

Chapter 7

Ten Donkeys

The author's final story is in the form of a picture book with no text apart from the title. Although the other novels written and illustrated for this thesis by the author are aimed at a wider British audience including Ethiopian children living in the Diaspora, this book fills a gap in the Ethiopian children's book market and was designed specifically for young children in Ethiopia.

Picture books are available across developed countries for babies and children. McCannon, Thornton and Williams categorized them as: '0 – 3: years: board books, novelty books, 3 to 5 years: picture books, ABC books, 5 – 7 years: picture books, reading primers, colour storybooks.'¹ Picture books date back to the mid-nineteenth century when *Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffman was published which, at that time, would have only been enjoyed by the relatively elite.

Ethiopia appears to be in that same position today regarding availability of such material for pre-school children. The author identified a relatively small number of books aimed at Ethiopian children and available in Ethiopian bookshops on visits in 2010 and 2011. Habte Books² is developing a selection of picture books for the youngest of children which, although available for the Ethiopian market, is also aimed at families with adopted Ethiopian children and Ethiopian families living in the Diaspora. Michael Daniel Ambatchew produced a series of large scale (A4) picture books illustrated by Atlabachew Reda from 2004.³ In 2002 an ABC book, fully illustrated with line drawings, appeared with Amharic words in the order of their alphabetical pronunciation. *A is for*

Addis Ababa is, according to its introduction, aimed at: ‘young readers and adults who want to begin exploring Ethiopia’s fascinating culture and heritage through some basic Amharinya words...’⁴ Other overseas sources of alphabet books for Ethiopian children include *The ABGD Ethiopian Alphabet: Amharic-English for Beginners*,⁵ *An African Alphabet*, produced by a British based charity,⁶ *E is for Ethiopia*, produced by two Canadians who did voluntary work in Ethiopia⁷ and *Our First Amharic Words* by Stacy Bellward.⁸ The alphabet books which were located are in English rather than other Ethiopian languages and, while there appears to be a number of books based on the Ethiopian alphabets emerging through internet book sales such as Amazon, picture books on numbers and counting specific to an Ethiopian audience do not appear to be so widely available. Only one picture book, *Counting Addis Ababa*,⁹ was located which uses more than one Ethiopian language.

In 2006 a directory of children’s picture books listed over 28,000 English medium sources from across the world aimed at preschool children. *A to Zoo*¹⁰ describes the scale of publication of such materials and reflects on the trends and scope of such materials. Lima and Lima wrote: ‘[t]oday the picture book is a part of growing up, a teaching tool, an entertainment medium, a memory to treasure... Professionalism, curiosity on all subjects, and freedom of expression have brought the children’s picture book into the twenty-first century with a bewildering array of materials from which to choose.’¹¹ However, within that directory there are only six books listed for picture books related to Ethiopia. They are written by four authors including three by Jane Kurtz whose works have previously been referred to in this thesis. At a seminar and workshop on writing and illustrating for Ethiopian children held at the National Library in Addis Ababa in May

2011 the Swedish organisers (from the International Library in Stockholm and a children's bookshop specialising in books in many languages) informed the audience of the lack of materials available in Ethiopian languages.¹² The author's own research into picture books in Ethiopia noted wider issues relating to context and language which was discussed in the chapter on context.¹³

The purpose of picture books can be more than just a story with pictures. Nikolajeva wrote: '[e]mpirical research shows that even infants respond adequately to shapes, for instance, of human faces. This means that they are capable of decoding iconic signs.'¹⁴ Thus there is no lower age limit as even babies can relate to books. The relatively small numbers of children who attend kindergarten in Ethiopia are exposed to books from as young as the age of three and plans to increase pre school education appear to continue to be a government objective.¹⁵ McCannon, Thornton and Williams identified that, '[f]rom an early age, children learn what a book is, how to hold it the right way up, the order in which to turn the pages and how to read – first the images and then later the words.'¹⁶ The 'concept' of a picture book, according to Shulevitz, is closer to a 'silent film' with the pictures telling the story as illustrated by: 'Caldecott's picture books, created between 1878 and his death in 1886, ... probably the first fully developed examples of the true picture book.'¹⁷ Duvoisin expounds the importance of illustration and how it can tell a story without text: 'pictorial literature.'¹⁸

