

# PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WHILE BUILDING UPON COMPONENTS OF READING LITERACY

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The paper sheds light on the evaluation of books for pre-school children and the theory of reading children's literature while bearing in mind the various components of reading literacy. Like reading literacy, education on sustainability is also a life-long process, and for understanding the concept of sustainability and the role of the individual in its implementation, which begins to form in the pre-school period, we chose the work by Adèle Tariel and Julie de Terssac *1000 Cows* (French original: *1000 vaches*), which indicates that illustrations affect the comprehension of the story and (at least partially) change or present more clearly the key morphological characteristics of the text. We conducted a case study in which we included part-time students from the third year of Early Childhood Education Studies (n = 13). An analysis of the content of responses was carried out. These demonstrate a broad semantic field of understanding literary-artistic reading and represent an example of interdisciplinary integration that can significantly contribute to the development of components of reading literacy as well as a sustainable future.

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# SPODBUJANJE TRAJNOSTNEGA RAZVOJA OB UPOŠTEVANJU GRADNIKOV BRALNE PISMENOSTI

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Prispevek osvetljuje vrednotenje knjig za predšolske otroke in teorijo branja otroške književnosti z upoštevanjem gradnikov bralne pismenosti. Vzgoja za trajnostni razvoj je tako kot bralna pismenost vseživljenjski proces, zato smo za razumevanje pojmovanja trajnosti in vloge posameznikov pri njenem uresničevanju, ki se prične oblikovati že v predšolskem obdobju, izbrali delo Adèle Tariel in Julie de Terssac *1000 kerav*, ki kaže, da ilustracije vplivajo na razumevanje zgodbe in (vsaj delno) spreminjajo oziroma natančneje predstavljajo osnovne morfološke značilnosti besedila. Izvedli smo študijo primera, v katero smo vključili izredne študente tretjega letnika Predšolske vzgoje ( $n = 13$ ). Opravljena je bila analiza vsebine odgovorov, ki izkazujejo široko pomensko polje razumevanja literarno-likovnega branja in predstavljajo primer medpodročnega povezovanja, ki lahko pomembno prispeva k razvoju gradnikov bralne pismenosti in trajnostne prihodnosti.



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## 1 Introduction

The article addresses two different issues which are complete and separate in their own right, and at the same time also interdependent: evaluating books for (preschool) children and discussing quality works on the chosen theme on the one hand, and the theory of reading children's literature in educational institutions (nursery schools) while bearing in mind components of reading literacy on the other.

For an in-depth analysis the picture book *1000 Cows* (original French title: *1000 vaches*, Editions Père Fouettard, 2017, Slovene edition *1000 krav*, Založba Pivec, 2023) by writer Adèle Tariel and illustrator Julie de Terssac was selected, the main theme of which is a society that is inclusive, technologically competent and environmentally sustainable. We believe that reading material contributes to comprehending the notion of sustainability and the role of individuals in its implementation. The nursery school environment forms the foundations of life-long learning and is an important component of sustainable development for creating a better world. In her article on the importance of education on sustainable development, Saša Kregar stresses that education is a strong catalyst in a positive shift in mentality and can support the inclusion of all aspects of sustainable development (Kregar, 2022). Through reading events, teachers can encourage knowledge, skills, values and opinions which will enable children to participate in sustainable development. For acquiring a variety of knowledge and skills, and developing various capabilities and values, a child develops a palette of literacies during early education, and these literacies are 'conducted and developed through language' (Svetlik *et al.* 2022, p. 135), so the basis of all of these is a continually developing reading literacy.

An education for a sustainable future connects cognitive, emotional-motivational, value, and action-skill aims (Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2014). In the preschool period, the focus is on the emotional orientation of educational activities, and instilling important values is linked to understanding these phenomena and the connection between them, forming opinions and the development of creative and critical thought, so it is important to be aware that, through reading events and quality reading material at nursery school, we can make an important contribution not only to the development of reading literacy but also to a sustainable future. Contemporary children's literature also documents the consequences of human impact on the

environment such as pollution, urbanisation, intensive livestock farming, growth of emissions and greenhouse gasses, etc. It can be the starting point for educators in informing and raising children into responsible and informed individuals and through reading enable the younger generations to ‘develop values, acquire knowledge and skills for solving environmental and social challenges’, while sustainability is ensured ‘precisely by the social-emotional component that with children influences the adoption of values and formation of attitudes.’ (Marić Jurišin, Šafranč and Malčić, 2020, pp. 52, 64). Talking about what has been read and associated creative activities thus not only bring new knowledge but also shape personality traits and sustainability awareness.

