

# ILLUSTRATIONS OF EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTIONS IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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## ABSTRACT

Visual culture is an integral part of modern life. Books with the engaging visual design still attract children's attention and are at the center of examples of their experiences and interactions. In children's books, the image is the central part of perception and the accompanying text plays a secondary role. Visual perception influences and shapes children's views about what the world around them is like. The book's illustrations are often the primary criteria when choosing a book for a child, which also creates interest in the written content. By analyzing different illustrations, it is possible to distinguish several main features that are characteristic of depicting a certain emotion and how the characters feel. When looking at any illustration, the character's facial expression is one of the primary objects looked at to determine how the character is feeling. Appropriate body posture creates the effect of movement alone or helps create the mood of an illustration by complementing the emotional background provided by facial expressions. A true representation of emotions in an illustration not only creates an enjoyable overall image but also clearly shows children how each emotion manifests itself and helps them understand themselves and in the people around them. The aim of the research is to investigate the role of children's books in their psycho-emotional development and the techniques of depicting emotions in book illustrations. Research methods: theoretical – research of literature and Internet resources; case study. Research results – the importance of children's book illustrations in children's psycho-emotional development is substantiated, and the types of representation of various emotional expressions are determined. The case study confirms that not in all cases artists have paid attention to facial mimicry, which is the most active part of a person for the expression of emotions.

**Keywords:** *graphic design, children's book illustrations, emotions, emotional intelligence.*

## Introduction

Children perceive the world around them and the situations it creates very vividly. In order for a child to grow and develop fully, it is necessary to be aware of their feelings, talk about them, and seek support if necessary (Grīnvuda, 2019). Looking at this fact in the long term, the limitation of emotions and the inability to express them in appropriate situations leads to the psyche shutting down emotions, guarding us against overload and

disappointment (Morozova, n.d.). Therefore, it is important for parents and caregivers to talk to children about different emotions, and how to better control or express them in harmless ways. Children are attracted to everything that happens around them, they observe, learn, and repeat. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to appropriate behavioral examples for children.

Around the age of 2–4 years old, children learn to become empathetic. Empathy can be encouraged in children by telling or reading stories about how other people or characters feel (Emociju grāmata/ A book of emotions, 2016). Empathy is based on self-awareness because the clearer and better we feel our emotions, the clearer we can understand the emotions of those around us. Emotions are most accurately reflected in the body rather than verbal language. By paying attention to a person's facial expressions or body movements, it is possible to understand their true emotional state much more clearly (Goulmens, 2001), which can also be depicted in stories and books for children. Discussing different stories and helping children analyze and understand them can develop a child's perception and help them avoid negative actions or behaviors in the future.

Emotional understanding is a vital indicator that satisfies needs and helps determine whether the environment is safe enough and meets the requirements to function fully. People who are not taught to recognize, analyze, and manage their emotions may encounter a series of difficulties in everyday life (Morozova, n.d.).

Each emotional range is a unique mixture of emotional sets accumulated throughout life from the people around us. Many emotions are also consciously accumulated by being influenced by a movie, cartoon, or reading a book or magazine that describes a particular emotion that each person later tries to apply to themselves (Villido, 2021). This is how children also accumulate and reflect emotions that they have seen, heard, or read, gradually learning how to reflect them.

Children aged 4 to 12 have a relatively limited emotional range accumulated from life experiences. It is useful at this age to supplement this range with the emotions and feelings depicted in picture books that children can internalize. Reading stories about emotions with children prepares them to face them in real life and develops a positive perception and emotional response to such situations (Nikolajeva, 2014). The emotional background created in a child can influence the type of person they will grow up to be.

The aim of the research is to investigate the role of children's books in their psycho-emotional development and the techniques of depicting emotions in book illustrations.

## Methodology

The study is based on the analysis of literature and internet resources on the specificity of depicting human emotions and a case study, selecting Latvian children's books on emotional understanding. Case study is a research method that allows for detailed exploration and analysis of a specific case or event in order to understand its essence and compliance with established criteria (Yin, 2013). Qualitative data analysis was used in

the article to understand the situation and its compliance with the insights provided in the literature. Case studies can help develop specific strategies and solutions to improve the impact of children's books on emotional intelligence development.