'For picture books to be understood by children, you must know how to communicate clearly. And to do this, you must understand the rules governing the use of pictures in picture books.'¹⁹ The author undertook a two year course in Illustrating for Children's Publishing²⁰ prior to commencing her postgraduate research for a PhD. She

learnt that, not only is the ability to execute effective artwork important but, to achieve a successful product, it is also necessary to understand the context of the audience and to create elements of surprise, suspense and drama at key points to maintain the child's attention. The development of a picture book is usually no more than 32 pages in length and requires detailed planning. *Ten Donkeys* is half that size yet still required a storyboard approach to plan the action and identify the details. If a story is to be of interest to the child there has to be more than action according to Shulevitz who identifies the need for detail in the actions to stimulate a 'vivid' imagination with a conclusion which satisfies the reader.²¹ Sendak compared a successful picture book to a good poem. 'A picture book has to have that incredible seamless look to it when it's finished.'²²

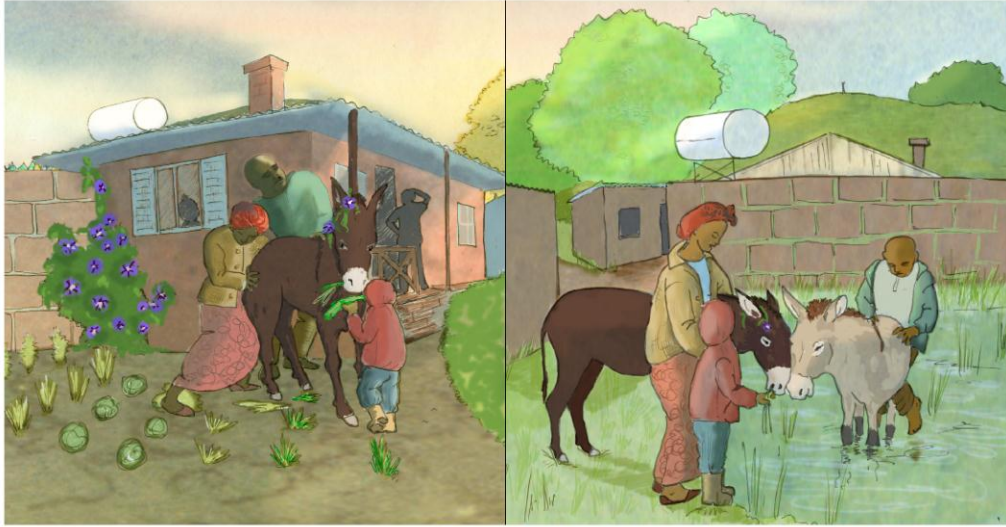
In a picture book with no text this action has to be created through images alone, the story emerging through the locations and gestures/expressions of the characters possibly assisted by symbolic content (letters or numbers) and other artistic elements such as the viewpoints of the reader and the atmosphere created by the illustrator. Perry Nodelman acknowledged that images are necessary to replace words which would be too complicated for young readers to understand.²³ In the case of *Ten Donkeys*, the author takes the reader on a journey through a familiar landscape – a typical Ethiopian rural scene which includes: circular straw-roofed *tukuls*, shiny corrugated iron roofs on mud walled painted buildings used as shops, a larger concrete block house with a garden and a school near a football pitch, wooded areas and bare hillsides, a stream where locals are washing their clothes, a cultivated and ploughed field and a marshy area.

As the story opens, the scene is viewed from raised grassland where three figures, a woman, man and child, are searching the distant landscape. A single post gives a clue

