanding is an important cognitive tool through which all humans in all cultures make sense of the world. This refers to the fact that one's context affects the way signs and signifiers are understood. Therefore, a difference in the understanding of the stories can be observed in the way the illustrators conveyed the writers' ideas/concepts.

The success of the story is affected by the loss in translation from the writing to the illustration of the stories. According to Lyle (2002:54), stories are predisposed products of human experience, and these stories are narrative experiencing that are transformed into findings that we can share and compare with the narratives of others, as we are social beings. Narrative is one of the values of the creation of meaning, and the impulse for humans to tell stories or to shape experiences into stories points to that (Lyle, 2002:54). The illustrators translated the written stories into a picture format, and feedback from the writers occurred through constant communication, advice, editing and critique. Correspondence between the writers and the illustrators occurred via e-mail. The illustrated story books are presented in the following figures.



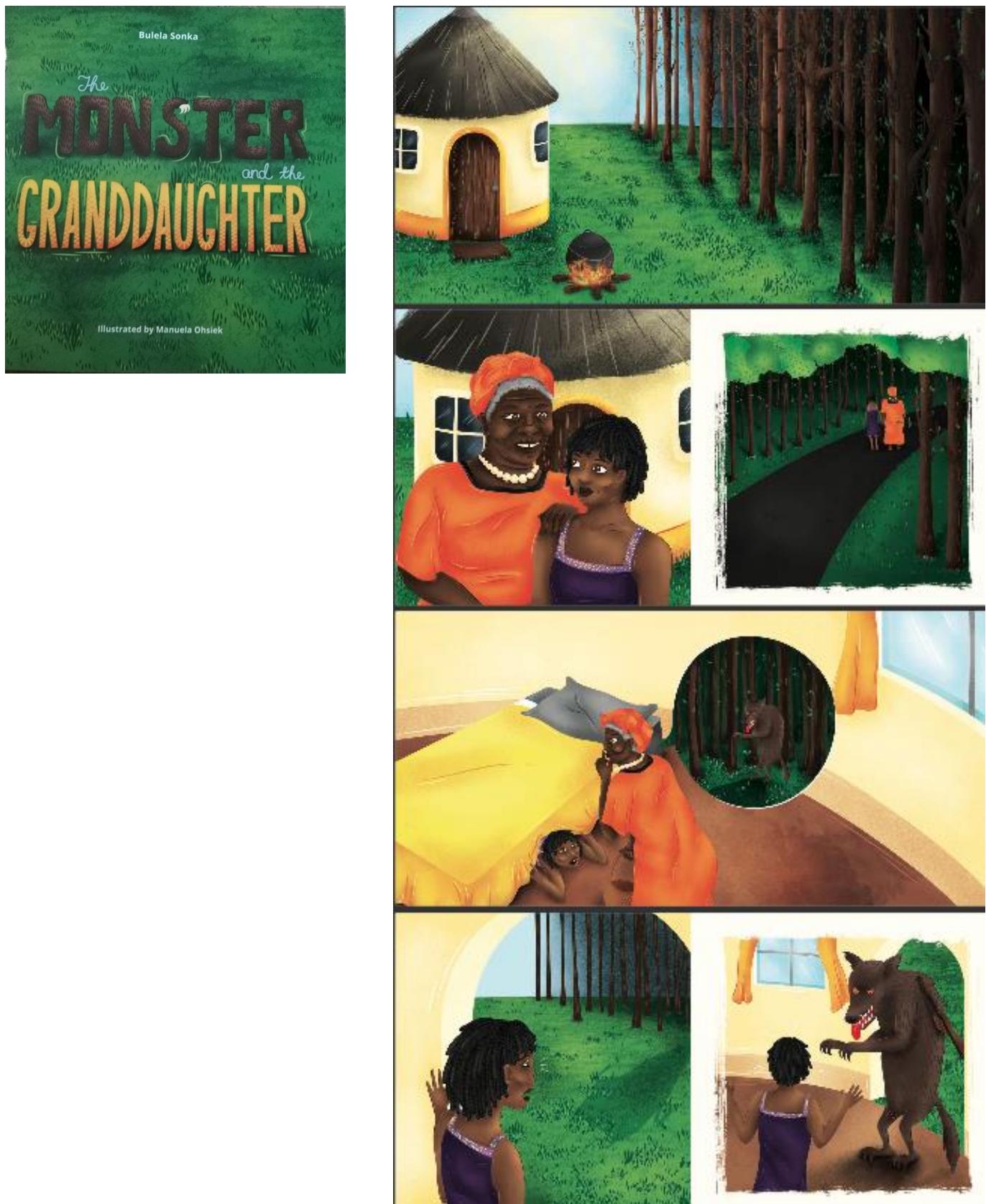
(I1)SS Figure 5.6: Story 1, S(1): *Stella's Story*, by Khanya Xhegwnana