Scientific literature, the internet, and publications were searched for information on the need for children to learn about emotions. The review of book offerings is based on the range of books available in libraries and internet resources on popular children's books that teach children about emotions and help them understand them. A qualitative content analysis was conducted on 11 emotion books published in Latvia from 2013 to 2021. This allows for an assessment of the existing book offerings and an analysis of their variety of depicted emotions and the quality of visual information.

The book evaluation summary was conducted based on the following criteria: review of dominant emotions, use of images, characters, and their portrayal in illustrations. Illustration ratings were assessed on a scale of one to three based on facial expressions and body representation (1 – average; 2 – good; 3 – very good).

The study presented in the article is a result of preliminary research and will be used as a starting point for the illustration project of the emotional storybook "Kā kļūt par Lāci?" (How to become a Bear?) in Latvian and Latgalian languages, which will be carried out by the author of the article, designer L. Munda.

## Results

### Illustrations of Emotions. Literature Review

Visual art is an integral part of modern life. Books with strong visual design attract children's attention and shape their emotional experiences. For younger children, the image itself is the central part of perception, and the accompanying text plays a secondary role. Visual perception influences and shapes children's views of the surrounding world (Short, 2018). Illustrations influence children's interest in the material they are reading. With their liveliness and vividness, images can intrigue children. Often, the image does not express everything that can be read in the book, thus piquing the reader's interest to explore the book further (Brookshire et al., 2002). In children's books, illustrations are one of the main ways to visually and clearly depict emotions and how the main characters feel. They help create a certain mood that is described in the text, and illustrations are much easier for children to perceive and understand. By examining various illustrations, it is possible to distinguish several main features that have been used to depict a particular emotion and how the characters feel.

Recognizing and understanding emotions is a task of psychology. To help children understand their own and others' emotions, purposeful activities are organized by psychologists for individuals or groups of children in preschool educational institutions. Various methodological materials have been developed, which can be used by both educators and parents.

When examining any illustration, the character's facial expression is one of the first objects to be looked at to determine the character's feelings. Body posture only creates a movement effect or helps create the emotional background of the illustration,

**Table 1** A child’s understanding of emotions (Emociju grāmata, n.d.)

<b>Emotion</b>	<b>A child’s understanding of emotions</b>
ANGER	An angry person can furrow their brow, clench their jaw, turn red, tremble, breathe quickly, yell or refuse to speak.
JOY	A happy person smiles, laughs, jumps, and runs.
SADNESS	A sad person looks at the ground, their lips downturned, they become still, and may cry.
SUSPICION	A suspicious person may squint or narrow their eyes. They may be silent and watch you skeptically.
FEARS	A scared person may widen their eyes, freeze, become still, quiet, and even pale. They may tremble and cry. Sometimes, a scared person may even attack.
SURPRISE	A surprised person opens their eyes wide and stares for a long time. They wait for a response. They may raise their eyebrows and wrinkle their forehead. They may open their mouth and let out different exclamations like oh, yes, wow, well, no!

complementing the emotional atmosphere provided by the facial expressions. It is valuable for children to examine and understand various illustrations and drawings that depict different facial expressions. Special attention is paid to facial features such as eyes, lips, cheekbones, etc. (Vingrinājumu komplekts.../ Exercise kit..., n.d.). True depiction of emotions in illustrations not only creates a pleasant composition but also clearly shows children how each emotion is expressed, helping them understand their own and others’ emotions.

To successfully understand their own needs, children must learn to recognize and name their emotions. The “Emotion Book” developed by the “Family Development Center” indicates that when talking about emotions, a child can often name both physical manifestations and their feelings (see Table 1).

The depiction of diverse emotions is a challenge for animators and illustrators of children’s books because each basic emotion has subtle variations. Emotion names and their specific relationships are depicted in various emotion and feeling maps. R. Plutchik’s wheel of emotions helps us view literacy through a wider perspective. Literacy refers to “a person’s knowledge of a particular subject or field.” Therefore, improving emotional literacy means not only having words for emotions, but also understanding how different emotions are connected to each other and how they tend to change over time (Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions: Exploring the Emotion Wheel, 2022).

A visual representation of emotions is useful for illustrators, and is provided in the article “Emotions in diagrams and images. Create emotions for cartoon characters”. The eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and nose are facial features that outwardly express a person’s emotions. The face is analyzed in complex ways during emotional moments. For example, joy and happiness are expressed with a wide smile, with the corners of the lips lifted and tightened, often with dimples in the cheeks, and slightly narrowed eyes. A smile can be expressed in three different ways. A genuine smile is the happiest and cannot be faked in real life. A genuine smile is expressed with narrowed lower eyelids, strongly lifted corners of the mouth, showing teeth, and forming wrinkles in the corners of the eyes. A fake smile is not as wide as a genuine smile, it is much more subdued, the lower eyelids do not decrease, and the corners of the lips stretch more horizontally rather than lifting up.