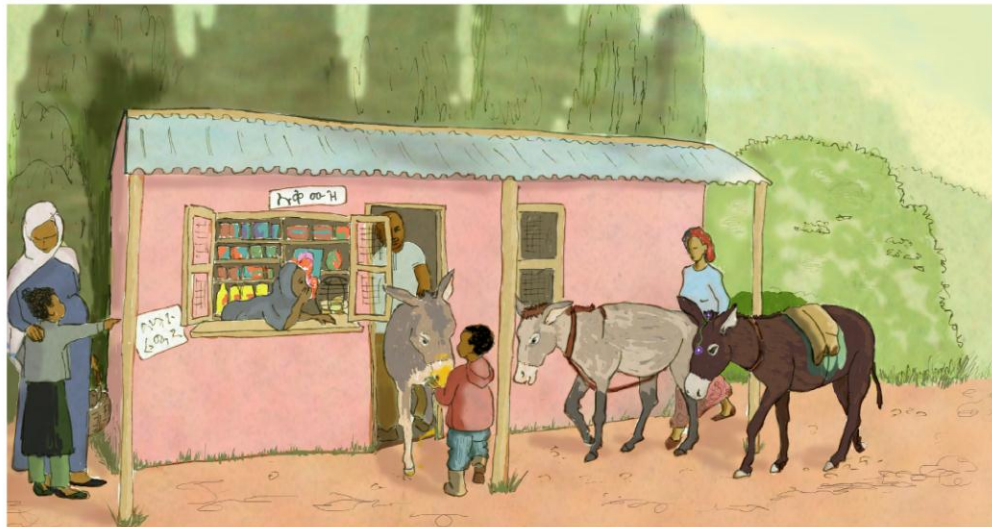
as to what they are looking for. It is early morning and the sun is just rising. It is cold but dry and people are beginning to emerge in a few distant locations – youngsters on the football pitch and women by the stream carrying their washing in bowls on their heads.



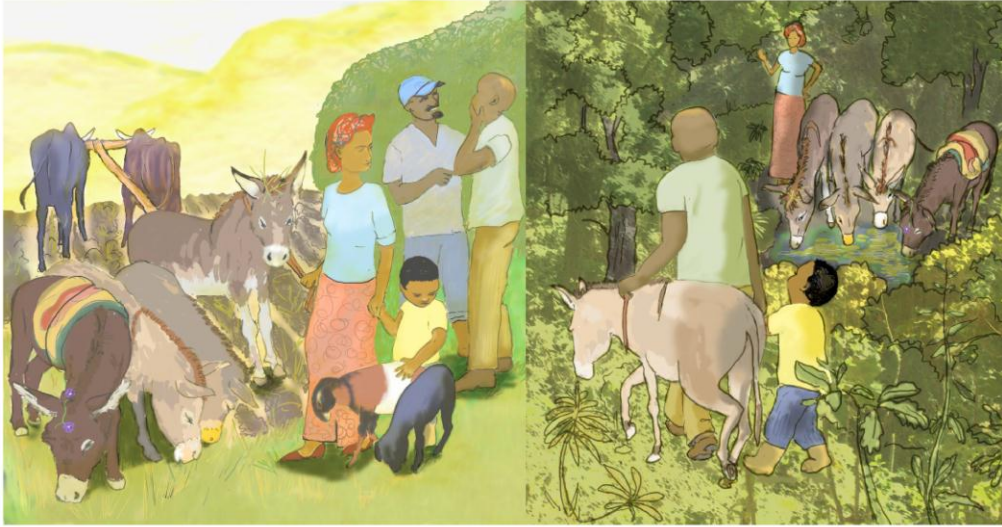
The next image, an hour or so later as the day is getting warmer, is in the garden that was previously viewed from above. Here the man is pushing a donkey which is eating the vegetables. It stubbornly refuses to move as the woman leans against it and the child tries to offer a tempting handful of grass. In a corner a morning glory bush clings to the wall and one strand hangs from the donkey's ear. By the next scene, on the same double page, the first donkey (recognised by its colour and the morning glory flower) is nudging the second donkey which is being pushed by the man as the child holds his mother's hand. In each scene, some double page spreads and others covering single pages, there is a gradual progression. The man appears less angry towards the donkeys and the woman keeps the group together, each donkey a different colour and some with evidence of where they were found.