In evaluating children’s literature, the process must be directed towards the young reader and their (gradual) development of reading comprehension with the possibility of a critical response to reading material. Through the educational process we develop elements of individual components together with other components of reading literacy, tied in with the aims and contents of all areas of curriculum activities. Also important are factors listed by the IFLA (2018) as the foundations of literacy: access to reading materials (surrounding a child with meaningful reading material), adults as a reading role model, and adults prepared to read to a child while it is still unable to do so itself. When it comes to the dual addressee for children’s literature, that is the young reader (or in early childhood in fact the listener) and the adult (professional or non-professional) mediator, we need to highlight the connection between the adult/reader and the child/listener in the preschool period (Pattison, 2021; Sipe, 2001), especially with picture book material. Despite the diverse perception of the term dual addressee, it in essence emphasises the different understanding by an adult and by a child of the same texts (and illustrations), which stems from life experiences, reading habits, living environment, interests, beliefs, worldview, and moral values. A reading event enables us to develop the initial subjective literary-aesthetic experience with a response to the text and encourages understanding and appraisal of the text in terms of the level of recall, comprehension with reasoning and evaluation (Saksida, 2017, p. 53). What is important in discussing texts – at all levels – is the use of a unified (literary theoretical) terminology of literary genre and the separation of book genre from book forms. Results of research on comprehending the structure of common literary genre (Kamberelis 1999; Kordigel and Šega, 2000; Pinto *et al.*, 2020) in children’s and YA literature have shown that

children begin to link the correct terminological designations with the structure and elements of a specific literary genre at a relatively early age.

The Slovene edition of the picture book *1000 Cows* (Tariel and Terssac, 2023), presented in detail in this research, was published within the framework of the *Pulse of European Literature* project, which aims to publish contemporary literary works from European Union countries, aiming to address the common European identity, striving for inclusiveness, embracing diversity, and ensuring equality for all people with particular attention to the environment and the fight against climate change, which educators can gradually develop with children at nursery schools through ‘problem sensitivity, awareness of strategies aimed at solving the problem and searching new ways and solutions’ (Dolinar and Likar, 2021, p. 72).

## 2 Methodology

The aim of the research was to examine the impact of the multimodal work on approaches to developing the components of reading literacy in the preschool period, and identifying and connecting the literary experience of future educators in raising awareness and promoting sustainable development with preschool children. We set ourselves the following research questions:

- Which code of communication in the multimodal work (verbal or visual) will the students’ notes focus on?
- Which components of reading literacy will future educators connect to the literary experience of an individual’s relationship to animals and nature to gradually develop sustainable interaction?
- Will students in developing individual components of reading literacy link proposed activities with sustainable development and plan interdisciplinary activities?

Descriptive and compilation methods are used for theoretical starting points as the aim is to shed light on the problems of terminology using established literature. A synthesising approach is used in the concluding part.

The research used qualitative methods of scientific pedagogic research that is based on case studies ‘with an emphasis on understanding and interpretation’ of participants’ responses (Vogrinc, 2008, p 49; Mesec, 2023). The purpose of the article is to present the results of the case study conducted in December 2023 at the University of Maribor Faculty of Education.

The research involved 13 students, the research sample (n=13) was a convenience sample and included part-time third-year Early Childhood Education Studies students, who in the 2023/2024 academic year attended the elective class on Family Literacy.

Collecting data was based on a multimodal analysis (Table 1) of the selected work, *1000 cows* by Adèle Tariel and Julie de Terssac, first published in Slovene in 2023. The criteria for selecting the reading material are literary (Haramija, 2017, pp. 24–25; Kos, 2001, pp. 23–37) and artistic (Zupančič, 2017, p. 44) with the opportunity for implementing raising awareness on sustainable development with preschool children. Collecting data was carried out in accordance with the ethical principles of research, the purpose of the research was presented to participants, they were invited to participate voluntarily and endured the anonymity of their answers. We asked the students to read the literary work and then write down their answers to the questions. We carried out an analysis of the content of answers to ten open questions with which we had in advance set the themes (components of reading literacy):

1. How would you use the selected picture book to develop speech at nursery school?
2. What could in your opinion arouse the attention and reading motivation in children for reading the selected picture book?
3. In what way can the selected picture book contribute to the understanding of the concept of reading material?
4. How might you, with the help of the selected picture book, develop individual levels of phonetic awareness at nursery school?
5. Does the selected picture book offer an opportunity for vocabulary development?
6. What questions would you use to verify comprehension?

