

# A Book is a Book

A short-term impromptu inquiry

Carol Vaage

©2022

# A Book is a Book

## An Impromptu Short-Term Inquiry

by Carol Vaage

*I brought a hardcover blank book to the story corner and asked the class if they knew what it was. One child said, "It is not a book." My reply? "What makes a book a book?"*

The children began throwing out attributes of books, and I quickly signaled my teaching assistant to start recording the comments. Following is a transcript of my provocation statements and questions and their social construction and theory of what makes a book. Starting off is a strong statement, *A book is a book!* All comments with CV are mine.

A book is a book! (theory)

A real book has cardboard on the front. (theory)

CV: You mean it has a hard cover?

Yeah.

CV: What about this book that has a soft cover? Is this soft cover book a book?

ooooo...that book is bendy...

Yeah that is a book too.

***A real book can have a soft cover and a hard cover.*** (revised theory 1)

A real book has real paintings. (new theory)

CV: What about this book? Does it have paintings?

No, it has pictures (photographs.)

CV: Then is it a book even if it does not have real paintings?

Yes, it is a book too.

***A real book can have paintings or pictures.*** (revised theory 2)



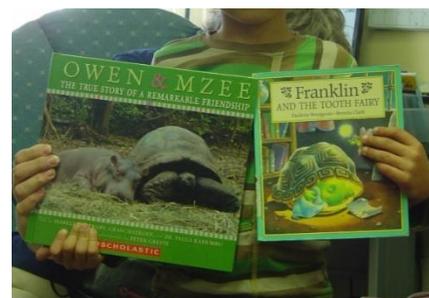
Books are real. They have real things. (new theory)

CV: Do you mean that if a book is make-believe it is not a book?

What about Henny Penny? It is a make-believe story. Is Henny Penny a real book?

ohhhh...yeah it is a book too.

***A real book can have real facts or can be make-believe.*** (revised theory 3)



Well, these books are sillier than other books! (new theory)  
CV: What about this Knock-Knock joke book? It is silly. Is it a book?

Yeah, it is a book. A real book can be silly.

***A real book can be silly.*** (revised theory 4)

A book has to have words! (new theory)

CV: Well I have this book here and it does not have words.

Is this a book?

Maybe you can make your own story with the pictures.

Yeah, it is a book.

***A real book can have words or no words.*** (revised theory 5)

All books have titles! (new theory)

CV: I have seen junior kindergarteners make books. They cannot write yet, so their books do not have titles. Are they books?

Yah...yah...yah.

***A real book can have a title or no title.*** (revised theory 6)

A book has to have an author. (new theory)

CV: Can you have a book without an author?

If you had a book without an author then there would not be a story!

CV: Class, this book does not have an author. Is this a book?

Yah...yah...

***Not all books have authors.*** (revised theory 7)



All books have to have pictures or drawings. (new theory)

CV: This dictionary does not have pictures. Is it a book?

Class: Yes...



***A real book can have pictures or no pictures.*** (revised theory 8)

A book has to have a draw-er! (new theory)

CV: You mean an illustrator?

Yeah!

CV: Does this book have an illustrator? It does not have pictures in it.

Class: No...

***A real book does not need to have an illustrator.*** (revised theory 9)

All books need pages! (new theory)

CV: Does it have to have pages?

It actually does...

CV: I have seen a book with folded pages like this. Is it a real book if it is folded? Does a book have to have cut pages or can it be folded?

Class: Both!

CV: So we are looking at format. You're right! Format is important.



***A real book can have cut pages or folded pages.*** (revised theory 10)

CV: If it has one page is it a book? (testing hypothesis)

No. Because it needs pages.

What about a poem? It is one page! (testing hypothesis)

CV: Is a poem a book?

Class: No...

CV: So what makes a book a book? (theory with evidence)

Class: A book has pages.

A book is a book!



***A real book has PAGES!*** (revised theory 11)

This lively exchange of theories and testing theories was significant to this group of children. From this time forward, I heard snippets of conversation about covers, images, format, authors, and illustrators. But mostly I heard the phrase, **A book is a book.**

We documented this learning episode by transcribing the conversation and showing photos.

Children were keen to share this learning with their parents, who at first seemed unsure of why this would be so important to them. But as they began to read the children's theories and see how they had to adjust their thinking with each new scenario or provocation, they began to smile, recognizing the process they went through to come to the conclusion that **a book needs pages.**



***My reflections:***

My role was mainly to bump them off their assumptions and predictable answers by showing or telling them an example of a book that did not meet their criteria. By doing that, they needed to reach deeper to expand their theories, to reach a theory that stood up to all examples of the books in our world of knowledge.

I might have missed the opportunity, if one confident child had not stated at the beginning, ***That is not a book!*** These types of teachable, or more appropriately, *learn-able*, moments are embedded in children's comments all the time, if only we could hear them.