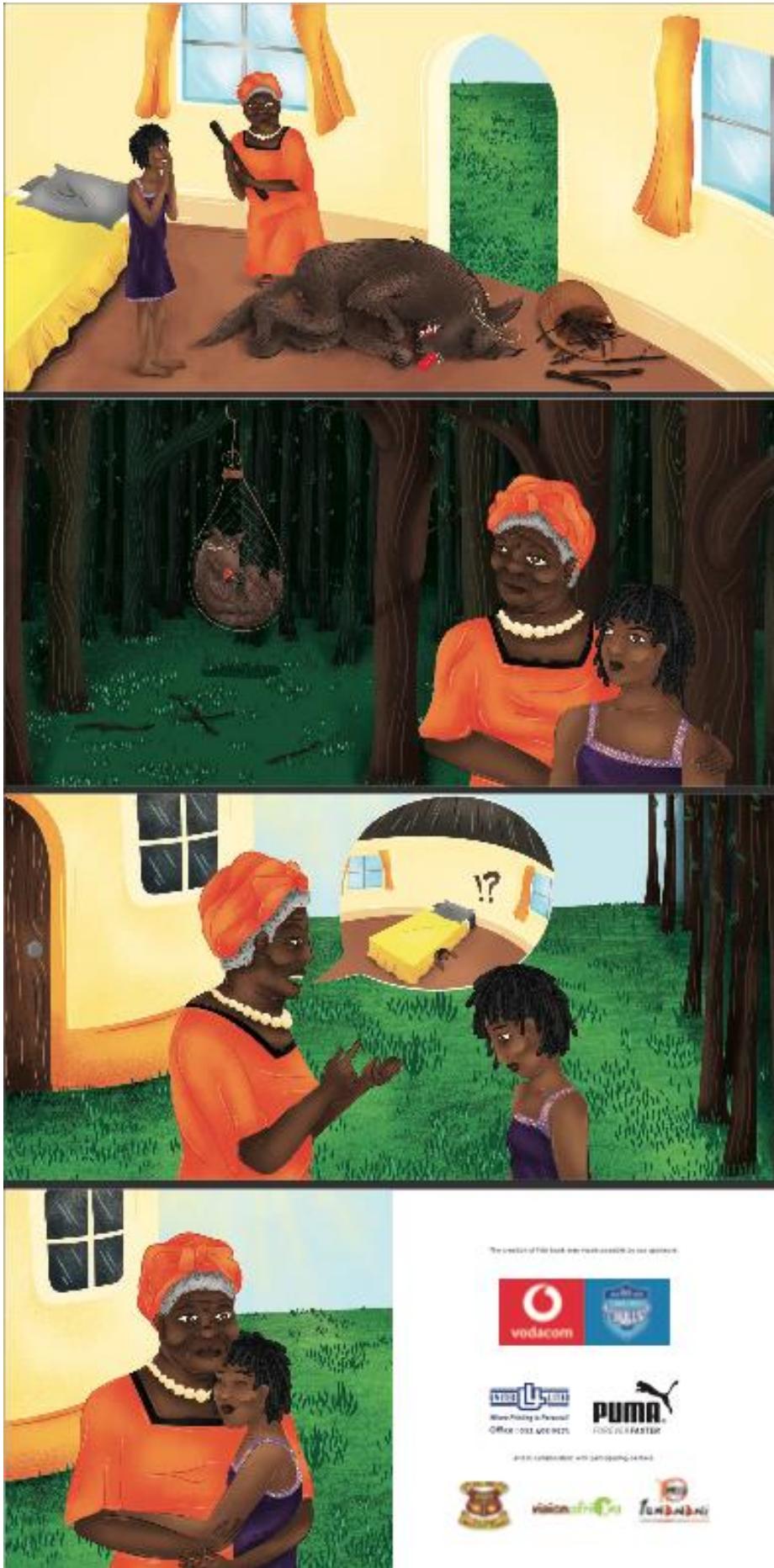


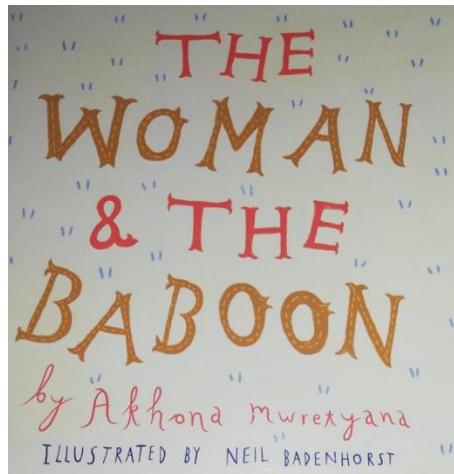
(I2)RM Figure 5.7: Story 1, S(1): *The Responsible Mother*, by Lisa Mrosoro





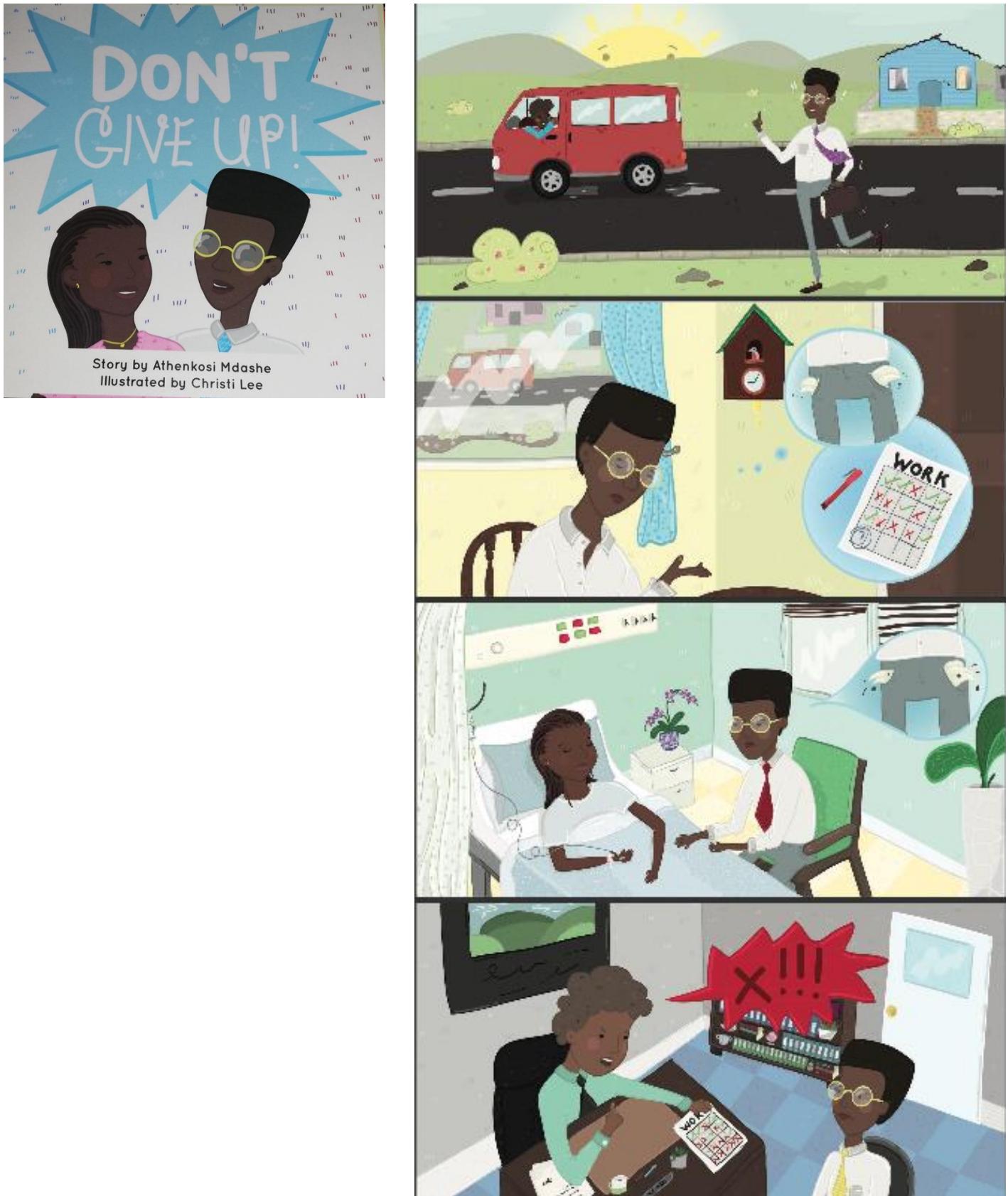
(I3)TMG Figure 5.8: Story 1, S(1): *The Monster and the Granddaughter*, by Bulela Sonka