7. Give examples of activities through which you would encourage children's responses to the selected text and with which you would encourage text production.
8. Which part of the picture book do you believe encourages evaluation or presents an opportunity for children to develop their own opinion?
9. Have you read or are you aware of any other picture book for preschool children by the selected author? If so, list which one.
10. Were you to read the selected picture book to children at nursery school today, what activity would you chose straight after reading?

We obtained qualitative data, which we reviewed, coded and categorised (Mesec, 2023, pp. 116–122) with the aim of finding meaningful parts of the texts that are relevant to the objectives of the research. An analysis of the content of answers to the open questions was carried out, the interpretation is presented in chapter 3.2.

### 3 Results and Discussion

The picture book *1000 Cows* by writer Adèle Tariel and illustrator Julie de Tessac, first published in Slovene in 2023, translated by Marko Bratina, is almost a manifesto against mass production (Figure 1). As the book is about cows, it looks at the case of milk and dairy products (the dairy industry), but, of course, anything we begin to name with numbers because we run out of names can be – extremely dangerous. At the same time, the picture book reinforces the view that money is not the (only) way to happiness.

#### 3.1 Multimodal analysis if the picture book *1000 Cows*

The cover (Figure 1) depicts idyllic nature, a flowering meadow and sun-lit mountains in the background; even the milk carton placed in these idyllic surroundings suggesting a different content is coloured pleasantly. On one side of the milk carton are the names of the authors and the translator, the other depicts a cow's head and the title of the picture book. A negative note to this idyllic atmosphere is brought by a barbed wire fence built around the milk carton and the tall chimney behind it with black smoke billowing from it. The front endsheet in the original French version has a two-line dedication, in the Slovene version two lines of acknowledgment are added to the dedication:

‘This picture book is dedicated to Vivien and all breeders striving to live in freedom and in harmony with the environment. It is also dedicated to all the cows whose names we borrowed for the book’s Slovene edition.’



**Figure 1: Front cover of the picture book.**

Source: Tariel and Terssac, 2023, with permission of the publisher.

This is followed by a titlepage, on the left side of which is the colophon; the right page repeats the title, the authors of the text and illustration, the translator and a vignette illustration of a man lying in the grass enjoying nature.

**Table 1: Text and illustration in the picture book *1000 Cows***

	Text	Illustrations
1	A farmer had three cows, Ajda, Buba and Cvetka (N.B. these are the Slovene names of the cows, in the French original they are called <i>Mariette, Ginette &amp; Georgette</i> ). He looked after them well and in exchange they gave him milk which he was able to exchange in the village for other things he needed in life (bread, sausages, pumpkins).	The illustration depicts cows that are smiling, surrounded by idyllic high-altitude scenery, they live in a remote place with the farmer in a green natural environment. The farmer is also smiling; the reader discovers that the man on the inside cover vignette is the farmer (he is dressed the same in this illustration), his face is calm and content.
2	One day a man from town appears on the farm – he is called the Tic-man; he suggests the farmer should have more	The clothes of the newcomer are highlighted (a coat printed with numbers), his face is smiling, he is drinking milk. The farmer and all three cows are curious (only parts of their heads can be seen in the illustration) – they



	Text	Illustrations
	cows and he would undertake selling the milk.	are all out in the field and the unannounced guest is on the other side of the fence. It is not entirely clear whether the cows and the farmer are in the enclosure or the newcomer.
3	Following the advice from the town visitor, the farmer acquires another three cows, Pika, Liska and Miška.	The original three cows and the three new ones stand opposite each other as if ready for a battle. They look very different: the original ones are various shades of brown, one has flowers in its horns, the three new ones are patchy (black and white). Standing in the middle of the illustration is the man from town, holding a pail of milk in each hand, he has no face (his face is empty – lacks eyes, a nose and a mouth). The surrounding nature is still equally beautiful; the cows are placed in the pasture.
4	The farmer has purchased even more cows; there are now 17 – they still all have names. The Tie-man urges the farmer to sell even more milk.	The double page has two separate illustrations: bottom left is the Tie-man, wearing his coat printed with numbers, his tie is also accentuated; on the right page are four milk cartons which have MILK MOO printed on one side and ULTRA GOOD 100% COW'S MILK (intraiconic text) on the other. Behind the milk cartons are financial statements (with BUSINESS written on them). There are no cows in the illustration.
5	More and more cows kept arriving at the farm. To start with, the farmer tried to give them all names, but after a while he just gave them numbers. Sometimes it seems as if the original cows are giving him doubtful looks.	The single page illustration is filled with cows, no part is left empty and there is no nature left. Only Ajda, Buba and Cvetka stand out, being brown – all other cows are black and white and have numbers written on their backs.
6	Three days later the Tie-man delivered more cows (numbers 35 to 80).	The cows are coming out of a delivery truck, the Tie-man is happy, the farmer looks sad, his posture indicates he is not happy. The scene is set in the meadow, the new cows are being observed by two others who are also among the newcomers (they are black and white); the absence of the farmer's original three cows is obvious.
7	With the hundredth cow, the Tie-man acquires a milking machine; he wanted even more cows as the milk was selling well. Ajda, Buba and Cvetka only rarely see each other in the crowd of cows.	The man from town is smiling because business is going well. On the left side are five cows (which show no emotions), attached to the milking machine. To the right is the farmer, his face in the forefront lets us know he is sad, even lost. It is as if he no longer fits into this milk-production facility. Pages of accounting books serve as a background to the illustration.
8	Stepping up production – the farm transforms into a factory. There are now 800 cows, modernisation is described (conveyor belt, hey crane, milking machines).	Running in front of the cows is a conveyor belt for food, they are attached to a milking machine. The computer screen is recording record milk production. Once again, the background to the illustration are pages from accounting books. The farmer and the original three cows are not in the illustration; the absence of

