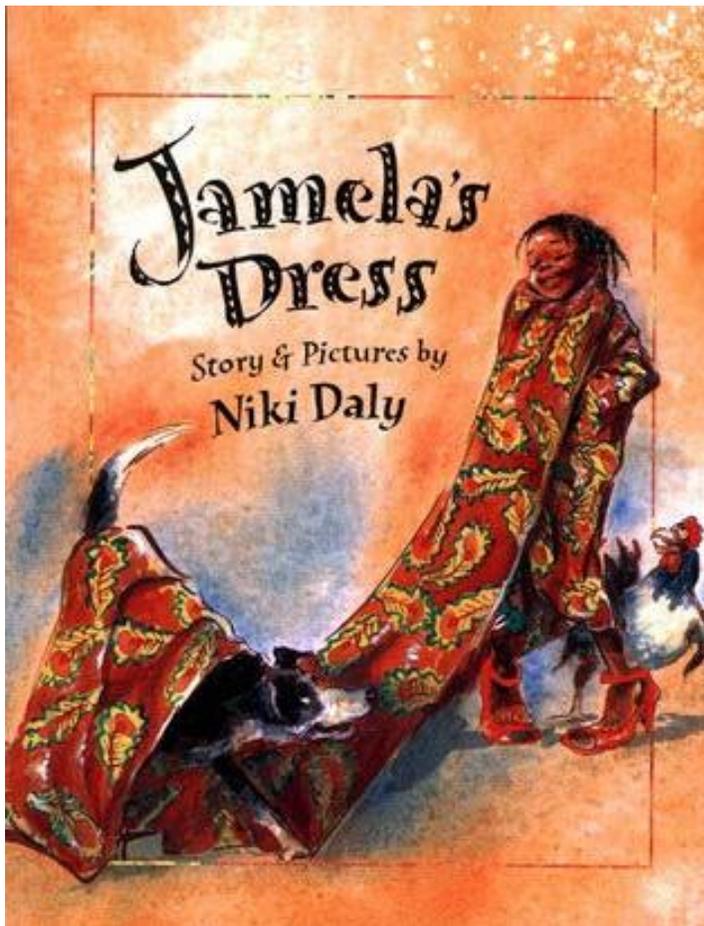


THE AFRICAN CHILD

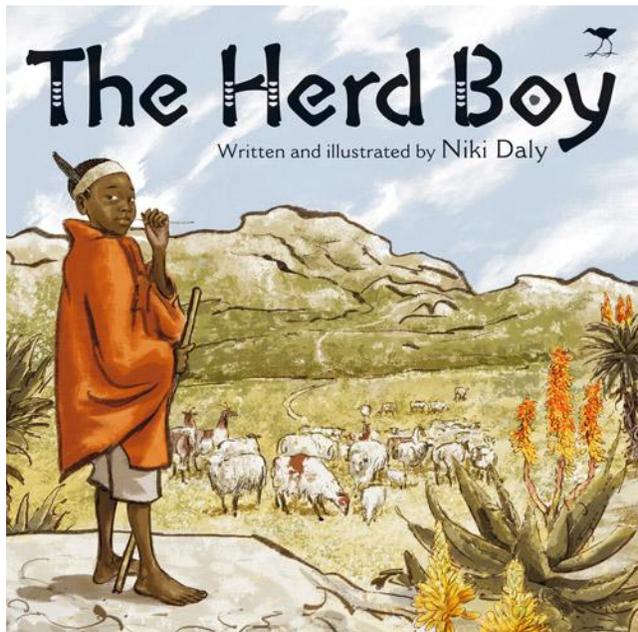
A picture is worth a thousand words for a child; it is worth a million words.

It is pictures that open children's minds to creative thoughts, imaginative ideas and enquiring spirit. Thus the illustrator is very important because it is the pictures he draws which first attract young people to pick the books and attempt to read. It is through this process that a child develops the love for books and the habit of reading. A child may not understand a word but a picture gives him something he is familiar with or can imagine and relate to; a picture ignites an interest in exploring what the story can be.



Pictures encourage conversation and bridge the gap between the old and the young; and help to connect what they see with how they reason, linking words with concepts. e.g as in the JAMELA STORIES by Niki Daly. In JAMELA'S DRESS, there is so much respect between mother and daughter, even when the daughter knows she has misbehaved. Jamela can't resist wrapping around her the material her mother has bought for a wedding; and before she knows it she is sashaying down the road, proudly!

