



## *Voices in the Park*

**Q: The different perspectives in Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* may confuse the reader but they give depth to this simple story. Discuss**

Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* is an interesting children book. It appears simple, but on a second glance, the book appears to have more depth than it looks. It gains depth through its narration as it is narrated through four voices.

At first glance, the book appears a simple childish book full of paintings and colors. It talks about two small families visiting the park: Charles and his mother and Smudge and her father. The two take their dog for a walk. Charles and Smudge meet in the park, become friends, and play happily. Charles' mother is angry with him for leaving her sight and playing with a stranger. They separate and go home. Thus, when seeing the story like this, one takes it as simple and fit for children only.

When having a deeper look, one finds more meanings and ways of analysis. Every detail narrates a story. Pictures with their colors and shades, fonts of writing, the clothes the characters wear and the position and place of everyone gives meaning. There are four voices in the story, each one tells the same story from a different perspective. Each has its own colors, shades, and fonts that tell us about its personality and psychology. Thus, having four voices makes the story interesting as it gains four different points of view.

In short, four characters narrated 'Voices in the Park'. The same story was narrated from the perspective of adults and children. This might appear confusing at the beginning because of the contrast, but it gives more depth to the story with four points of view.

**Q: *Voices in The Park* appears to be simple on the surface, yet it is actually quite complex.**

### **Discuss**

Anthony Brown's *Voices in the Park* is an interesting picture novel revolving around a park visitation. From the outlook, the event is not complicated. Interestingly, as each character reports their unique experience depending on their perception, the narrative changes. Accordingly, each of the voices, represented by the four characters featured, makes a seemingly single event more complex than it appears from the onset. Although Brown's picture poem appears simple, the interplay between text and images, the non-conventional plot, and the differences in what the characters imply makes it complex.

Brown's narrative has a purposeful interplay between text and images, unveiling the narrative's diversity. When Smudge urges Charles to come to the slide, her request is accompanied by strikingly different shades where Charlie's side appears gloomy on the left, while Smudge's is vibrant due to the bright skies on the right. Essentially, the illustration points at Smudge's happy and bubbly personality, compared to that of Charles, who is visibly, dull. Interestingly, after the children begin to play and a friendship sprouts, they share a bright background illustrating the fun the two were having. The poem's interplay between images and text helps position the reader and makes the novel complex.

The plot of Brown's *Voices in the Park* is non-linear. Essentially, Brown fragments his poem into four distinct voices, each adding to an individual's understanding of the narrative. Accordingly, a reader must interact with the four voices before understanding what Brown intended to convey in his picture poem. For instance, interacting with the first voice makes the reader aware of the frightful people at the park. However, interacting with the other voices erases that notion, bringing the understanding that Charles' mother detested Smudge's father because they belonged to different socioeconomic classes. Eventually, the voices are blended for a single semi-ambiguous ending, and the perception of each, together with the images, makes the reader derive their interpretations and connect to the story.

The difference in what the characters represent adds to the complexity of Brown's *Voices in the Park*. Although the actions of Charles' mother can seem to be those of a concerned and protective mother in simple terms, what the actions imply is different. The approach by Charles's mother points to her higher social class compared to Smudge's family. Effectively, Charles' mother represents critical upper-class women and their skewed view of others. Smudge's actions of inviting Charles to play, however, lead to the realization that she is bubbly, cheerful, and friendly, contrary to the "rough-looking" child Charles' mother sees.

In summation, Brown's picture poem is not as simple as it appears. The interplay between images and text and the non-linear plot makes it rather complex. Besides, what the characters represent on a deeper level sharply contradicts the surface-level meanings, which further complicates the poem.

**Q: Modern Children's Literature deals with didactic themes aimed at raising the consciousness of young readers about serious contemporary concerns. Discuss with reference to *Voices in the Park*?**

Didactic themes directly present a message or a moral lesson to the reader to educate them. In Anthony Brown's *Voices in the Park*, didactic themes inform the readers of contemporary issues. Unemployment, race, and social status are the significant didactic themes that enlighten the readers of Brown's *Voices in the Park*.

Anthony Brown's picture book focuses on the delicate issue of unemployment prevalent in contemporary settings. Brown portrays unemployment among Black people through Smudge's father, a depressed and frustrated parent who worries as he reads a newspaper. Smudge's father also deals with the degrading treatment and vulnerabilities unemployment and poverty expose him to, including judgment and stereotypical attitudes of affluent females like Charles' mother, which is a typical experience in cross-class interactions. However, Smudge interacts with her father, and he feels better. The scenario teaches youngsters the need to love one another, work hard to enjoy the privileges that come with money while navigating racial lines and cheer their parents up to transform their gloomy days.

