

Display or Disappear: The Importance of Free Previews for Digitally Marketing Children's Picture Books in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond

**by
Olivia Johnson**

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Bachelor of Arts, University of British Columbia, 2019

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Declaration of Committee

Name: Olivia Johnson

Degree: Master of Publishing

Title: Display or Disappear: The Importance of Free Previews for Digitally Marketing Children’s Picture Books in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond

Committee:

John Maxwell
Co-Supervisor
Associate Professor, Publishing Program

Amanda Lastoria
Co-Supervisor
Adjunct Professor, Publishing Program

Mauve Pagé
Committee Member
Lecturer, Publishing Program

Jen Gauthier
Committee Member
Publisher, Greystone Books

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified (early 2020 through the time of writing in early 2022) the need for publishing companies to digitally market their children's picture books as people were encouraged to stay home and businesses went mostly online. There arose a heightened importance for free previews—tools from within digital marketing, to be used by publishing houses to connect with buyers online. Free previews are visual samples of a product. As the children's picture book marketplace is competitive and the content heavily illustrated, free previews provide online evidence of a book for customers see what they are buying before purchase. Focusing on North America and using case-study support and analysis from inside a Vancouver-based book publisher Greystone Kids, this project report investigates how free previews are important to promoting children's picture books in light of COVID-19 and will continue to be significant as the publishing industry proceeds into the future.

Keywords: free previews; children's picture books; publishing; book marketing; digital marketing

Dedication

I dedicate this project report to all the beloved publishers, booksellers, librarians, and book buyers who continue to persevere through the pandemic.

I would also like to dedicate this paper to my mom, for always encouraging me to do more and for being my constant support through the best and worst of times.

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To the team at Greystone Books: Jen Gauthier, Rob Sanders, Alex Cooper, Makenzie Pratt, Megan Jones, Kathy Nguyen, and everyone else, thank you for taking a chance and believing in me, and for allowing me to help bring your incredible books to life. It has been so wonderful to learn and work alongside everyone. I began studying publishing because of the work Greystone Books does and I am extremely grateful to continue working for this amazing independent publishing company.

To my fellow Master of Publishing peers: Even though it was such an unusual year, and we only met once so far, I really valued the experience of learning beside you all and sharing ideas. You are all kind and genuine people, and I look forward to maybe working together again in the future.

To the Master of Publishing program: Thank you for providing me with the space and opportunity to continue my education in the world of publishing. You introduced me to dozens of important industry professionals and opened so many more doors.

And thank you to everyone who reads this report. I hope this brings you what you are looking for.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the need for publishing companies to digitally market their children's picture books as people were informed to stay home by their local governments and businesses went mostly online. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Ducharme) and the WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated, "it is a crisis that will touch every sector" (Ducharme) of the marketplace. Regarding the publishing industry, bookstores were deemed non-essential businesses and had to temporarily close. *Time Magazine*, an American weekly newsmagazine ("Time"), wrote "COVID-19 forced non-essential businesses to close across the [continent and] bookstores shuttered their doors and feared the worst" (Chow and Gutterman). *Quill & Quire* reported that for Canadian bookstores, "the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered libraries [and stores] across the country in March 2020" ("Canadian Bookstores") too.

Publishing houses took note of the urgent marketplace demand to be more visible online and pivoted their marketing strategies to reach book buyers. *Time Magazine* observed that "[a]s these bookstores remain closed, an online movement emerged to bolster their chances...[and] book [professionals] adapt[ed] to online business models [to] survive" (Chow and Gutterman). There arose a heightened importance for free previews, tools from within digital marketing, to show, illustrate, and provide evidence of a printed book for people browsing and buying titles online. Focusing on North America specifically, and using Greystone Kids for support, this report is a case study that considers why free previews are important assets to effectively digitally market children's picture books in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. More so, free previews will continue to be significant as the publishing industry proceeds into the future.

Chapter two supplies information on what free previews are and how they work under the umbrella of digital marketing. Free previews are visual samples of a product and are not new concepts to the world of online marketing. In publishing, free previews are used in various ways to present books to buyers and provide people with visual

proof that a title matches its product description. With COVID-19, there arose a heightened importance for publishing houses to use more free previews to help the discoverability of their books as people were shopping and browsing titles mostly online since bookstores were closed and people didn't want to be in public environments for risk of COVID-19 exposure. These free previews are not free content though, and publishers continue to take steps to protect their intellectual property.

