The visual elements of line, shape, color, texture, and composition work together to create art, much as character, setting, plot, theme, and style work together to create literature. When you look at picture book illustrations, think about how the artist is using these “building blocks” to grab your eye, move the story along, or create a certain mood. Some elements stand out as more powerful than others, but all generally have some role.

1. **Lines** can set the mood or convey movement. They provide a feeling of strength, balance, motion, or distance. (Look at Mo Willems’s work, for example.)

2. The use of **shapes** can convey action and includes geometric circles, ovals, squares, rectangles, triangles, and so forth. (Look at Lois Ehlert’s work.)

3. **Color** is probably the most obvious element in children’s book illustration. It is used to convey emotion and symbolism. Green, blue, and purple, like plants and water, are cool and recede. Warm colors are yellow, orange, and red; like fire and sun, they come forward. (Look at Eric Carle’s work.)

4. **Texture** can be used to enhance the realistic quality of illustrations or to stimulate the imagination. Many contemporary illustrators are experimenting with 3-D and computer graphic effects that make you want to touch the page. (Look at Brian Pinkney’s work.)

5. **Composition** unifies all the elements in an illustration. It is the total arrangement, the balance and symmetry of elements. How are line, shape, color, and texture arranged on the page? Which, if any, dominates? How do they work together to create an impression or mood, to help tell the story?