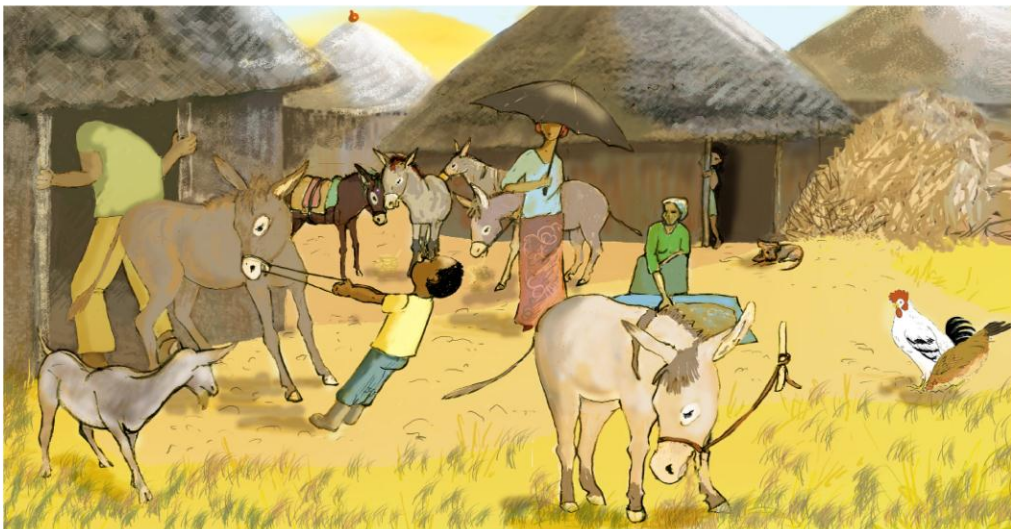
The third donkey is discovered emerging from the shop pushed by the man and encouraged by the little boy. They are watched by the shopkeeper and a pregnant woman with her daughter. The other two donkeys are now on leads held by the mother.



The following pages look down on the field where the fourth donkey is located and the woodland where they encounter the fifth donkey, hiding among the eucalyptus trees.



With each new picture the day moves on, light changes and, by the time they find the sixth donkey in the village, it is hot and sunny.



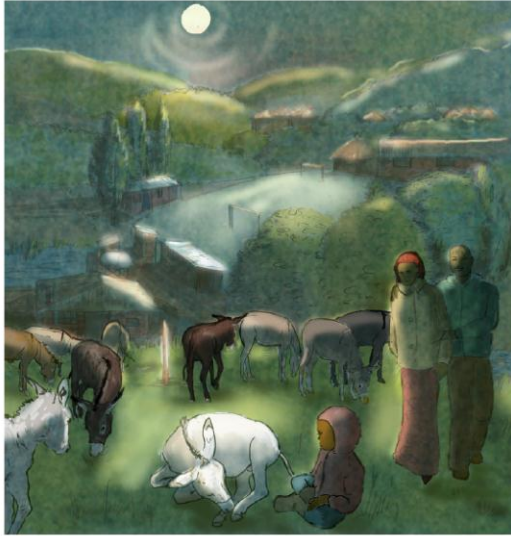
Later in the day, as the sun disappears behind a cloud, the seventh donkey is discovered in the school, much to the amusement of the children and the annoyance of the teacher. Nearby, on the muddy field used as a football pitch, the eighth donkey has the father on its back, returning through the pouring rain.



By evening, as the light begins to fade and the sun drops in the west, the eight donkeys and their owners reach the stream where the ninth donkey is biting a woman's washing as others watch.



Finally, in the moonlight, the nine donkeys return to the hillside where the little boy, followed by his mother and father, discovers the tenth and youngest donkey, fast asleep by the post from which they had all escaped the night before. The book cover shows all ten donkeys (front and back) with the title in English.²⁴



When identifying which images to use the illustrator/author has to ensure that they will be recognised. More importantly, the images need to be familiar to the readers as previously explained in the chapters on context and illustration. Buildings, animals, dress and landscape were taken into consideration and research included images from the internet when the author's own library of photographs and film clips failed to provide accurate imagery. Finally, the draft document was shared with those who are familiar with the country to ensure the pictures were appropriate and the message clear and suitable for the target group.

This book was accepted by Shama Book Publishers for publication in February 2011 and layout was completed in preparation for printing when the author visited Addis Ababa in May 2011.

¹ Mc Cannon, D., Thornton, S., Williams, Y. (2008) *The Bloomsbury Guide to Creating Illustrated Children's Books*, London: A& C Black, p12.

² Since 2009 Fitsame Teferra has written and published a small range of books through Habte Books (<http://www.habtebooks.com/en/>) They include *Counting Addis Ababa* (illustrated by Anteneh Fissehah) *Little Lion's Bedtime* and *Abeba goes to Bed* (both illustrated Wegayehu Ayele).