	Text	Illustrations
		humans is shocking – there are no people, the cows are depicted as machines.
9	There were never 1000 cows because seven of them disappeared: Ajda, Buba, Cvetka, 429, 512, 826 and 901. The farmer sets out to find them.	On the left side are Ajda, Buba and Cvetka (they all have travel bundles – a sign that they are leaving). They are crossing the stream and are surrounded by idyllic high-altitude pastures with green grass and mountains in the background. On the right side below the text are three black and white cows with the numbers written on their backs, following the path of the first three cows.
10	The farmer finds the runaway cows. In the pasture he lies down among them. Satisfied, he falls asleep; he is awakened by a lick on the face to find he is surrounded with all 1000 cows.	Two separated illustrations: left under the text is the depiction of the farmer, lying content in the grass (a repetition of the illustration in the inside cover vignette); the entire right page is a night scene – black and white cows wandering off into the distance, somewhere towards the mountains.
11	Ajda, Buba and Cvetka stayed with the farmer who promises them that the farm will no longer be industrial.	The cows and the farmer with satisfaction on their faces look towards the industrial barn with milk storage facilities and a pipeline taking milk into town. They are surrounded by idyllic nature, the only reminder of the farmer's previous calculations are the numbers written out on the outside of the barn.
12	997 cows have apparently found a high-mountain pasture which they now inhabit.	The illustration depicts a magnificent view of the natural surroundings, filled with mountains in the background, sunny meadows and forests below them. The meadows are dotted with tiny black and white dots representing cows. The minuscule size of the cows (almost unrecognisable) makes the surrounding nature look even greater and more magnificent. The wooden sign has 1000 COW PLATEAU written on it (intraiconic text).

The realistic short story *1000 Cows* is a warning about contemporary consumer society. The content farmer has three cows and calls them by their names, he lives in an idyllic natural environment and has time for his friends. A chance visitor tries the farmer's home-produced milk and senses he can make some money. He convinces the farmer into expanding his business which grows to the point when we can no longer talk of a farm but an industrial plant (Figure 2). The farmer is no longer happy, he has no time for friends; the turning point occurs when seven cows (the original three, Ajda, Buba and Cvetka, and four of the numbered ones) escape. The farmer sets out to find them and decides he will abandon mass production, returning home with his three cows. All the others find their way to a high-mountain pasture where they can graze freely in the meadows. The focus is on the tranquillity of the natural environment as the opposite to human consumer society. In the illustrations this divide is shown with the idyllic grassy landscape and the range of

mountains in the background, and on the other hand the absence of living beings – when the cows are no longer depicted as animals but milk cartons. The text and the illustrations are in complete interaction, complementing each other and jointly creating a whole.

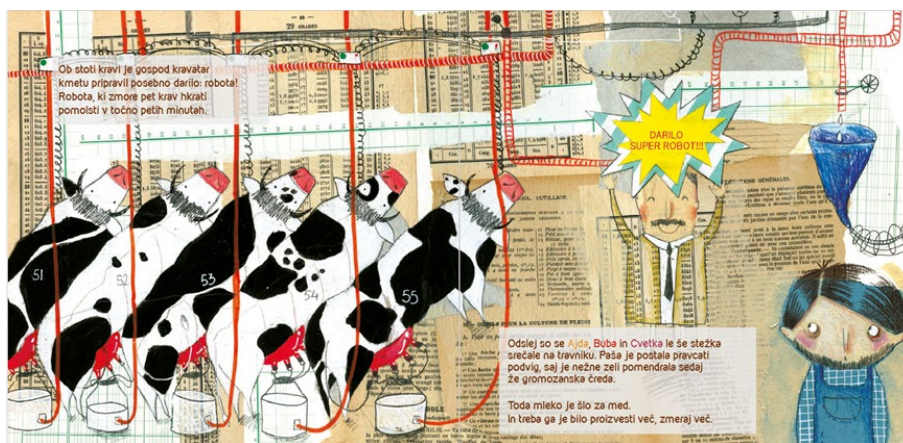


Figure 2: The happy Tie-man and the worried farmer in the specialised dairy farm.  
Source: Tariel and Terssac, 2023, pp. 17–18, with permission of the publisher.