The third chapter will provide a foundational understanding into how a children's picture book is defined, the current market size in North America, and it will analyze the ways in which free previews can be used to help promote these titles. Printed children's picture books are the focus of this report since they are largely comprised of complimentary text and imagery. Children's picture books are also different than illustrated books in terms of the amount of visual reliance and use of drawings to convey story meaning.

In the fourth chapter, I will use my experience from my 2021 internship at Vancouver-based independent publisher Greystone Books, more specifically their imprint Greystone Kids, to provide insight into how free previews are currently being used as part of their digital marketing strategy for their children's picture books. A detailed look into one title, *Teatime Around the World*, and interviews from the company's marketing team will support my findings that free preview content is helpful to book buyers and important to promoting a title. *Teatime Around the World* was published during one of the peak times of the COVID-19 pandemic, making it an exemplary title to assess.

The fifth chapter of this report looks to other Canadian independent children's picture book publishing companies and highlights the similar digital marketing practices they are undertaking to promote their books with the reality of COVID-19. New online platforms that are available for publishers to post free preview content and reach a larger audience will be outlined with supporting information.

This report was written based on a four-month internship I had at Greystone Books and Greystone Kids in the summer of 2021. Interning at Greystone Books was a wonderful and insightful experience. I learnt a great deal about the world of digitally marketing books with the ever-present challenge of COVID-19. Upon studying how they

coped with the pandemic and were successfully pivoting their marketing strategies, I felt it was appropriate to write this report to exemplify their practices. Being privy to the process behind their children's picture book digital marketing, I was allowed to investigate deeper into the reasons and rationale behind every step.

The purpose of this report is to guide readers through the modified ways in which publishing companies can market their children's picture books in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Free previews have become important assets for effectively digitally marketing children's picture books, and they will continue to be significant as the publishing industry progresses into the future. In the end, I believe readers will be more knowledgeable on what free previews of books are, what children's picture books are, how Greystone Kids approaches this marketing tool for their own children's picture books, and the new practices that can be utilized by publishing houses today. Ultimately, I hope this report influences future publishing professionals on how to successfully market their children's picture books with the help of free previews.

Chapter 2.

Understanding Free Previews in the Publishing Industry

Free previews fall under the umbrella of digital marketing. Digital marketing is becoming more important within the publishing industry, especially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic as more people turn online to shop for books. This section will provide a deeper analysis into what free previews are and how they are used within book publishing.

2.1. What is Digital Marketing and How Does It Connect to Free Previews?

Digital marketing is important to book marketing in present day. The American Marketing Association defines digital marketing as an “ever-changing, dynamic process” that “promot[es] business products and services across the internet [and through] many different [online] channels to prospective customers” (“American Marketing Association”).

Digital marketing is becoming more widely used by many companies around the world to promote their product and connect with consumers. Craig Dempster and John Lee, two Executive Vice Presidents for Merkle, a “data-driven customer experience management company that specializes in the delivery of unique, personalized customer experiences across platforms and devices” (“Merkle”), conducted a study that emphasized the marketplace shift to prioritizing digital marketing. In 2014, the pair analyzed the consumer marketplace over several years and uncovered that there was a “downward shift in consumption of traditional media[,] such as print and radio, [while at the same time] consumers drastically increased the number of hours spent on digital media”. This increase was from “52 minutes to 90” (Dempster and Lee 4) per day.

Similarly, Damian Ryan, Head of Media and Technology Mergers and Acquisitions for BDO, “one of the largest professional services firms in the world” (“KoganPage”), simply states we are in the midst of an “online revolution” (Ryan 2).

Businesses need to presently “connect with consumers who take technology and integrate it seamlessly into their everyday lives” in order for their product to be seen.