Laughter is one of the signs of a smile. It is a very expressive and joyful facial expression, expressed in a wide smile, showing teeth, forming smile wrinkles on the face, often even with almost closed eyes (Emocijas diagrammās un attēlos.../ Emotions in charts and pictures..., 2019). It should be noted that joy is one of the basic human emotions and is expressed with a smile on the face. Even a fake smile creates a feeling of joy.

All negative facial expressions are characterized by tension and a furrowed brow, especially between the eyebrows. Even a slightly furrowed brow indicates that a person may become angry, although it may also indicate that a person is trying to concentrate on something (Emocijas diagrammās un attēlos.../ Emotions in charts and pictures..., 2019). Depression and anger can also affect those around or next to the depicted characters. If one of the characters is sad or angry, the adjacent person will also feel similar emotions (Vingrinājumu komplekts.../ Exercise kit..., n.d.).

Depression is an emotion similar to anger, but it is not expressed as expressively. A wrinkle appears between the eyebrows, the base of the eyebrows moves downwards, and the jaw is tense, lowering the corners of the lips slightly. Anger is expressed very expressively, the gaze is attentive, the eyebrows are furrowed together and downwards, expressive wrinkles appear between the eyebrows, as well as horizontal wrinkles on the forehead. The lips are tightly pressed together, and the jaw is tense, wrinkles may appear at the corners of the mouth.

**The eyes** are the center of attention and are capable of expressing many emotions. Subtle but significant changes in facial expression are caused by the size of the eye veins, the position of the iris, and the interaction of the eyelids (Emocijas diagrammās un attēlos... / Emotions in charts and pictures..., 2019). For example, sleepy eyes are half-closed, the eyelid covers half of the iris and pupil, the eye looks relaxed and calm, but in a surprised expression, the eyes will be wide open, the iris and pupil will be clearly visible. It is not without reason that it is said that the eyes are a mirror of a person's inner feelings.

**Eyebrows.** Just like the eyes themselves, the position of the eyebrows can express subtle differences in emotions. The movement of the eyebrows depends on their two main parts, the base and the arch. Both of these parts can be moved by raising or lowering them, relaxing them, and even combining all of the previously mentioned actions.

The position of **the mouth** is second only to the eyebrows in expressing facial expressions. The position of the lips, the dimples in the cheeks, and the location of the corners of the mouth can express and reflect a wide variety of emotions (Emotion diagrams and images, 2019). For example, when the lips are stretched and both corners of the mouth are lifted, it means that a person is happy, whereas if the lips are pressed together and the corners are drooping, the person feels sad or upset.

**The nose** is the only part of the face that does not express many emotions; it is practically a motionless part of the face, although it may wrinkle or have a crease in response to strong emotions.

The combination of all the parts of the face reflects a particular expression of emotion. Each facial expression is characterized by the emotion it represents, which the character feels. Therefore, the expression that is characteristic of the face is one of the main ways to determine the emotion that is being experienced.

When teaching children to recognize emotions, it is essential to point out that they are represented using lines, dots, and geometric shapes, and that these are stylized images created based on facial expressions in real life.

### **Case study. Offer of emotion books and their analysis**

Books are one of the most effective tools that provide children with information about emotions and their expressions. Self-awareness and emotional intelligence are popular topics that are increasingly being discussed today. In Latvia, a wide range of foreign and local author books about emotions are available in bookstores. By exploring the offer of children's books, three main age groups for which these books are intended can be distinguished – preschool, primary school, and secondary school children. Parents and educators are also noted as the target audience for these books.

The development of empathy in children is important from an early age. It is the ability to empathize with another person's emotions and understand how they feel by putting oneself in their situation. People can feel very differently in certain situations, so it is important to teach children how these feelings manifest and recognize them (Velika, 2017).

For the youngest readers, an excellent aid in exploring emotions is the developmental booklet "Emotions" with 40 stickers that help develop a child's abilities and skills. The booklet contains engaging situations with short lines. Working with stickers helps children explore the three main emotions – joy, anger, and sadness.