### 3.2 Analysis of answers to the set questions

Through a literary experience of the relationship of an individual and society towards nature, animals and the environment, the selected picture book by Adèle Tariel and Julie de Terssac: *1000 Cows*, taking into account the age of those it addresses (preschool children), raises awareness of current and pressing challenges of our overburdened environment, the global consequences of irresponsible human activities (overexploiting ecosystems), and promotes inclusive sustainable action and ‘taking the initiative for creative solutions and their realisation.’ (Drljić and Riccarda Kiswarday, 2021, p. 19).

Components of reading literacy (Haramija, 2020), a life-long development, are promoted as a process at nursery schools through goals and content in all areas of curricular activities,<sup>1</sup> because a comprehensive treatment of reading material encourages interdisciplinary integration that is considered a modern didactic

<sup>1</sup> Areas of curricular activities at nursery school level are: movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics.

approach facilitating multiple aspects of connecting information. The research has enabled an insight into the comprehensive treatment of the literary work through a direct link with components of reading literacy.

In the preschool period, vocabulary, phonetic awareness and speech are strongly linked, as the development of speech is most intense at this time. Caring for speech development is one of the most important roles of nursery schools (Šek Mertük & Cugmas 2020), with speech a complex ability (Alatalo & Westlund, 2021; Hindman *et al.*, 2022; Vukelich *et al.*, 2019), that is predicted by several factors and can be encouraged in various ways. In answering the first question on how the selected picture book might be used to develop speech at nursery school, the respondents gave different examples of **describing illustrations** ('after reading the story we would look at the pictures, the children would describe them,' 'we would describe the cows in the illustrations,' etc.), **guided conversations** ('we would discuss healthy lifestyles,' 'we would talk about our attitudes towards nature and animals,' 'we would talk about farm animals,' 'we would talk about responsible treatment of animals,' 'we would talk about how to stay in touch with nature,' etc.), **storytelling with illustrations** ('children would tell stories about the illustrations,' 'we would recount the story through the illustrations,' 'by looking at the illustrations we would discuss the content' etc.), **describing literary characters, events, the literary space** ('we could discuss how the farmer felt with his three cows, how he felt when he had a thousand cows,' 'we could discuss the actions of Mr Tie-man,' 'children would talk about the event they liked most,' 'children would describe where the story takes place,' 'children would present their favourite character,' 'children would discuss their own experiences on a farm, etc.), which proves their knowledge of elements of speech components. Research by Marjanovič Umek, Krajnc and Fekonja (2006) showed that beside the family environment, frequent reading in nursery school contributes significantly to higher levels of speech development where the educator's way of reading and the frequency of speech interactions are very important. At the same time, answers show that the participating part-time students would link speech activities with the literary experience of the individual's attitude to animals and nature, thereby encouraging the social-emotional component of sustainability that affects the acquisition of values, the formation of attitudes, and the development of ethics and morals.

Reading motivation enables faster progress in the development of reading literacy (Bošnjak & Košir, 2020). Reading motivation is closely related to text comprehension and at the same time encourages interest in reading and a positive attitude towards reading. It is about the desire to read or listen due to the satisfaction a child feels when reading. The key purpose of reading motivation in nursery school, 'is encouraging the readiness of children to accept texts and shaping their expectations' (Saksida, 2017, p. 53). We reviewed the responses to the second question, where respondents wrote down what might trigger attention and motivation for reading the selected picture book. The diversity of responses indicates that in planning reading events, respondents would prepare the horizon of children's expectations (Kordigel Aberšek, 2008, pp. 111–112) with various forms of introductory motivation which we divided into two categories (Table 2). Included in the first group are responses which stem from announcing the content of the reading material (imaginative motivation), and in the second group responses that stem from the children's experiences (experiential motivation).