Digital marketing is not a new concept in the publishing industry. Digital publishing has been evolving over the last few decades as publishing houses continue to respond to the demands of their buyers and new media applications are becoming popular. “Starting back in 1971, Michael S. Hart launched Project Gutenberg and digitized the U.S. Declaration of Independence, becoming the first eBook in the world” (“History of the eBook”). Then in 1998, the first eBook readers were launched (“History of the eBook”) and more notably, Google was created (“History of the eBook”). Two years later, in “2000, Blue-Ray discs were [created, and] Stephen King offered his novella *Riding the Bullet* as a digital-only computer-readable file, and soon, Random House and HarperCollins started to sell digital versions of their publications” (“History of the eBook”). *Publisher’s Weekly* wrote the big boom of Amazon’s bookselling career too, introducing the Look Inside Feature in 2001, to be followed by the launch of the Kindle and the Kindle e-bookstore in 2007 (Milliot 3). Digitization of books was ramping up, and to keep up with these revitalized demands from consumers, publishing houses started to market their books in digital ways too. Ingram Content Group, “an American service provider [and distributor] to the book publishing industry” (“Ingram Content Group”), points to publishing houses creating their own websites, using email to connect with media, and sharing book content online through the Internet as part of the response to the digital movement (“Ingram”). Today, the American Marketing Association believes there are “countless ways to conduct digital marketing” and free previews are one of the best tools used in book publishing to do so.

2.2. What are Free Previews?

Free previews are an extension of digital marketing, and they consist of product imagery or text samples. It is crucial to grasp what free previews are to further understand their importance in book publishing and specifically, their use for children’s picture books.

Dejah Rubel, Metadata and Resources Management Librarian at Ferris State University, defines free previews as digital “photographic display[s of] an appropriate level of information about [an] object” (Rubel 60). These are additional images, such as

back, front, and side photos, of a good that are uploaded online for consumers to further see what they are buying. Rubel emphasizes that previews can simultaneously highlight the unique qualities of a product and “can more accurately aid [buyers] in making better decisions [by] giv[ing them] an immediate idea of the nature [of the item through] photographs” (Ruben 60) and imagery. Previews help the discoverability and visibility for a product online. Similarly, marketing scholar Stephan Greene wrote “the key to previews [is to] communicate the level and scope of objects to [buyers] so that comprehension is maximized, and disorientation is minimized” (Greene et al. 4).

Free previews are not new tools in the world of marketing. Ryan points to carvings on cave walls and ancient “Egyptians us[ing] papyrus to create posters and flyers” (Ryan 3) to historically ground readers’ minds in the world of free preview marketing. More academically, Fredrik Wallenberg, PhD in Information Management from the University of California at Berkeley (“Fredrik Wallenberg”) and author of *Judging a Book By Its Cover* notes that discussion around previews can be connected back to Raymond A. Bauer (Wallenberg 2), a Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education in the 1950s (“Raymond Bauer”). Wallenberg believes that Bauer “first suggested that the consumer decision making process should be seen from the perspective of risk taking” and that buying a product would equvalate to the risk of essentially throwing away money if the item was not good or if it was different than expected. As a possible solution, Wallenberg studied that if customers were “able to preview the good, [then it would] increase the likelihood of a purchase” (Wallenberg 2). In another case, Ted Roseilus, an assistant business professor at the Colorado State University, mentioned that free samples would be “one of [the] eleven risk reduction strategies” for buyers when it comes to purchasing an item. By using free previews, companies and customers can have a lower risk of product dissatisfaction. Ryan correspondingly states that “[p]eople have been trying to influence other people since the dawn of human existence, utilizing whatever means and media they had at their disposal” (Ryan 3) and presently, free previews are the means.

2.3. How are Free Previews Used in the Book Publishing Industry?

Free previews are used in various ways in the book publishing industry to further expose books to buyers. Free previews of books enable buyers with a digital “book

buying experience” (“Power of the Preview”) by “provid[ing] a free chapter or a peek inside” (“The Value of Free Book Samples”) interior spreads and illustrations, depending on the nature of the title itself. For clarification, a trade book might provide a sample chapter to read, and children’s picture books would offer a handful of interior spreads. Free previews of books can “be extremely persuasive [by] showing the depth, breadth, and quality of [a] book” (“The Value of Free Book Samples”) along with production elements like paper quality, binding, and size, in a way that description alone cannot fully capture.