(I4)WB Figure 5.9: Story 1, S(1): *The Woman and the Baboon*, by Akhona Mwretyana





(I5)NGU Figure 5.10: Story 1, S(1): *Don't Give Up!* by Athenkosi Mdashé



As stated earlier, the illustrated stories sometimes differed from the written stories. It is important to analyse how the illustrators interpreted the writers' stories and changed it to wordless picture stories. The main and fundamental message carrier relies solely on the pictures, without any help of words. Picture books act as multidimensional and dynamic books in which stories can be read off the pictures in different ways. Hade (2000, cited in Crawford & Hade, 2000) states that the visual image is different from written text in its capacity to extend further than words into verbal expressions. Viewers create and change narratives and become narrators. The learners became narrators when they read and told everyone what they read. A synopsis of each story is given below. These synopses were rendered by reading the illustrations in the books, following the storyline that the subject, signs and symbols in the stories suggest, and conveying the order of events in the story.

#### (I1)SS: *Stella's Story*

*Stella's Story* is about a girl who lives with her grandmother in a township. She does really well in school and wins trophies. After her grandmother gets sick and passes away, Stella's marks go down and she is very distraught and lonely. A teacher at the school invites Stella to stay with her and she adopts her into her family. The story ends with Stella getting a degree from university and smiling with the teacher at her side. The story's message suggests that there is 'light at the end of the tunnel'.

The picture book is a condensed version of the written story. Not everything from the written story is portrayed in the illustrations. The illustrations are more simplistic and portray many small signs and icons as signifiers, for example in the second double-page spread of *Stella's Story* there is a trophy with an A+ sign on it, signifying that Stella is a top student. The reader deducts from the same double-page spread that, by extending her hand and carrying water in her right hand, Stella is taking care of the other figure, the grandmother. The figure on the left is hunched over, has a cane next to her, has a pink hat on and has wrinkles. The relationship between the two people seems to be that the lady on the left is the grandmother and the younger girl is the granddaughter, Stella.

This is portrayed in the way Stella's body language is directed to the grandmother and by their smiles. The written text says that the grandmother and daughter live in a township, and the illustrator correctly situated it in Kayamandi by using the geographical layout of Kayamandi in the opening scene.

### (I2)RM: *The Responsible Mother*

This story is about a mother and her twin children who live in a small town. The mother realises that they do not have food and she hides this from the children, as she does not want them to be unhappy or worried. The mother decides to go to the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) to ask for help. The mother comes home and has groceries and food for the children. She cooks them a nice meal. The children sleep soundly through the night and the story ends with the mother dressing the children to go to school and waving goodbye to them as a taxi waits for them. The Grade 9 learner wrote that the story's overall message was meant to depict the responsible mother and how she decided to ask for help for her family.

The main message of *The Responsible Mother*, as with *Stella's Story*, is that anything is possible and that no matter what, there can be a positive outcome in a life of hardship. The picture book and the written version of the story are very similar. The illustrated narrative follows a storyline that suggests the reason why the mother applied for the grant at SASSA; however, the story suggests that the mother had survived without the grant for a while now. The written version states that the children knew about the situation and that they still went to school and did not do anything to make their mother feel bad. This is significant to the story, as it conveys the perspective of the children, and not only that of the mother. The perspective of the mother is that she had to apply to SASSA in order to take care of her children. The perspective of the children is that their role is to support the mother by doing good and going to school. The importance of school is emphasised in this story, regardless of the circumstances.

### (I3)TMG: *The Monster and the Granddaughter*

This story is about a grandmother and her granddaughter, called Annabelle, who live in a hut by the forest/woods. The granddaughter is scared of the wolf in the forest and hides under her bed. She opens a door to look outside and sees that a wolf is approaching the hut and she is scared. The grandmother hits the wolf over the head with a stick. The next page shows that the wolf is hanging in a net from a tree branch in the forest. The grandmother explains to the girl, on the next page, that there is no reason for her to be scared anymore and the story ends with the grandmother and granddaughter hugging.

In the original, written version of the story, the girl was told by her grandmother to hide under the bed while she goes to the forest to look for sticks. Annabelle gets up from under the bed to see her grandmother off. She stands at the door for too long and a wolf comes closer and, as the wolf is about to hurt the girl, the grandmother smacks the wolf over the head. After the wolf is hung in the forest, the grandmother scolds Annabelle for not listening to her. The Grade 9 learner wrote that Annabelle was so sad and said she would never again do the opposite of what her grandmother told her.

The main message of the story intends to be that Annabelle must listen to her grandmother no matter what, and that it is important to be obedient and to listen to instructions in order to be safe. In the illustrated version of the book, the story reads as though the girl is hiding from a wolf in the forest. The story ends with the grandmother speaking to the girl about being under the bed. The illustrations were understood in such a way that indicated that the main message of the story might be that the little girl does not have to be afraid of the wolf. Some of the essence of the story might have dispersed in the translation; however, the even bigger message can be to always be safe and not to be scared of bad things, because the grandmother will always look after and take care of Annabelle. The value within the story lies in the importance of being obedient to the people who care for your well-being. The story can be seen as a comment on child–caregiver relationships and what the result of disobedience can amount to.

Wordless picture books can strengthen learners' engagement, inspiration, learning and understanding (Heinsbergen, 2013:1). It is very beneficial for a child to engage with advanced children's literature, and picture books provide an easy way to inspire and motivate learners to read and also to write. Furthermore, education can be used as a foundation phase for indigenous people to reclaim their language and give worth to the language and culture once again (Aikman & May, 2003:141). The meanings behind the signs and symbols used in the stories discussed above were explored through semiotic analysis, discussed in the following section.