**Table 2: Introductory motivation**

Announcing the content of the reading material	Announcing the content through experiential motivation
'we would take a look at the front cover of the picture book' 'we would look at the front cover and talk about it' 'I would read the title to the children and we would think about the content' 'I would put various books on cows in the book corner' 'with a riddle about cows' 'with a talk about farms, farm animals'	'having milk for breakfast, we would discuss where it comes from' 'we would visit a farm and see how cows are milked' 'I would ask the children if they knew any stories about cows'

Contemporary literary-receptive teaching of children's literature acknowledges a number of reading motivation typologies that are formed according to criteria defined by the text as a literary form of art, as well as criteria determined by the teacher's knowledge of the children, their receptive abilities and their pre-textual experiences (Kordigel Aberšek, 2008, p. 117; Saksida, 1994). In the pre-school period, the purpose of reading motivation with children is to create anticipation. This begins with the teacher's thoughts on how to conduct a reading event at nursery school and how to prepare the children for listening to the selected text. The answers indicate that participants in the study would derive the initial motivation for reading

from both codes of communication and link it with curricular activities from other areas.

Picture books in which linguistic and visual codes of communication are closely intertwined (Table 2), are especially suitable for developing multimodal literacy and comprehending the concept of reading material at nursery school (Haramija and Batič, 2016, 2020). When reading multimodal texts, the illustration is an equivalent carrier of information and contributes importantly to the development of visual literacy. The answers given by respondents to the question about the ways the selected picture book *1000 Cows* might contribute to the comprehension of reading material included suggestions that ‘the illustrations in the picture book complement the text,’ ‘the figures in the illustrations clearly show emotions,’ ‘the illustrations precisely depict technological advantages of large farms such as automatising of work – a milking machine, robotisation,’ ‘there is a lot of intraiconic text which additionally exposes the tie-man’s attitude towards animals,’ ‘the title page illustration of a cow as a milk carton in a barbed wire enclosure symbolizes the entrapment of animals for profit,’ ‘the chimney symbolizes the farm as a mass livestock factory which beside producing food creates greenhouse gasses that affect climate change,’ etc., which suggests that the content would also be meaningfully read through reading the illustrations (images), which ‘represents a starting point in the development of visual literacy and interactive meanings of the story’ (Bednjički Rošer and Batič, 2022, p. 120).

As well as their meaning, words also have a phonetic form which in the alphabetical system of writing hold a key role in learning how to read and write (Zemljak Jontes & Bednjički Rošer, 2020). Phonetic awareness which is conditioned by the mental development of children develops gradually, with individual levels in sequence from less demanding activities – recognising long and short words, recognising and forming rhymes, to the more demanding – syllabification, awareness of the beginnings and ends of words, to the highest – phonemic awareness that involves recognising, manipulating and combining sounds into words. To the question on how they might use the selected picture book to develop phonetic awareness in nursery school, respondents gave examples (Table 3) which we classified according to the level of difficulty.

Table 3: Levels of phonetic awareness

Levels of phonetic awareness	Phonetic awareness abilities	Examples from the picture book
1. level	Recognising short and long words	<i>noč – prijatelj</i> <i>krub – klobasa</i> <i>kmet – kravatar</i>
2. level	Recognising and forming rhymes, alliterations	<i>Cvetka – Metka</i> <i>Breza – Majoneza</i> <i>Zinka – Palačinka</i> <i>kompot – robot</i> <i>vrtiljak - tovornjak</i> <b>k</b> met, <b>k</b> rava, <b>k</b> ravatar <b>B</b> rena, <b>B</b> oža, <b>B</b> reza, <b>B</b> uba
3. level	Syllabification	<i>to-vor-njak, kme-ti-ja, čre-da</i>
4. level	awareness of the beginning and end of words	<i>tra<b>k</b>, <b>k</b>rava,</i> <i><b>m</b>leko, <b>č</b>reda, <b>t</b>ravnik</i>
5. level	Phonemic awareness	<i>n-o-č</i>

The development of speech and communication skills is conditioned by the knowledge of words and their use, so vocabulary is one of the basic components of reading literacy (Coyne *et al.*, 2022; Voršič & Ropič Kop, 2020), as its extent is the best indicator of reading comprehension (Pečjak, 2010). Respondents were asked whether the selected picture book offers an opportunity to develop vocabulary. Their answers show the diverse opportunities for broadening vocabulary which in the preschool period develops and increases rapidly. In terms of vocabulary development, it is known that children understand words before they are capable of speaking to them and also that there are great individual differences between children of the same age. The picture book *1000 Cows* enables an expansion of vocabulary; among words that they might give children additional explanations, respondents listed: *molža* (milking), *kangla* (pail), *blebec* (loaf), *gostija* (feast), *razlegati se* (spread out), *tekniti* (enjoy eating), *porpraševanje* (demand), *nabava* (purchase), *vztrajati* (persist), *čreda* (herd), *zadostovati* (satisfactory), *stežka* (with difficulty), *spreleteti* (occur), *čemeriti se* (be sullen), *navdih* (inspiration), *skleniti* (conclude), *nabito poln*, (full to the brim), *paša* (graze), *pomendrati* (trample), *truma* (troop), *tovarna* (factory), *rekord* (record), *ubežnice* (fugitives), *spokojno* (tranquil), *pompom* (pompom), *poslovanje* (business) etc. Figurative meanings that would be discussed with children: *nekaj gre za med* (lit. something goes for honey, meaning it sells well), *biti izžet* (lit. be squeezed, meaning be drained), *tešiti žejo* (quench thirst), *iti v gosjem redu* (lit. walk in a goose line, meaning walk in line, single file), *biti kos nalogi* (be up to a task), *gledati postrani* (lit. look sideways, meaning give a doubtful look), *debelo gledati* (stare), *strto srce* (broken