Free previews for books are uploaded to numerous websites and online platforms to reach different types of book buyers. The amount of free preview imagery varies depending on the audience a publisher’s marketing team is trying to reach. For example, on Amazon, the recommended number of previews is 10% of the book’s final content (“Look Inside”). To reach the general public, a publishing company should upload free previews on Amazon, to their own website, and social media. On a company website, a higher or lower percentage of free previews of books can be uploaded depending on the marketing team’s preference. To connect with librarians and booksellers, a publishing house can utilize free previews in digital catalogues through industry-wide online sites such as Edelweiss+ and CataList. A digital catalogue’s primary function is to connect with librarians and bookseller accounts directly.

CoreSource is “digital asset management and distribution platform” (“CoreSource”) that allows a title’s data to be fed into these digital catalogue sites. CoreSource is used by some Canadian and American publishers to manage their online data, as well as distribute image assets (including free previews) to industry and consumer websites. The launch of CataList in 2011 marked the beginning of the “digital catalogue” (“Industry News”) industry trend and BookNet defines CataList as a “digital catalogue online tool for marketing, selling, and ordering books” (“BookNet”). Similarly, Edelweiss+ is a “unique digital catalog platform that publishers use to efficiently sell and market” (“Edelweiss”) titles. *Quill & Quire* outlined that digital catalogues “will not only include basic information such as trim size, price, page count, and cover image, but it will also allow publishers to feature enriched multimedia including book trailers[,] author interviews[, and free previews]” (“Industry News”) for librarians and booksellers to see that might help spark their interest in a title.

Librarians and booksellers are immensely important to the sales of books. Therefore, it is crucial that book publishers provide them with as much free preview content as possible, so they can more deeply understand a title in its entirety. Joseph Turow, a Professor of Media Systems & Industries (“Turow”), and author of *The Role of ‘The Audience’ in Publishing Children’s Books*, noted that librarians are the ones that will “bring the books to [buyers]” and they will “shun [formulaic] material, even if it has appeal initially” (Turow 93). With this perception, Turow encourages publishing companies to provide more visual insights into each unique aspect of a book via free previews so librarians and booksellers can make more well-informed decisions on their acquisitions. By using digital catalogues as a bridge, librarians and booksellers can first-hand see an entire set of interior or additional free preview content of a book from publishers in a protected way. The risk of oversharing a book’s content is minimized, as digital catalogues are only used by “other book professionals” (“Edelweiss Help”) within the industry (“ABPBC Digital Catalogues”).

To reach consumers directly, free previews of books are uploaded to online public platforms like the company website, Amazon, bookstore sites, and social media. On Amazon, free previews are called A+ assets or Look Inside features. On bookstore sites, these are just interior spread images. And on social media, free previews are posted photos or stories of the book on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, presenting more than just the cover itself. All these online spaces connect publishing houses with customers directly and only a few interior images from a title are shown to protect the book’s value. It’s important to post free previews in these online domains as the publishing industry’s *Hot Sheet* noted that in 2021 “more than 50 percent of all book sales occur online [and] publishers [must start] paying attention to the small details like free previews in order to “increase [direct] sales” (“BookSales Hot Sheet).

It should be noted that Amazon is a unique public platform for publishers to use in terms of A+ content. Amazon A+ content can classify as free previews directly targeting book buyers online. It’s defined as “Amazon’s way of letting [a company] enhance [their] product descriptions and page details [by adding] high-definition videos [and] enhanced images” (“Amazon A+ Content”) to further promote discovery. Instead of just showing interior spreads, key selling points or endorsement quotes for a book can be illustrated in a more eye-catching manner and added to a title’s product page.

Amanda Lastoria, a Research Associate with the Canadian Institute for Studies in Publishing points out that with direct-to-consumer sites, people are only allowed “to see roughly 10% of a book’s content” (Lastoria 6), this proportion was influenced by fair dealing guidelines in North America. Publishers maintain control over what free preview images of their books are available in these public spaces while simultaneously satisfying the consumer desire to see more of a product before purchase. There is a big difference in terms of security when uploading free previews of books directed to book professionals and those to the everyday consumer, and thus free previews are limited on these online sites. The security issues I’m referring to is piracy and downloading book online without paying for it or gaining the publisher’s permission.