### **5.3 Semiotic analysis of three books**

A semiotic analysis explores the verbal and visual signs of a story and then interprets the symbolic meaning. After that, questions are asked relating to the story, e.g. What is expressed in the story? How does this story link to the readers' values and context? What is liked and disliked about the

story? What is the link between the values and meaning of the story? Picture books follow visual narratives and clues in order to make the story coherent.

### **5.3.1 Storylines:** Analysis by focus group (parents and their children and teachers)

Throughout the storylines of the wordless picture books, illustrations are used to convey messages. These messages exist within the signs and symbols of the illustrations. According to Gerber and Golden (1990:205), semiotics provides a tool to help us understand picture books and the signs within them. Semiotics focuses on meaning-making and how symbols or signs can lead to a type of contextual understanding of what the stories might be saying (Curtin, 2009:51). The most prominent element that adds to meaning-making can be argued to be how narrative is understood (Lyle, 2002:46). “Messages are communicated through signs, symbols and signifiers” (Sebeok, 2001:3). Semiotics is how humans have a natural ability to understand such signs (Sebeok, 2001:3). Signs therefore are understood differently by different people. In this study, the illustrators did not understand the contextual symbols that were needed for the stories to carry their full meaning in the indigenous culture, as the illustrators were not part of or aware of the context.

Signs, however, do represent objects, according to Sebeok, and readers bring their own contextual understanding to books when they read (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66). In this instance, the learners who read the books brought their contextual understandings to the stories, which resulted in some stories being relatable and understood and other stories being misunderstood. The communication language of the books was the same in that all the stories were illustrated; however, each story was illustrated with a different technique and each story has different subjects and protagonists. This results in the diversity of the books, but also the varied reactions and responses from the learners towards the different styles<sup>4</sup> of the books, and how each style assists the child to understand the message or hinders understanding. Narratives are constructed by story-makers and story-takers. The youths (learners who wrote the stories) acted as story-makers with the assistance of the

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<sup>4</sup> Style in this instance refers to the drawing techniques used, i.e. whether the picture is two-dimensional or three-dimensional, a crayon drawing, etc., whether the characters have outlines, whether they blend in with the background, etc.

illustrators, and the story-takers are the viewers who will inevitably read the stories (Crawford & Hade, 2000). Between the story-makers and takers there needs to be uniformity in the message that is relayed to the readers.

Normative Western curricula previously pushed aside indigenous ways of knowing and indigenous knowledge. In order to reclaim cultural validity, indigenous knowledge must be applied practically (Akena, 2012:601). This knowledge therefore can no longer be viewed as inferior, as it can be embraced through wordless picture books. The learners enjoyed readings stories that they could relate to, as well as understand. They identified with the characters and the stories, and the context in which the characters were placed. Akena (2012:606) states that a “biased and external knowledge system produced outside a community and incorporated inside the community’s educational frameworks or societal frameworks can become a negative influence to the people of the culture”. The value of indigenous knowledge is noted in, among others, the application of it in a community. The merit of stories produced in the community is evident in the pride the youths displayed in having their stories printed, as well as how the small children reacted with recognition when they encountered the books.

In the feedback sessions that were held with the teachers, they analysed the books and the symbols used in them and gauged whether they were applicable and understandable from their indigenous cultural contextual viewpoints and experiences. P(3) understood the storyline of *Stella's Story* ((I1)SS) in a different way. The participant came from a different township to live in Kayamandi, and therefore had a different perspective that affected her experience of the storylines:

Oh, but I can't say that because I come also from a township, so we don't have cows where I grew up, so I don't know. Maybe dogs, but I see here is a dog, maybe a lot of dogs. Because sometimes when the dogs are howling, you know making a noise then that is how we know that there is something bad that is going to happen ... we older people even say that chase this dog away because they are calling out bad things to come if they don't howl then we will not get bad things.

P(3) read the story from her context and experience. Most people in Kayamandi came from the Eastern Cape, while this participant came from a township in Tanzania. The participant felt that her experience would not be helpful. P(3) commented on the environment set in (I1)SS that changes

the manner in which readers might understand the storyline. On the second-page spread of (I1)SS, P(3) commented: “Maybe they can have couches, where they can sit. Even though we can see they are happy. We can see the grandmother isn’t happy on the chair that she is sitting on.” The living area in the story is very empty, which the participant felt was not an accurate representation of what the houses look like inside. If the girl can afford to go to school, they can surely afford to have at least one soft couch.

In (I1)SS, the main character’s grandmother passes away and P(3) found it very strange that the main character was alone in the house and that no family members were there to support her. Because the writers of the stories (Grade 9 learners) and the illustrators were not the same people, and in some cases came from different cultural groups, some interpretation mistakes were made in the illustration of these books. This problem occurred due to the illustrators not understanding the context that the writers intended in the story. It can be seen in the way the focus group responded to the wordless picture books:

Now she is supposed to have neighbours because as soon as they hear that so and so has passed away, they come very fast and [also] everyone in the home. So that you don’t have time to be alone. There will be people here cleaning, others are making tea and coffee, others are comforting you, you can never be alone like this. So, we need a lot of people here, a lot of busy people ... and she will not sit alone like this there are people here who are comforting her, talking to her that everything will be alright.

An indigenous understanding of the community/context/culture was missed in some of the instances. To a certain extent, the illustrator depicted the message on the surface level, whereas there was a deeper message or meaning connected with the occurrence of a death in the family. The key aspect of meaning-making is how narrative is understood (Lyle, 2002:46). Furthermore, narrative understanding is an important cognitive tool through which humans in all cultures make sense of the world (Lyle, 2002:53). The main character and this scene are experienced as incorrect and unrelatable, as P(3) could not relate to the character going through the death of a loved one alone, as it is not familiar to her. The frame of reference that P(3) used to read the scene and symbols included her context and what she was used to in her community. The narrative experience of the character was not completely relatable for P(3).

Regarding the main character moving in with the teacher at the end of the story, P(3) commented that the cow can symbolise that the teacher is wealthy and that the family will not let the child go to the teacher alone; they would at least walk with her. P(3) remarked:

Yes, there are no family members; again, at least have an aunt or sister with you, but you can't be alone with a teacher. Most of the time even those who didn't support you they sit, and they are there.

It also symbolises that the relationship of the teacher and learner is problematic; that some sort of family member would have been present. Again, this is an example of an indigenous contextual misunderstanding. The girl is portrayed as being entirely alone; however, P(3) repeatedly said “there must be some family somewhere”. In the next paragraph, the symbols used in the stories are analysed semiotically and the feedback and interviews with the focus group are elaborated upon.