³ This ABCD series consists of four titles and provides pre-school and primary school students in Grades 1 – 4 with culturally appropriate reading materials.

⁴ Sauda Mdahoma (2002) *A is for Addis Ababa - Ethiopia through the Alphabet*, Mombassa: Ken Fin Publishers, Introduction page.

⁵ Gebregeorgis Yohannes formed a small publishing company in the United States, where one of his books was *The ABGD Ethiopian Alphabet: Amharic-English for Beginners* was produced according to this source: <http://www.janekurtz.com/ethiopiareads/yohannes.html> downloaded on 28/10/2010.

⁶ This Alphabet primer in English and Amharic has colour illustrations by various young artists of the Ethiopian Gemini Trust. It is published in the UK by the Baquis Press.

⁷ Lori Prodan and Keith Holmes lived in Awassa, Ethiopia for two years then self published this book in 2006.

⁸ Stacy Bellward is the American author of picture and story books aimed at adopted Ethiopian children and their families. She is also president of the Ethiopian Kids Community. Source www.ethiopiankids.com downloaded on 28/10/2010

⁹ Fitsame Teferra (2010) *Counting Addis Ababa*, Germany: Habtebooks.

¹⁰ Lima, C.W. & Lima, J (2006) *A to Zoo - Subject Access to Children's Picture Books 7th Edition*, Connecticut: Libraries Unlimited, p ix.

¹¹ Ibid p6.

¹² Matilda Wallin, Helena Erisson Berhan and Nina Suatan explained that it is Swedish policy to make books available in the mother tongue languages of all its citizens. Although some books had been identified they were keen to encourage local writers and illustrators as well as publishers to develop a greater variety of books for children in the Ethiopian languages both for children in Ethiopia as well as in the Diaspora.

¹³ See chapter 4.

¹⁴ Nikolajeva, M. 'Interpretative Codes and Implied Readers of Children's Picture Books' Colomer, T., Kümmerling-Meibauer, B. & Silva-Díaz, C. (eds.) (2010) *New Directions in Picturebook Research*, New York: Routledge, p 28. In this paper the author identifies different codes which children need to connect the picture with the real world.

¹⁵ 'Early Education in Ethiopia: Progress and Prospects' by James L. Hoot, Judit Szente and Belete Mebratu was written in 2004 <http://www.springerlink.com/content/mr4264j406415x0j/>., downloaded on 8/11/2010. The author was present at meetings with Ministry of Education staff to discuss the future of early years education in 2006.

¹⁶ Mc Cannon, D., Thornton, S., Williams, Y. (2008) *The Bloomsbury Guide to Creating Illustrated Children's Books*, London: A& C Black, p11.

¹⁷ Shulevitz, U. (1985) *Writing with Pictures*, New York: Watson-Guption Publications, p16.

¹⁸ Duvoisin R. 'Illustration' Egoff, S., Stubbs, G.T. & Ashley, L.F. (1980 2nd edition) *Only Connect readings on children's literature*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, p305.

¹⁹ Shulevitz, U op cit p18

²⁰ This undergraduate programme is delivered by Glyndwr University, in Wrexham. The author was a full-time student between 2006 and 2008 and obtained a diploma. Her tutors produced a comprehensive book (Mc Cannon, D., Thornton, S., Williams, Y. (2008) *The Bloomsbury Guide to Creating Illustrated Children's Books* London: A& C Black) including sections specifically dedicated to picture books.

²¹ Shulevitz, U. op cit p33 'Only when the reader cares and likes the actor does the story's ending matter to the reader.'

²² Lorraine, W. 'An interview with Maurice Sendak' Egoff, S., Stubbs, G.T. & Ashley, L.F. (1980 2nd edition) *Only Connect - readings on children's literature*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, p327

²³ Nodelman, P. 'Picturebook Narratives and the Project of Children's Literature', Colomer, T., Kümmerling-Meibauer, B. & Silva-Díaz, C. (eds.) (2010) *New Directions in Picturebook Research*, New York: Routledge, p13

²⁴ Although other Ethiopian languages could have been added, the publisher and author decided to use English and the introduction is also written in English. This may limit the readership although all teachers have to learn English which is compulsory from primary school, including in non-formal education.