Free previews are important to the marketing and discoverability of books. Especially in light of COVID-19, Lastoria emphasizes that the pandemic has “proliferated and amplified the ways in which [people] discover, acquire, and share printed books online” (Lastoria 1). Publishing companies need to spend more time showcasing “on-screen representations of a book’s materiality” (Lastoria 1) to successfully promote a title. Here, materiality is referring to a book’s quality of production, its design properties, its interior and exterior characteristics, and its physical attributes. A book’s materiality is significant because it is “where the money is... it is the most valued property of a book” (Lastoria 6) for both consumers and publishers. The materiality “justifies retail price and compels consumers to buy the book” (Lastoria 6). Without being able to see the title in person due to COVID-19 restrictions, free previews digitally present these key “selling points” (Lastoria 6) in a quicker way.

2.4. Do Free Previews Differ from Free Content?

Free previews of books are not the same as free content. In publishing, free previews are marketing tools used to garner interest and widen discoverability for book. Fredrik Wallenberg points out that there is a current argument in the industry that some companies think free previews “lead to increased sales through awareness of the good while others claim that previews cannibalize sales” (Wallenberg 1). He states the root of this concern is “[v]iewing digital content over the Internet automatically create[s] a local copy” (Wallenberg 3) and by exposing too much of a book on certain online platforms, the public could download and save interior spreads without paying.

Publishing houses can prevent free previews from cannibalizing sales “in a number of ways” (Wallenberg 3) though. Wallenberg suggests that publishers watermark interior spreads with their company logos, add time limits with content, and lock downloadable access as some of the ways in which companies can “limit content available” (Wallenberg 3). In addition, scholar Alice Li wrote *Optimal Design of Free Samples for Digital Products and Services* in the *Journal of Marketing Research*, suggesting that book publishers can alter “the image quality of the sample [to be] much lower than that of the original print book” (Li 421) to discourage piracy, but in turn, this practice might negatively affect the consumer’s “attractiveness of the content” (Li 421). One of the better practices is for publishers “to use [their] insights” (“Booksales Hot Sheet”) to gauge their free preview selection based on how much they trust the receivers of the previews and therefore, how much free content they are uploading.

Chapter 3.

The World of Children's Picture Books in North America

This section will unpack what a children's picture book is and the current children's picture book marketplace in North America. Chapter three further provides insight into how important free previews are to the marketing and discoverability of these titles. It is valuable to know this information to lend context to this report and to enable readers with an understanding into children's picture books, an area of publishing which has not been thoroughly explored by previous Master of Publishing courses.

3.1. What is a Children's Picture Book?

A children's picture book is a visually dominant illustrative short story that is typically read to an/or by young children. Children's Book Editorial Services Librarian Brooke Vitale describes them as books "in which the illustrations and the text work together to tell the story" ("Children's Books"). According to Vitale, picture books are meant for children ages three to seven, and "word count, trim size, and plot" ("Children's Books") are the most important guides. Printers are vital to the production of children's picture books and in North America, printers specify that these titles are "less than 1000 words [and use] font sizes [from] 16 [to] 24 pts" ("Book Printing"). Page count is on average 32 pages, to match a printing signature, and the standard children's picture book sizes are 8 x 10 inches or 10 x 8 inches in landscape orientation ("Book Printing"). The types of plotlines in children's picture books shares themes that can be universally understood by young children too; for example, tales of friendship, first-time experiences, and expressing emotions ("MasterClass").