### **5.3.2 Utilisation of signs and symbols**

The symbols and signifiers used in the books were interpreted and illustrated from the written stories. The illustrators drew what they understood from the written stories based on their own portrayal. Semiotics is concerned with meaning. Images or objects are not seen as important if they are understood as a one-way process from image-object to the individual. These images or objects can rather be perceived as the outcome of a complex interrelationship between the individual, the image/object and other factors (Curtin, 2009:52). One part cannot be separated from the rest, as images were used in the wordless picture books to communicate the main idea of the story and cannot be read or understood by individual signs only. The story can only be understood as a narrative when signs are placed in a specific order. Certain indigenous symbols and traditions were highlighted in the books by the participants, namely the use of cows, grandmothers, death and new beginnings, clothing and poverty. These symbols are discussed below.

#### **5.3.2.1 Animals**

In the first pages of (I1)SS, a double-page spread shows a distant view of a township. In this double-page spread, cows are recognised in the scene. The last page of (I1)SS also shows a cow in the

corner of the double-page spread. In *Stella's Story*, the cows were recognised as the first symbol linked with the indigeneity of the culture:

The cows, yes you can do so many things ... you can use it as a source of meat ... And also use it like when we want to plough in the fields. So, we use the cows. And then obviously we get milk, because it is really some kind of blessing ... where I'm coming from. If you have too many cows or livestock then you are referred to as someone who is rich ... because you can sell the cows. Some of the people don't work, they depend on the cows or sheep or goat or whatever because you can sell them, milk them, eat them. (P(2))

The cow is viewed as a symbol of wealth because of its practical uses, such as that it can be slaughtered for meat and can provide fresh milk; however, as the participant continued, the significance of the cow was recognised beyond its practical aspects.

Also, the cows, there are certain cows that you slaughter ... for certain things. Like, if maybe you are a person who believes in ancestors, for a man if the man died so you have to make a ritual after a year, so that you are just the farewell. The way of saying farewell to the man. So, you can't slaughter a cow for a man, but you have to slaughter an ox for a man. Because they believe that you must as a way to say farewell and then you must look after your family. Even though that is their belief. And if maybe you have for females some other problems, female problems, you have your periods, if it's not normal, so there is that certain cow, they use for the family. They will try to take out [off] the fur of the cow. You see they usually use the tail of the cow, they will make something like a thread so that they can put it on. So, it is for those people that believe. But it must be a certain cow, not all of the cows. So that cow you have to look after it and be careful with that cow. It is for every person, every family in the house, or even their extended family. If they have problems like maybe other things, woman stuff, so they have to come, go in the mountain and take the cow. They believe that you will be healed. (P(2))

There are myths/beliefs/rituals and traditions regarding the acts of slaughtering cows, as stated by the participant above, that emphasise the symbolic value of this specific animal. Another participant from the focus group commented on the portrayal of the cow as follows:

... because the cows we use most of the time when we do the cleansing the ritual and even if we do the funerals and we didn't buy meat me slaughter the cows and the sheep if your father [has] passed away. When you do something for her as your ancestor you also use the cow ... We use it as a symbol for our culture. There is something that happens, we connect to the ancestor by slaughtering this cow. (P(3))

There is a bigger significance in the symbolism of the cow that outsiders of the community might not read in the same way. Most of the focus group participants understood the symbol of the cow portrayed in the story as the writers intended. Barthes (1999) states that, in every society, there is a unique symbol system has been formed by and evolved in the society. The cow, for example, represents something else in a different culture or context. When examined, individual symbol systems reflect cultural logic, as the symbols' main function is to communicate information between members of a culture. Some logic can therefore only be understood by members of the same culture. Symbols depend on one another for their growth, value and meaning.

The terminology that occurs in the connections of the narrative includes semiotics (Fludernik, 2009). In semiotics there is a distinction between three kinds of signs: a deictic sign, an iconic sign and symbolic signs, as mentioned previously (Fludernik, 2009:102). Putting the deictic and iconic signs aside, the symbolic signs come forth as unpredictable as there is no clear link to the signified (Fludernik, 2009:102). P(2) discussed symbols that could have been included in the wordless picture book to enhance the symbolic meaning of the story and make it more indigenous:

The owl ... people they always cannot see it during the day, you always see it at night, so they relate it with witchcraft, which is like a superstition. Which means it is bad luck. Even if you hear the owl hooting, then it is bad luck. So, it's, for me, it's so obvious.

P(2) stated that the owl can also play a role of foreshadowing in the narrative, symbolising that something bad is going to happen, which is that the grandmother died.

### **5.3.2.2 Grandmothers**

During the analysis of the wordless picture books it was evident that the presence of a grandmother in a family or household is very significant to this community. This fact surfaced in the way the

participants spoke about grandmothers and how they elaborated on the topic of what grandmothers mean and symbolise in their indigenous culture

Looking at (I1)SS, P(3) commented on the girl being represented alone and living with the grandmother:

The fact that the grandmother is looking after the girl, it is obvious that the parents aren't looking after the child anymore. But still in some other cases if you get a child out of marriage. So, when you are getting married you have to leave your children behind for that small time.. So, if that can be the case as you see that there is a mother and a father in the picture frame on the wall, which means that they passed away. Which means the grandmother is looking after the child.

P(3) interpreted the portrait of a man and woman on the wall as the girl's parents who had passed away. P(3) tried to understand why the girl was alone and looked on the page for clues as to why she would be living with the grandmother. Even though the portrait is a very small symbol, P(3) read that as the sign that signified what is happening in the page. Furthermore, P(3) understood the symbolisation of a grandmother as a blessing, because P(3) believes it is a blessing when the grandmother speaks to you: "Yes, because we can believe what we hear from our grandmother. Yes, even the way [grandmothers] talk to us we get healed." This indicates that the presence of a grandmother is valued in the culture and her input in the family is regarded very highly. The illustration of the grandmother as the child's guardian emphasises and points to the appreciation and high regard in which grandmothers are viewed.