The narrative also explores race, affecting people of color because they struggle to find jobs. Brown's picture book unveils the issue of race through the use of the dogs, one of which is brown and the other black, namely Victoria and Albert, respectively. At the start of the narrative, the black dog is labeled a "horrible thing", which keeps chasing the brown dog at the park. It is symbolic since Smudge's family owns Albert, the black pet dog mentioned above; one can argue that the animal symbolizes the family's-colored race. Brown also portrays the aspect of race among Black people through Smudge and her father. Although Smudge is a cheerful child, her father is frustrated, a scenario that makes the reader contemplate how race interplays to disadvantage people of color in contemporary settings.

Brown delves into the **social factor** in his *Voices in the Park*. Throughout the narrative, the characters featured are grouped into the upper class, comprising Charles and his mother, and the poor, represented by Smudge and her father. The rich are smartly dressed, unhappy, and stereotypical about the poor, as illustrated by the labels Charles' mother gives to Smudge, her father, and their pet dog. According to her, Smudge is a "rough-looking child," her father is the "frightful type," and Albert is a "Scruffy mongrel." The contemporary concern of the ever-increasing rich and poor divide is brought through the theme. However, the poor are worried and alleviated from their world, although more cheerful than their affluent counterparts. Nonetheless, Brown seems to be informing his audience on the need to traverse socioeconomic boundaries and judgmental attitudes to accommodate new experiences like the case of Smudge and Charles and the pet dogs.

In summary, Brown indeed uses didactic themes in his *Voices in the Park* to explore contemporary concerns. Through the themes of unemployment, race, and social status, one gets acquainted with the struggles of the poor folk and understands that they should work hard to have a better socioeconomic standing, accommodate others, and cheer their parents up. Brown's narrative also teaches about the love of one's neighbours.

**Q: In *Voices in the Park*, variety and diversity are used to defy the single perception and the one view. Discuss**

Variety indeed defies a single perception of the walk in the park because each of the voices Anthony Brown utilizes adds to the depth of the narrative. Essentially, Brown relies on the voices of Charles, her mother, Smudge, and her father. Although Charles' mother is the epitome of class prejudice, her son has masculine prejudice. Nonetheless, Smudge perceives Charles as a timid, weak, and ineffectual person or a "wimp." Her father is too discouraged and withdrawn to notice those around him. Although the four voices are alienated, each contributes to a reader's understanding that personal judgments are biased, that happiness comes from within and that people within the family are different.

While Brown's narrative features a mere walk into a park where social interactions occur, the voice of Charles and his mother defy the single perception by making the reader aware that judgments on personal perceptions are often inaccurate. When Charles' mother spots Smudge's family, she portrays them as bad people simply because they are from a lower social class. However, after Smudge invites Charles to play, a tentative relationship is established between them, and their viewpoints change. Charles realizes that the mother's quest to stay away from Smudge is misguided and in bad faith because she is an accommodative, playful, and cheerful person. Ultimately, the beautifully dressed woman in the park becomes unreliable because she gives misleading information about others.

The people of diverse **socioeconomic backgrounds** used in Brown's *Voices in the Park* shift ones focus from the park experience to the awareness that happiness comes from within and is not an outcome of a person's social status. While Charles and the mother belong to an affluent **socioeconomic** class, Smudge and her father are poor because the father lacks gainful employment. Surprisingly, Charles and the mother are unhappy despite the privileges offered by the money. Contrastingly, Smudge is cheerful despite her poor social status, and is careful enough to notice the emotions of others. Accordingly, the narrative informs the reader that although money is important, it cannot buy happiness.

Brown effectively brings out the difference among family members in the case of Charles and his mother. **Charles's mother** is critical of others and has a poor relationship with her son. She is also very strict and anticipates having his son play under her watch. Accordingly, Charles is sad because he is denied his freedom at home and outside the domestic space. However, when Charles agrees to play with Smudge, she proves to be friendly and Charles wonders whether he would find her at the park upon his next visit. Charles also deems Albert a friendly pet dog rather than a "mongrel," as labelled by his mother.

In summary, using various voices and characters of different socioeconomic backgrounds transforms the simple narrative about a park experience into a multi-dimensional narrative. Through the multiple voices, one understands family differences and the need to refrain from judging because judgments based on personal perceptions are often wrong. The use of poor and affluent characters, however, makes one learn that happiness comes from within an individual irrespective of their financial prowess.

---