It is key to know that children's picture books are different than illustrative storybooks. In *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, Professor of Illustration Martin Salisbury and Professor of Children's Literature Morag Styles differentiate the two through "the particular relationship" (Walters) between "word and image" (Salisbury and Styles). In children's picture books, there is an increase in the number of visuals and in the "sequence of images that usually in conjunction with a

small number of words, carry much of the ‘narrative responsibility’ of the story” (Walters). The ‘narrative responsibility’ cannot be fulfilled by text alone in children’s picture books. Further, Salisbury and Styles report that through these images “children learn about the rules of narrative conveyed through the use of color, line, perspective, framing and positioning on the page” (Walters). In illustrative books, images can be sparse and act as additions to the text, not essential narrative vehicles to the story. Additional evidence of this idea is presented in *Picturing Canada*, where literature professors Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman mention “illustrative books have images dispersed throughout the book at distinct intervals as partial pages, spot illustrations, or head and tail pieces [whereas] in picture book[s], neither words nor images exist in isolation but are integrated into a complex synthesis in which all parts of the book are crucial to understanding” (Edwards and Saltman 4). Picture books published in Canada today support these understandings and are filled with visuals to help convey a title’s narrative.

3.2. Why Should We Care About Children’s Picture Books?

Picture books are one of the earliest forms of engagement that children have with literature. They have the power to influence people’s perception of life from a young age. Gabrielle Strouse, a Professor in Counselling and Psychology Education at the University of South Dakota, studied the effect of children’s picture books on young minds in 2018. She found a similar conclusion to Salisbury and Styles understanding that these books “appear to weave themselves seamlessly into the lives of young readers” (Walter). Strouse claims that picture books are an “important source of new language, concepts, and lessons for young children... teach[ing them] transferrable information about words, letters, science, problem solutions and moral lessons” (Strouse 9) in a way that is easy to comprehend and enjoyable. More so, journalist SF Said from *The Guardian* unpacked how children’s picture books become “part of our emotional autobiographies” (Said) by teaching people key lessons and emotional comprehension from such a young age. For example, the way humans grow up and understand sadness could be influenced by the blue and grey imagery used in picture books. Similarly, happiness may correspond to bright and yellow visual cues. *Picturing Canada*’s Gail and Edwards support these findings too by stating the visual nature of children’s picture books use “symbolism and colour to express the emotional tone” (Edwards and Saltman 76) to children in a way that words could not. Children then carry these key life lessons

and emotional understandings from children’s picture books into the future with them, subconsciously or consciously. By influencing perception from such a young age and having seemingly endless amounts of life lessons to convey to children, there are many children’s picture books available in the marketplace today.

3.3. Understanding the Children’s Picture Book Marketplace in North America

The children’s picture book market in North America is large and competitive. In 2020¹, publishing companies in Canada and the United States saw a rise in the children’s picture book sales. These countries can be analyzed together given the similarities in their publishing processes and the overlapping connection between both country’s publishing industries, in terms of printing, distribution, senior and junior company branches and personnel (like HarperCollins and HarperCollins Canada, Penguin Random House and Penguin Random House Canada, and Simon & Schuster and Simon & Shuster Canada).

According to BookNet Canada, a non-profit organization that develops technology, standards, and education to serve the Canadian book industry (“BookNet Information”), even with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, sales did not decline (“BookNet”). BookNet recorded the sale of almost a million unique ISBNs, corresponding to around 50 million physical books sold at a total value of \$1.1 billion in Canada (“BookNet”). More specifically, Juvenile and Young Adult titles accounted for almost half of the market share in 2020 (“BookNet”) (see figure 1).

¹ This section analyzes 2020 data since 2021 data was still being processed.