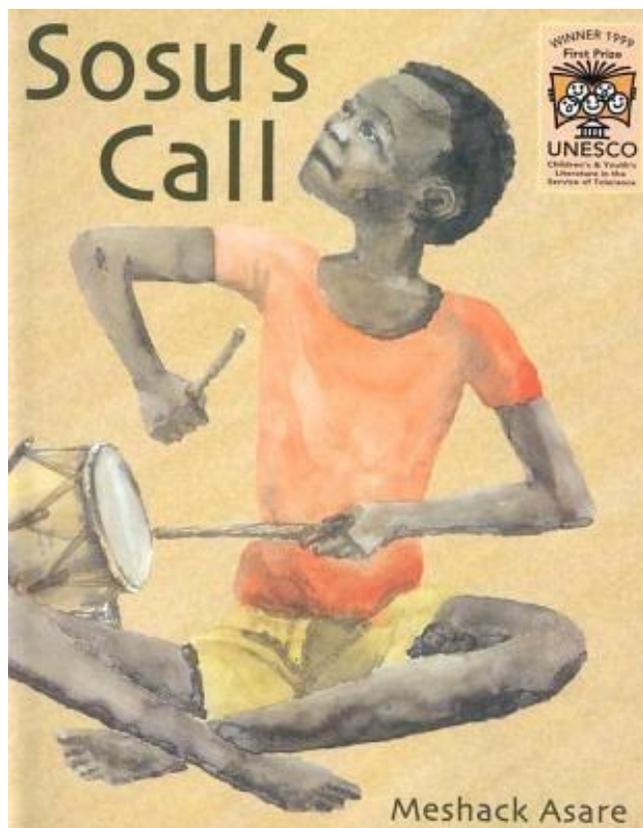
The remarkable thing about the illustrations is Daly's gift for respecting children and the child in each of us. Regardless of the type of illustration chosen for a particular content, the message of respect for both genders should be subtly contained in the texts. It is important to avoid illustrations that tend to send abusive messages.



In THE HERD BOY, again written and illustrated by Niki, a shepherd boy dreams of becoming president of his country. Niki asks 'What is there in the life of a herd boy that would help prepare him to become the shepherd of his a nation? Yet, Nelson Mandela became a world leader. Who could have predicted that a herd boy from the village of Qunu in the Transkei, would one day become a world leader?

The story is about a boy who dares to dream big. Again the pictures are even more powerful than the text; the attraction of the book is in the pictures. It is a story of empowerment.

For a child the picture is more interesting than the text; it is the picture which attracts the child to even look at the book, anyway.



Two years ago, I made a presentation on the book "Sosu's Call" and the 'Lucky One' here in Bratislava. The former is fiction but the latter is a true story. Massawoud was attracted to SOSU'S CALL because he could see himself as the character in the book. The character is a cripple and Massawoud is also a cripple.

That is why the book became his favourite in the library. It is the pictures that attract the child to look at the book in the first place. Massawoud is inspired by the cripple boy in the book; as the fictional figure is able to rescue his village from floods, Massawoud also hopes to be of some use to his people; his ambition is to be a banker and lo, and behold, a benefactor offers to pay for six surgeries which correct his legs.

He now walks with crutches but does not crawl on all fours anymore. He is now in high school hoping to be a banker.

In 2004, I came across a children's book at the Guadalajara Book Fair which really fascinated me. The book was in Portuguese so I could not read it but looking at the pictures I understood the story! It was an African folk tale which taken to the Americas and has gathered various twists and turns! I bought the rights and had it translated into English; the story is being enjoyed by children in Ghana. Pictures by themselves can tell stories; they are more powerful than text.

We are all aware of the IBBY project called SILENT BOOKS. It was started by IBBY Italy. The project centred on the collection of picture books without any text, with the belief that the inherent narrative power of the pictures could bridge cultural and linguistic barriers. Everybody could enjoy the same story irrespective of where they came from or what language they speak. These silent books give the immigrant children comfort and security and an escape from the difficulties of life for a moment.

They can let their imagination fly; pictures make one dream and that is the beautiful part of picture books. One is caught up in the pictures.