The book "How the Bunny Learned about Emotions" by Lithuanian writer Š. Baltrušaitienė is intended for children aged three to seven. In the story, the bunny experiences various situations, meets new characters, and learns to recognize different feelings – sadness, jealousy, fear, and even how to turn anger into joy (Šauere, 2019). This unusual and adventurous story will help nurture emotional intelligence in children and teach them about feelings.

E. Greenwood's book "My Mixed Emotions. Learn to Love Your Feelings" is aimed at children aged four to eight and describes the four basic emotions – joy, fear, anger, and sadness. This book is not only interesting for children, but also useful for parents. It helps to understand and recognize various emotions in a way that children can understand, provides support for successful relationships, and strengthens interest in learning.

One more bright example can be mentioned – the book "What does it feel like" by Polish author T. Oževiča. This book is included in the reading promotion program "Children and Youth Jury 2022" in the category "5+" of the National Library of Latvia, as well as included in other reading promotion programs abroad. The book reveals various feelings and emotions that anyone can experience and thus recognize these feelings within themselves (Šmite, 2022).

Among Latvian writers' books that provide insights into various emotions, A. Jansons' book "Tūju pasaka" can be mentioned, which is intended for readers of all ages. Step by step, the fairy tale leads the reader into the world of emotions through a series of adventures that happen to the book's main character, a boy named Oge.

In bookshelves, there are books that describe a particular emotion. Their stories are designed to vividly show a specific emotion, its causes, and provide advice on how to cope with them in a way that children can understand.

Fear is one of the basic emotions that helps to survive. It both paralyzes and invigorates, allowing for quick action. It is normal to be afraid. For this reason, many writers show fear delicately and clearly, and provide recommendations on how to combat it.

“Erika and Fear” is J. Petraskevics’ picture book about a girl named Erika, who lives alongside Fears. They are small creatures that hide in the house, garden, and elsewhere, sometimes playing various games of fear with the girl, but then a storm comes and big fears arrive with it (Bilžu grāmata bērniem par emociju spēku/ A picture book for children about the power of emotions, 2018). The book is about how fragile the line between fear and courage is. This book encourages reflection on how emotions affect each situation in life and their variability.

M. Viganda’s book “Courage to Deal with Fear” provides simple but concise advice for parents and children on how to cope with worries and fears. Although the world may seem like a scary place, especially when you are younger than others, the book helps to understand fears and overcome them.

Just as it is natural to be afraid, it is also natural to feel sadness. When experiencing sadness, it is possible to overcome it faster, especially when there is someone nearby who supports and helps. L. Bikse’s “Book about the Blue Pony” is a book about sadness that sometimes arises for no particular reason. This book helps to understand what sadness is and why it arises, as well as how to help oneself in such moments.

“The Dog Who Found Sadness” is a book by R. Briede illustrated by E. Brasliņa. The book tells the story of a dog who did not allow the black clouds of sadness that began to take over the entire city to affect him. The story is about how emotions affect our view of the world and how not to give in to them, overcoming feelings of sadness.

After sadness, joy and a feeling of relief always come. Joy is the most positive of emotions that someone can experience. By giving happiness to others, we can also feel happier ourselves.

The book “Fox Goes to Find Happiness” by writer E. Mize is an attractive book intended for the whole family. Following the adventures of a fox cub who learns about the world by asking curious questions and seeking answers, readers can find fun games and coloring pages that make the book even more engaging.

E. Dacjute’s book “Happiness is a Fox” tells a story about family, friendship, and happiness involving the main characters in an unusual plot that makes one reflect on what happiness and friendship truly are. Published in 2017, the book has received various awards and honors worldwide, including recognition at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair.

By increasing the feeling of happiness, it is possible to raise one’s self-esteem. High self-esteem indicates that a person is aware of their worth, it is the ability to rely on oneself, to feel self-satisfaction despite weaknesses or shortcomings.

The book “A small puddle” by I. Zeimanis strengthens a child’s self-esteem. The author himself says: “The world is as beautiful as we see it and ourselves. Therefore, in moments when we cannot expect support or joy from outside, it is useful to remember

that everything is already within us. Every person has all the possibilities, and in every puddle – all the heavens.” This book makes us think that the most important thing is already within us.