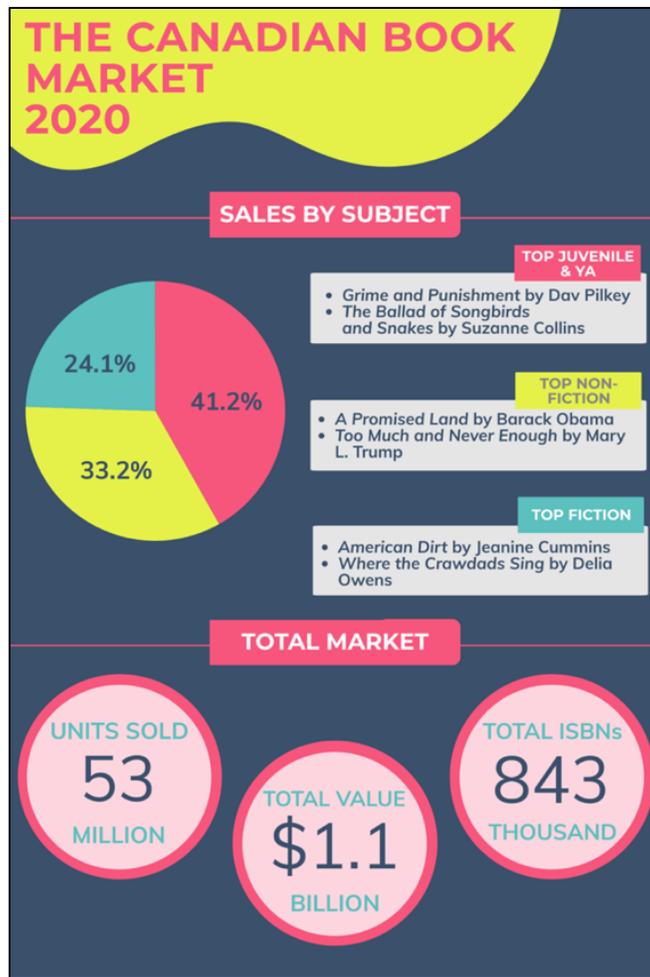


Figure 1 BookNet's visual graph of The Canadian Book Market in 2020 ("BookNet")

Likewise, in 2020 the United States children's picture book industry was profiled by IBIS, a market research company ("IBIS"). IBIS found that "the market size, measured by revenue, of the children's book publishing industry is \$2 billion" ("IBIS World") and forecasted a steady rate of increase in the years leading into the year 2022 ("IBIS World") (see figure 2). In the report, IBIS explained their thoughts regarding the predicted continuous growth in children's picture book revenue in the coming years, nodding to "the primary factor [being] the percentage of business conducted online" ("IBIS World") enabling book discoverability and purchase to be easier for buyers. With more business happening online, there is a heightened need for publishing houses to market digitally too, to reach this newly and readily available audience.

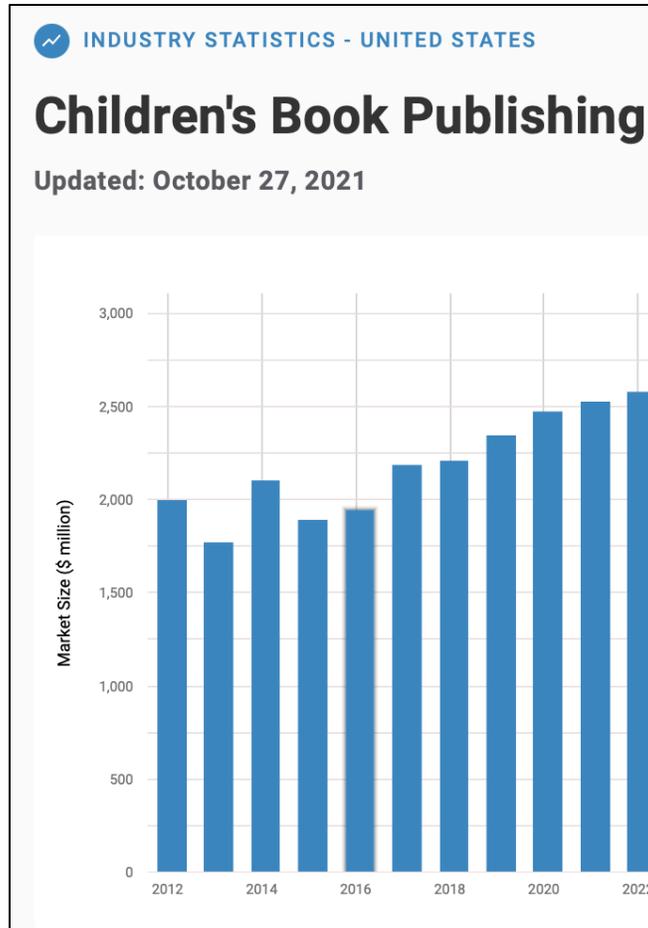


Figure 2 IBIS World's graph for the children's book market size for years 2012-2022 ("IBIS World")