This makes the drawing of the grandmother significant, especially as the grandmother is ill; however, the young child is still looking after her and respecting her and realising that the grandmother is her family. In this case, the grandmother is a signifier that signifies that the child is blessed because of the grandmother. The blessing of the girl by the signifier acts as the signified. It is signified that the grandmother exudes a blessing to the girl. As the blessing is taken away by the grandmother's death, the absence of the grandmother symbolises the predicament the child is in and that she is no longer blessed. In (I3)TMG, on the other hand, the grandmother goes to the woods and the daughter stays at home. She is stuck in a predicament when a wolf comes in the

door and, in the moment of fear, the grandmother comes to her rescue. The grandmother is not only portrayed as a blessing, but as a rescuer as well.

### **5.3.2.3 Symbols of death and new beginnings**

Throughout the wordless picture books there are depictions of death and new beginnings. In (I1)SS, the grandmother dies and the girl experiences despair, which turns into a positive event, and she experiences a positive new beginning. In (I2)RM the mother does not have money to provide for her children. Even though they do not experience a death, the family experience a dire situation, which then results in a new beginning. P(3) noted that the book could have predicted that something was about to happen, perhaps by the insertion of dark clouds.

Death is the black clouds. When someone is passed away, they call all the family and tell them about the news of someone as passed away and the others they cry, and someone goes to comfort them. Then if it is the son we lost, [and] we have no one to go to them and we must remember that person and we tell all the family members that they must be there on that day.

Furthermore, P(3) commented on the foresight of the story and that, by drawing rain, a new beginning would have been portrayed: “Yes, a new beginning and then wash those bad luck and so away.” Dark clouds portray that death has occurred and rain symbolises a new beginning in that, when the rain comes down, it means that everything will grow again afterwards. The rain makes the ground fertile and a new beginning is possible.

### **5.3.2.4 Clothing**

P(2) commented on (I2)RM that the clothing portrayed in the story is incorrect.

In Eastern Cape when you are married you can't have the pants. Unless she is a single parent, but if we say that the man in the picture is the husband, then that means that she would have to put [on] the skirt.

On the second page spread of (I2)RM, the mother and her two children are on the right-hand side waving at a man on the left-hand side. P(2) read that that man could perhaps be the husband of the woman on the right, and therefore concluded that the character is not allowed to wear pants, as they are very strict about clothing in the Eastern Cape. P(2) perceived the township in the story as similar to the one in Eastern Cape and spoke from the context of the Eastern Cape. P(2) commented that, in the Eastern Cape, the Xhosa culture is stricter regarding what a woman wears, as she has family or friends who live there and when she goes to visit they are very strict about what she wears.

Even if you put on pants here or in Cape Town, it's fine. But if you go there [Eastern Cape] you are obliged to wear skirts ... it is very strict there. It has something to do with the ancestors. Because now it is your way of showing the respect to the older people or the in-laws. And also, it is the way of showing respect to the ancestors because they always believe that their ancestors are always watching you. (P(2))

P(4) noticed in (I3)TMG that the attire of the woman in the picture book was appropriate; however, the colour scheme of the outfit is a portrayal of wealth: "The clothing is appropriate if she likes it. but yet she has money. Look, red, yellow and white, and she has money for lipstick. [laughs]" The participant continued that the character should have worn a dress with holes in so that people can see that the family is suffering: "... [no] not black clothes, maybe a dress that has holes that you can see these people are suffering."

P(1) stated beforehand with regard to (I3)TMG that she did not like fairy tales or folklore stories. This participant likes realistic stories; however, she contributed by analysing the symbols in the wordless picture book.

In Eastern Cape they have a place where they put the wood. The women will go the veld and fetch the wood and then, they will pack them there. In Xhosa it is called iGoqo. Where we go to the bush, or veld we go to the bush to fetch the wood. Every morning it is the women's job. And then we put and pack it nice all the way, and when we use them, we put them really nicely and only use a few.

P(1) saw that (I3)TMG portrayed a rural house by the woods. P(1) explained the role of women in Xhosa rural culture and that they would have to fetch wood every morning. With regard to what the women wear when they fetch wood, P(3) remarked:

In the rural areas? [no] ... The grandmothers in rural areas don't wear bright colours. Especially in rural areas. You see this is a pearl necklace. You can wear the bead one, then I can understand. But this one must be removed. Even when they go to town in traditional clothes, the dark one. When you get married after your white wedding.<sup>5</sup> Or if their grandmother will wear their normal clothes. But not the fancy one. It depends where they go.

The participant commented on the importance of respecting the type of clothing one should wear when visiting in this area: "No, they don't fetch wood in those baskets. They use their arms or use rope to put them together. The basket is too fancy. She goes to the woods as if she is going to town to buy something." The attributes of these signs used in the books allow for the wordless picture book to be read as open-ended (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66). Anyone can interpret the narrative in any manner.

### **5.3.2.5 Symbols of poverty**

Throughout the multiple stories, symbols that portray poverty were conveyed in the wordless picture books to add to the message of the stories. Symbols can have different meanings depending on the context in which they are viewed. The indigenous understanding of certain cultural norms can play a role here. The symbol of not having food in the house was regarded by P(2) as a cat lying in the fireplace. P(2) commented on the symbolisation of not having food in the home and how it is depicted in (I1)SS and (I2)RM. In (I2)RM, the third double-page spread shows that the cupboards in the kitchen are empty. P(2) commented:

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<sup>5</sup> A term referring to one's first marriage.

... if maybe there is a cat and then because in Eastern Cape the cupboards can be empty, the fridge can be empty, but we have a fireplace, even if let's say it is a rondawel, let's make it a rondawel, then here, because mostly we cook in the rondawels if its winter ... so in the middle of the rondawel there is this fireplace where we sit a tripod so ... the cat sleeps there. So, if you cook now and then the cat can't sleep there because it's hot. But now if the cat sleeps there it is cold, which means that you don't have anything to cook, you don't have food. So, when the cat sleeps on the fireplace it is a symbol that you don't have food.

It was noted by P(2) that the use of the symbolisation of empty cupboards was not as strong as it would have been if a cat sleeping in a fireplace was used instead. P(3) had the same perspective that a symbol for 'no food' would be a cat sleeping in the fireplace.

... the symbol of when you have nothing to eat. We have the pets, cat, if the cat is sleeping on the [fireplace]. We have a hut with a circle at the centre and in the centre there is a cement construction for the fireplace. Where we put the pot and the wood and when we cook something. Those tripod pots, we use those black three-leg pots. If you have nothing to cook, the cat goes and lays there, and we say you have iQalo. I don't know what that is in English ... When there is nothing to cook the cat sleeps there.