heart), *travniki se poleti posuje s cveticami* (in the summer the meadow is sprinkled with flowers), *ožarjen s sojem lune* (lit by moonlight) etc.

**Table 4: Questions with which one might verify the comprehension of the reading material**

Questions relating to the text:	Questions relating to the illustrations:
<p><i>Who is the story about, who appears in the picture book?</i></p> <p><i>What did the cows give the farmer?</i></p> <p><i>What did the farmer exchange the milk for in the village?</i></p> <p><i>Who visited the farmer?</i></p> <p><i>What did he want from him, what did he suggest?</i></p> <p><i>What did the farm turn into?</i></p> <p><i>Why does Mr Tie-man buy so much milk? Does he drink it all himself?</i></p> <p><i>How did the farmer name the cows when he no longer had the inspiration to choose names for them?</i></p> <p><i>Why did the farmer begin writing numbers on the cows' backs?</i></p> <p><i>How many cows did the farmer have?</i></p> <p><i>Who milked the cows when there were many?</i></p> <p><i>How did the farmer feel when he had lots of cows?</i></p> <p><i>Where did the cows go to?</i></p> <p><i>Did the farmer find them?</i></p> <p><i>Which cows stayed with him?</i></p> <p><i>Where did the other go to?</i></p> <p><i>What did the farmer decide in the end? Why did he decide this?</i></p>	<p><i>Can you recognise which cow is Ajda, which is Buba, and which is Cvetka?</i></p> <p><i>Does the farmer have a large farm?</i></p> <p><i>What is Mr Tie-man like? Why does he have numbers on his coat?</i></p> <p><i>Do the new cows look like Ajda, Buba and Cvetka?</i></p> <p><i>Are pails still used for milk when the farm expands?</i></p> <p><i>Why is Mr Tie-man so happy?</i></p> <p><i>Why are there so many numbers in the background of the milk cartons?</i></p> <p><i>How does the farmer feel when he sees the lorry full of new cows?</i></p> <p><i>What does the new robot do? Is the farmer glad of the new present?</i></p> <p><i>What happens with the cows in the new barn? What do they eat?</i></p> <p><i>Where did the cows set off for?</i></p> <p><i>What happened to them?</i></p> <p><i>What are the cows doing now?</i></p>

An opportunity to develop the component of text understanding which is conditioned by other components such as response to the text and creating texts, critical reading, reading motivation, vocabulary and speech, are in nursery school provided by all language-speech interactions in which children participate (Krajnc Ivič, 2020). The foundations for achieving the goals of text understanding in preschool education are visual and auditory perception, which are improved through reading or listening and observing texts, discussion with the help of illustrations, composing the whole from individual parts, looking for similarities, differences etc. In the research, respondents listed questions with which they might test the children's understanding of the selected picture book. We have classified the questions into two categories (Table 4), based on whether they relate to the text or the illustrations, which shows the research participants' focus on both (verbal and visual) codes of communication.