The book “Rabbit Garausis’ Land of Happiness” is a joint work by T. Kalninskis and N. Kugajevska. It is a story about the bad days of the rabbit Garausis, who is encouraged to go elsewhere in search of happiness, but the rabbit stays there and encourages everyone to start solving their own problems. Inspired by Garausis, significant changes begin to take place in the surrounding area. The story encourages us to raise our self-esteem and see all the good in ourselves and our abilities, which positively affects those around us.

The development of emotional intelligence in children with the help of books began in the 2000s. Previously, books that talked about emotions were not as relevant. Fairy tales and stories teach various situations, and each of them has its own moral, but they are not directly aimed at exploring and analyzing emotions.

The summary of the comparative analysis of the content of the books emphasizes the leading emotions described in the story, the selected characters, and the evaluation of the correspondence of the illustrations (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Results of a comparative analysis of book content and illustrations

No	Book	Emotions	Characters	Expression of emotions*	
				in faces	in the body
1	Š. Baltrušaitiene “How the Rabbit Learned to Recognize Feelings” (2018)	sadness, envy, fear, anger, joy	Hare, crow, etc. animals	3	2
2	E. Grīnvuda “All my emotions. Learn to love your emotions” (2021)	various	Children’s photos, various objects	3	3
3	T. Oževiča “What Feelings Do” (2021)	love, fear, anger, sadness, curiosity	Fantasy characters	1	2
4	A. Jansons “The Tale of Tūja” (2013)	self-awareness	Boy Oge	3	3
5	J. Petraškevičs “Erica and Fear” (2018)	fear, excitement, wonder, joy..	Fantasy and real characters	2	1
6	M. Viganda “Courage to Deal with Fear” (2014)	fear	Elves	3	3
7	L. Bikše “Book about the Blue Pony” (2019)	sadness	The blue pony	1	2
8	E. Mieze “Fox Goes to Find Happiness” (2017)	happiness	Fox	3	2
9	E. Dačjūte “Happiness is a Fox” (2019)	sadness, joy	The boy and the fox	1	2
10	I. Zeimanis “A Small Puddle” (2019)	self-awareness	Puddle, girl	2	2
11	T. Kalninskis, N. Kugajevska “Rabbit Garausis’ Land of Happiness” (2019)	self-awareness	Hare	2	3

\* Evaluation of emotional expressions in illustrations: 1 – average; 2 – good; 3 – very good.



A great deal of attention in emotion-related books is devoted to fear and overcoming it (1, 2, 3, 5, 6). The role of self-awareness in personality development prompts writers and psychologists to emphasize it in literary works (2, 4, 8, 10, 11). Illustrators, who are often also the authors of the text (5, 7), choose people – both children and adults (2, 4, 10), animals (1, 7, 8, 9, 11), as well as fantasy characters (3, 5, 6) as visual images in children's books, which have always been appealing to children. As theoretical research confirms, real expressive faces, including depictions of eyes, unequivocally convey emotions in book illustrations (1, 3, 4, 6, 8). By assigning the body of a human to an animal, such as a rabbit in the story “The Rabbit Garausis’ Land of Happiness,” illustrations acquire a comprehensible and familiar character for children (2, 4, 6, 11). The cases mentioned have received the highest rating of 3 when evaluating the appropriateness of the illustrations to the depiction of emotions.

## Conclusions

Theoretical research confirms that illustrations in children's books are important for the development of children's emotional intelligence, as they can influence a child's emotional state by promoting understanding, identification, and expression of emotions. Illustrations can help children understand and experience the events described in the book, develop empathy, enhance their ability to understand and resolve conflicts, and promote their emotional balance and overall well-being.

Facial expressions and body positions are two main ways in which emotions can be depicted in illustrations. Appropriately depicted facial expressions, such as a smile, sadness, fear, or anger, can help children understand the atmosphere of the story and anticipate the events that may occur. Body position complements facial expression for a complete expression of emotions.

The selection of engaging characters in illustrations for children's books is an important element, as it can help children understand and identify the various emotions that characters experience during the story. When it comes to illustrations for children's books, character selection can be people, animals, fantasy characters, or other beings.

A case study analyzing Latvian children's books on the topic of emotions demonstrates their diverse offerings and suitability for different age groups of children. The rating of the analyzed book illustrations ranges from one to three, indicating that not all artists have paid attention to facial expressions, which are the most active part of emotional expression. The conducted study is a preliminary study for the development of illustrations for the children's book “How to Become a Real Bear” by the author and designer L. Munda.

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