Even though participants P(2) and P(3) had different experiences growing up, their contextual indigenous knowledge regarding this matter was the same. However, P(4) did not agree that the symbol of 'no food' would be the cat sleeping on the fireplace. P(4) had a different experience:

No, we don't have a fireplace where the cat sleeps. If there is no food, what my grandmother used to do, because I grew up also raised by my grandmother, then we will go to so and so and ask for mielie-mielie, go to so and so and ask for cabbage and go to so and so and ask for oil. But at home we use to have plants like spinach and vegetables and then we just take it up from the garden, but for other things we go and ask, even if it is sugar, we wake up early in the morning, your grandmother will wake you up and ask you to go ask for sugar.

The portrayal of the SASSA offices in (I2)RM on the fourth double-page spread was especially unrealistic for P(4):

No but where are the people? SASSA is never this quiet. Never, never ever ... I think this side is closed. But this is open. So here it is closed, we need people who are sitting and who are in the line. And she has nothing, you can't go to SASSA if you don't have a birth certificate and a clinic card, so we don't see anything that shows that she [is prepared] ...

P(4)'s closing remarks on the symbols in (I2)RM are as follows:

... but I have to mention that you they have a nice place, you can't say that they are suffering. You can't say that they are suffering, when you look now at the rooms because what I know, we share the room. We share the room with our children, secondly, we share the same bed with the daughter and maybe the boy would need to sleep on the floor if you have one room ... yes, and I don't understand why the mother is tying his shoes [the mother in the picture is tying the boy's shoelaces], he is old enough to do it himself, so I am just confused, the mother, I don't like the way that she is doing things now. She is helping the child over and over again. I don't know why.

To reflect the order of narrative, iconic signs are arranged linearly (Gerber & Golden, 1990:205–206). For example, the way the woman was placed with the children showed the viewer that she is the children's mother. As the story continues, signs such as these and the placement of the signs in relation to one another portray to the viewer the relationship between characters, as well as an insinuated storyline. Iconic signs are used in illustrations and symbols and they have the potential to represent other features of the sign (Gerber & Golden, 1990:206).

By the end of the wordless picture book (I2)RM, the mother's children goes to school in a taxi. P(4) mentioned that this is a symbol of having money and that perhaps the children could not go to school before because they did not have money to take a taxi to get to school:

They can afford to go to school because it looks like they are taking a bus ... yes they are taking a taxi to school, which means that the mother has the money to pay for the taxi because when my children were in school there were taxis there to take them to school, but she used a train because she couldn't afford for the taxi, so she took a train. So, there [are] always options.

The semi-structured interview with P(4) regarding (I2)RM ended with the participant's closing remarks on how unrealistic the story portrays that the family was living in poverty:

It is not enough to maintain everything that they have now. Like they have two beds, they have such a big kitchen. [When going to SASSA] you need your documents, because you need to see some papers [illustrated in the story] even if it is not documenting but an envelope yes, to take it to the police station so that they can certify it, and maybe you can get the [SASSA] letter ... And then they can show us money standing next to the ATM, then afterwards we can maybe see them going to the shops to buy groceries.

Series of pictorial images reveal a visual text that invites interaction with the text and interaction with others. These transactions ask of the viewers to use their individual understanding to find relevance in the illustrated story at which they are looking (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66). Messages in wordless picture books are mainly given through visual images. Wordless picture books can be seen as narratives that welcome the readers to respond creatively and to connect the symbols, signs and signifiers of the story with their own contextual understanding (Crawford & Hade, 2000:66).

### **5.3.3 Types of illustrations**

Understanding wordless picture books also includes understanding the presence and absence of words and the effects these have on the narrative. In word and picture books, words and pictures function together to integrate the stories in various transmissions (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000:225). Pictures tend to boost the full meaning of the words, adding dynamic elements to the narrative. Reading a picture book without words leaves open a multiple range of possibilities in how the story is understood. Different variations can occur by different individuals multiple times. Pictures can instead act as the words and emerge from the book in the form of an oral story.

The type of illustration (drawings) used in wordless picture books serves a very important role, as the narrative is only portrayed and understood through the reading of the picture without text. *Stella's Story*, (I1)SS, was favoured among the focus group participants because of the simplistic depiction of the narrative. The object and subjects in the story had a clear outline that easily separated each from the other, and the story illustrated Kayamandi in the layout of the overview of the town in the opening pages of the book. In (I2)RM, *The Responsible Mother*, the illustration

style used was two-dimensional or ‘flat design’. There were outlines for the subjects, but no depth or shading accompanying the colours used. The participants of the focus group did not respond well to the illustration of (I2)RM, whereas in (I1)SS the line usage and colour usage felt more realistic. In (I3)TMG, *The Monster and the Granddaughter*, the illustration style used could also be explained as two-dimensional design; however, there is more shade variation in the images. The blending and shading of the colours set a mood for the scenes and created a more realistic feel. Even though the story was read as a tale or a fairy tale, the portrayal of the environment was viewed as realistic and accurate of the type of setting.

Another comment on (I2)RM and (I3)TMG was that the usage of colour for the attire of the main characters was unrealistic compared to what the story was portraying. In both stories, a rural area was portrayed; however, the characters were drawn with bright clothes. This is unrealistic, as the characters are poor or have to fetch wood. None of these activities ask for fancy, bright-coloured clothing. The colour of the clothes in the stories caused the participants to receive the stories in a different way, and it played an important role in the authenticity of the story for the participants. This issue made (I1)SS more successful, as the characters wore appropriate attire with an appropriate colour, fashion or style according to the storyline and the focus group participants’ opinions.

As mentioned before, in education it is better to view development tools as part of interactions, instead of viewing them as single entities operating in unlinked categories. Developing tools such as books and stories can aid in the production of knowledge for children. When indigenous knowledge is used, there should not only be a focus on what is going on inside the indigenous system, but also a consideration of the links between people outside of the system and links between systems (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 1998:3). One culture’s indigenous knowledge comes into contact with another culture’s indigenous knowledge. As two cultures interact, a way of communicating is established. The one must surely understand what the other is saying to an extent. Consideration of the way in which these cultures interact with one another can develop the way in which their respective knowledge is shared among them. If a wordless picture book is created in and for a specific culture group, most people in the culture would be able to understand the book; however, there are also differences within cultures, and culture is not static. It could possibly help if a section in front of the book explains the significance or deeper meaning of the various signs.

