

# Secrets in The Day of Ahmed's Secret

By Peter Duckett and Marjorie Knox

Children's picture books are like a vein of gold—rich in ore to be mined. Visual art, textual meanings, and transactions between the reader/listener and the book (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1994) evoke real as well as fictional images that influence each reader. Using photographs as points of comparison, we examined images and the written text in the picture book *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*, written by Florence Parry Heide and Judith Heide Gilliland and illustrated by Ted Lewin. This exploration was our initial foray into critically examining texts and pictures as artifacts that reveal differing perspectives. Our purpose is to share our evolving model of a critical analysis of a book and the story of how we arrived at our model.

Several years ago we met at a literacy workshop at the University of Arizona. At the workshop, Peter showed photographs of many of the historical sites depicted in *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*. We discovered we shared common experiences involving Cairo American College located in Cairo, Egypt. Marge worked at the school in the early '60s, while Peter has been living and working in Cairo for the past eighteen years.

After returning to our respective homes, we began to examine critically Peter's photographs and the illustrations from the book. Initially our intent was simply to compare photographs and illustrations. Peter went into the streets of Cairo carrying a digital camera and took more photographs that he then sent via email to Marge. Early discoveries regarding similarities and differences between the photographs and the illustrations from the book planted the seed for exploration.

We decided to examine the book in greater detail by looking for issues of authenticity as well as social issues within the book's pictures and written text. What emerged from our exploration proved informative to us in a variety of ways. First, we developed a deeper understanding of the particular book we had chosen to examine. Second, we began to understand the complexities facing illustrators and authors of picture books. Third, we created a working model for using photographs as a point of departure in crit-

ically examining other illustrated books. We hope that our model will prove beneficial for researchers, teachers, and students to think more deeply about books, the cultures represented in them, and the socio-political dynamics of the world.

## A working model for critical analysis

In the course of developing our working model (see Figure 1), we used photographs in order to examine critically the illustrations and the written

text of *The Day of Ahmed's Secret*. We placed "Comparing Photographs, Illustrations, and Text" at the center of the model because this is how we started our exploration. This central circle is surrounded by question marks representing the questions that emerged from the comparisons we made. Around the questions we placed options for further research that could prove informative. The forms of research, which may occur in any order, are by no means exhaustive but

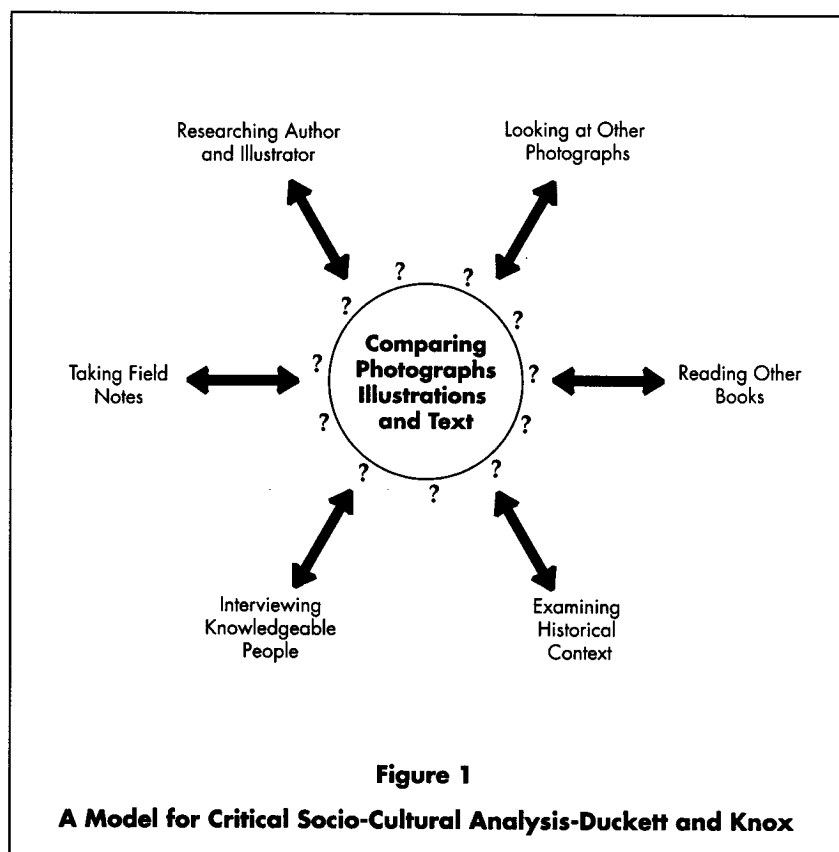


Figure 1

A Model for Critical Socio-Cultural Analysis-Duckett and Knox