During the preschool period, the component of response to the text and text formation is demonstrated through the child's formation of appropriate and meaningful speech and the application of information or knowledge in new situations and is related to the comprehension of texts, read previously (Pinto, Tarchi & Bigozzi, 2019; Pulko & Kranjec, 2020). Although the *Kindergarten Curriculum* (Kurikulum, 1999) does not include text summarising (Baloh, 2019, p. 15), research (Baloh, 2019; Marjanovič Umek *et al.*, 2006) shows that this is the key activity after reading a text, which is important for the development of the child's pragmatic narrative skill when we develop the child's narrative scheme through planned activities (Tompkins *et al.*, 2019). Children gain narrative strategies gradually through developing the ability of expression and in the preschool period reach different narrative capabilities. It is important that we plan these on three difficulty levels: recalling verbal information, comprehension through reasoning, and text evaluation (Saksida 2017, p. 53). Through verbal teaching methods as responses to what is being read, 'it is possible and essential to develop these in the preschool period.' In this research, our respondents listed examples of activities that would encourage a child's response to what is being read: 'I would encourage children to discuss their visit to a farm,' 'I would prepare pictorial material (4–6 images), and invite the children to arrange it in the correct sequence while talking about the story,' 'I would instruct the children to continue the story about how the cows lived on the pasture high in the mountains,' 'we would make puppets and prepare a puppet show,' 'we would create a pocket story,' 'we would continue the story in our story-telling corner.' An analysis of the answers shows that respondents would use various methods of narrating (Baloh, 2019, pp. 117–118) and various post-creative activities, which indicates an interdisciplinary linking that is considered a contemporary didactic approach with the possibility of connecting information from multiple aspects.



**Figure 3: Living in freedom and harmony with environment.**

Source: Tariel and Terssac, 2023, pp. 27–28, with permission of the publisher.

In the preschool period, critical reading provides a foundation for expressing one's own opinions and judging from experience. This component develops gradually, in the first age period children recognise the messages of simple illustrations, stories or information, in the second age period they already recognise the basic message and express their own opinion on the text (Licardo & Krajnc Ivič, 2020). The development of language, and with it also of critical reading, is naturally involved in all areas of activities and we can encourage it in nursery school through planned reading events (Saksida, 2017), where educators (after reading) expose the parts of the text that represent an opportunity for thought, discussion, and, taking into account the children's prior knowledge in the area of close development encourage values, cooperation, creativity, etc. The respondents were asked to find possibilities for evaluating the text (Figure 3) or expressing the children's own opinions from the selected text. They mentioned, 'the Tie-man's greed – we would discuss with the children whether money really brings happiness and satisfaction,' 'we would discuss irresponsible treatment of animals with the children,' etc. The answers given by respondents show how they would, taking into account the experiences of preschool children with a positive attitude to the environment and practical actions, strengthen the components of reading literacy and the importance of education for a sustainable future. Lepičnik Vodopivec (2014) states that education for sustainable development is already well-established in Slovene nursery schools. An important role in informing future generations is played by educators who (Lepičnik Vodopivec,

Mezgec & Šindić, 2023) spontaneously include all three dimensions of sustainability into their teaching practices (environmental, social, and economic).

All responses to the question on whether the respondents were aware of or knew any other work by the selected author were negative, as no other works by the author have so far been translated into Slovene.

The final question about which follow-up activity you might choose first after reading the selected text was set because we were interested to see which component of reading literacy respondents would reach for most often, recognising it with the selected picture book as the key for planning further activities or whether summarising the text is indeed, as shown by research, (Baloh, 2019; Marjanovič Umek *et al.*, 2006), the main activity after reading a text. Respondents listed: 'we would summarise the story through the illustrations,' 'first we would talk about content,' 'first we would talk about the picture book and its message,' 'we would visit the nearest farm and look at the animals,' 'the children would create a poster about cows, investigate dairy products and cut them out of advertising leaflets.' Mostly respondents noted that after reading they would first discuss the content, summarise the story, which indicates that they would most frequently develop speech, vocabulary, text understanding, and response to what was read, which is also linked with creating texts and critical reading. Saksida (2016, p. 235, 2017) explains the multi-layered creation of meaning in multimodal texts within a social context with the fundamental characteristics and phases of reading events from nursery school to higher education levels, stressing that the meaning of a multimodal text is a field that is continuously being built upon and co-shaped by all participants in the reading event.

#### **4 Conclusions**

The concept of sustainability and the role of the individual in its realisation begins to form in the preschool period, and education on sustainable development is, like reading literacy, a life-long process. This is shaped by the awareness and formation of attitudes towards nature and the environment. The selected picture book opens up important issues and, through the literary experience of the individual's and society's attitude towards nature, animals and the environment, taking into account the addressee's age (preschool children), raises awareness about the current

challenges of the overburdened natural environment, the global consequences of human activity and mass production. The respondent's answers reveal a wide range of perceptions and understanding of literary-artistic reading, which is of fundamental importance for reading literacy. As professional readers, educators are a reading example. Through reading, when it is conducted in a way that the children listening also look at the illustrations that contribute significantly to the understanding of the story, complement it or even change it or represent key morphological characteristics of the text, the adult reader helps the children recognise the direction of reading and the orientation in the reading material. The research, which is an example of cross-sector integration, demonstrates that discussing quality reading materials can have an important contribution to the development of components of reading literacy and a sustainable future.

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