## 5.4 Synthesis

The stories were illustrated and interpreted in diverse ways and there was positive and negative feedback regarding the contextual portrayal of the signs and signifiers in the wordless picture books. Although the semiotic analysis of the wordless picture books was critical, the focus group participants still enjoyed the books, especially *Stella's Story*, (I1)SS. This was also enhanced by the fact that authentic stories were used from their own culture and everyday experiences. The illustration style also played an important role in the reception of the stories.

The symbols were analysed, as an exploration of the connotations between symbols and the culture depicted was required to determine whether the signs and signifiers were used in such a way that they were relevant and appropriate to the indigenous knowledge of the culture's context.

Telling a story, or the act of narration, happens when there is interaction between people that includes a topic (Fludernik, 2009). The Grade 9 learners learned through the writing of the picture books that they are all narrators and that their stories, or their versions of the stories, are also important. This added value and worth to how the learners viewed their stories and contexts. It also added to the importance of how their own indigenous knowledge was perceived. Heinsbergen (2013:17) states that libraries and classrooms should have picture books available in their facilities that depict signs and signifiers of the learners' own culture to enable them to relate to the stories. It is also significant to depict a variety of signs and signifiers to enable learners to appreciate diversity. Wordless picture books could be beneficial for numerous people and learners. It is also beneficial for children to engage with picture books that inspire and motivate them to write and tell their own stories. Sharing books and stories can assist in the development of approaches to writing and conversation (Heinsbergen, 2013:16), and can also contribute to social cohesion and diversity.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to semiotically analyse three wordless picture books as part of an NRF project in Kayamandi, Stellenbosch. The research was designed as qualitative research and entailed a study that included observation and interviews. The boundaries of the research included participant availability and interest, with some time limitations. The research was conducted within the boundaries of the Vision AfriKa Primary School in Kayamandi, and included five Grade 9 learners who wrote stories that related to their own context, five illustrators who translated the words into images and created the wordless picture books, and a focus group that evaluated the final products. Three of the five books produced were analysed in this research. Many lessons were learned in the process that can be valuable for future projects regarding wordless picture books and other children's books produced for various cultures in the South African context.

### 6.2 Conclusion from findings and implications

Overall, the book-creation part of the project was successful in the sense that the result was positive and the Grade 9 learners really felt part of an important process of documenting their everyday life in Kayamandi. The collaboration between the Grade 9 learners and the illustrators was fruitful, and both sides learned from the process. However, in future, the illustrators of the books should be chosen more carefully. It was shown in this study that, due to their own limited knowledge of another culture, the illustrators misinterpreted signs and signifiers that are important for authentic storytelling. It would not be possible to please everybody in a culture, but in this research it was evident that important interpretations were missed and that more attention should be paid to culture-specific and indigenous meaning-making in storytelling. Illustrators should be more informed about other cultures so that they can use culture-specific signs and signifiers more successfully. Illustrators have the right to interpret stories and also make them their own, but for the sake of diversity it is important that the signs and signifiers of various cultures are represented, and correctly so. The information gathered regarding the misinterpretation of the signs and signifiers during the focus group sessions was crucial in this regard. A suggestion would be to add an index at the front of the book to explain certain symbols, signs or signifiers that can be important to the contextual understanding of the story.

Semiotics was used to examine the signs and signifiers in the wordless picture books throughout this investigation. Narratology, indigenous knowledge, social justice and diversity were also used to investigate the wordless picture books. Signs serve many functions in humans' lives, and allowing people to recognise patterns is one of these functions. Living things use signs to "signal [their] existence, communicate messages with one another and model incoming information from the external world" (Sebeok, 2001:3). Narratives such as myths, stories and legends are powerful structures within all cultures. Human experiences produce stories that are narratives that change experiences into findings that "we can share and compare with the narratives of others" (Lyle, 2000:54). Semiotic text gives meaning and understanding to narrative, and also to anything that signifies something else or is regarded as a signifier.

A sign has the potential to be anything and also show the meaning of anything. This 'meaning', however, is within a specific culture or conceptual framework (Chandler & Ryan, 2009:82). A radical alternative is offered by indigenous knowledge systems for the successful economic transformation of people's lives. There is value in the way that this system works with people from different communities and their knowledge (Briggs, 2013:232). Change in education is important for the rights of various groups of people, as the world's diverse population is increasing (Banks, 2004:299). Multicultural education is developed as a response to the concerns of racial, ethnic and cultural groups that felt pushed to the periphery (Banks, 2004:297). Discrimination within institutions or education has resulted in a struggle of acceptance in people's own ethnic cultural indigeneity.

Indigenous people tend to have difficulty accepting their own culture, largely because of mainstream educational development (Banks, 2004:302). Storytellers and illustrators should be educated about multicultural societies and the development of multicultural literature, and not just have an understanding of their own knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is often viewed as something from the past because of the hybridised knowledge that exists in the globalised world. Indigenous knowledge is for the past and the present, as context, culture and language are linked to indigenous knowledge and people are exposed to the knowledge in their own environments. The value of indigenous knowledge is often overlooked by indigenous people because Western norms play such a dominant role in education and it seems to require less effort to fit into this norm than to create new curricula (Aikman & May, 2003:139). The diminishment of indigenous knowledge in education needs to be overcome in some way, and this can be done by introducing context-

relative knowledge into specific contexts. Better exposure to indigenous knowledge is necessary in education (Aikman & May, 2003:14). Wordless picture books can act as a foundation in this regard to introduce knowledge and tell stories in education to develop learners.

The time limitations of the project influenced the results of the books produced. In future, more time should be spent to reflect on how the process plays out. This can be done by gathering stories, finding illustrators and ensuring that the collaboration between all participants is experienced as a fruitful learning experience. This could be beneficial for all involved to enhance their knowledge of one another's cultural practices and the signs and signifiers used to express those practices. Furthermore, NRF funding was awarded for this project for one year, and many of the lessons learned from this research will be implemented in the future.

### **6.3 Final comments**

Producing wordless picture books is a difficult process because you have to tell a story without any words, and it takes a huge amount of skill to successfully communicate the basic story. However, the use of culturally relevant images would assist in this communication, and it therefore is crucial for people working in the book production field, storytellers and illustrators to take cognisance of the diversity of signs and signifiers that exist in the South African context. This research serves as an example in which three books were analysed and some important misrepresentations were identified. More books targeted at previously marginalised groups such as the Xhosa should be considered in a study to semiotically assess the signs and signifiers used in the books.

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