The COVID-19 pandemic did not completely disfigure the children's picture book marketplace in North America. Even with the pandemic, it is notable that children's picture books continue to be among the most popular sellers and online retail is one of the most important sales channels to credit to this evidence. This is supported in *COVID-19 and Book Publishing: Impacts and Insights for 2021*, an industry report written by book professionals Cliff Gruen, Thad McIlroy, and Steven Sieck, who mention online retail saw "10 years of growth in a matter of months" (Gruen et al. 4). They unpacked the unprecedented and rushed ways in which the pandemic shifted transactions between publishers and book buyers online and children's books "enjoyed double digital increases, adult books, far less in their unit sales" (Gruen et al. 9). The *Hot Sheet* supported these findings in their report too, mentioning that "2020 was a historic year for children's nonfiction print book sales... unit sales up by 23 percent versus the prior year...due to the need for educational materials as well as entertainment at home"

("BookSales Hot Sheet"). Overall, there is evidence that the children's picture book market is continuing to grow in North America especially with the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of writing in early 2022, and free previews are helping expand a title's exposure online.

3.4. How are Free Previews Used for Marketing Children's Picture Books?

Today, free previews are among the most important tools to effectively digitally market children's picture books. Free previews help describe the book in ways that product summaries and metadata information alone cannot, and digital evidence of content leaves less room for misjudgement in the eyes of the buyer. As children's picture books are visually prominent in their product nature and sold alongside many other titles in the marketplace, there is a constant need for publishing companies to present as many key selling points and unique features about their titles as possible to increase buyers' interest. Publishing houses writing full color, a printing description referring to a book printed in four colors of ink rather than black ink only, in a title's metadata doesn't answer possible book buyer questions such as what color pallet is used, are spreads bright or dark, are there people or are "objects used to represent a character" (Walter).

Free previews help visually explain and showcase book features. Furthermore, as seen in the definition of a children's picture books, the 'narrative responsibility' images have to support the small word count that cannot be fully described by text descriptions alone. Instead, by pairing data information with free preview images, buyers can more accurately judge if the picture book "reveals the quality of the product [description] in terms of the text content, font and image resolution, color, layout, and formatting" (Li et al. 420) and soundly base their purchase decision with this visible proof. Similarly, Turow insists that interior and "exterior characteristics like format, cover attractiveness, [and interior] color are of primary importance to buyers' criteria" (Turow 94) and can be only truly seen online through free previews.

Having free previews of children's picture books opens space for the process of 'picturing' for buyers. In *Children's Literature in Education*, Jen Aggleton, a PhD candidate in Education and Children's Literature at the University of Cambridge ("Aggleton"), notions to the idea of 'picturing' as "building images inside the reader's

mind [as] a vital process in the reading process” and comprehension for adults and children. In her study, she supports the use of free previews for children’s picture books by insisting “illustrations carry additional information [that] ha[s] a significant impact on the [consumer’s] response to a text as a whole” (Aggleton 232). By having “more than one visual option” (Aggleton 232) by posting interior images and spreads, not just the cover, free previews “open up the possibility of the book” (Aggleton 240) in more engaging ways and can connect to buyers on a more intimate level.

Free previews help the engagement and discoverability of a children’s picture book. Greenleaf Book Group, an independent publisher and distributor based out of Texas (“Greenleaf”), states that businesses can “improve discoverability for [their] book in a crowded marketplace and encourage readers to become more engaged with [their] content” (“Power of the Preview”) through sample images and free preview content. Children’s picture books are filled with visuals that make it easier for publishers to create free previews and encourage buyers to becoming engaged with the content of book. More so, by presenting free previews on various platforms, publishing companies can expand their reach over the intricate systems within the Internet. Regarding social media specifically, Paulina Kubala-Chuchnowska, a content marketing specialist at PressPad (“Kubala-Chuchnowka”), a digital marketing platform (“PressPad”), encourages publishers in uploading digital free previews online as it “stimual[tes] people to share and forward [a book] with just one click” (Kubala-Chuchnowska 2020). This momentum can possibly encourage a children’s picture book to pop-up on the screens of many additional individuals who might have not otherwise been targeted in the publishing company’s original digital marketing outreach.

This information is important to digest because publishing houses can enhance their digital marketing techniques for their children’s picture books since they are comprised largely of visual content. More so, businesses aim to fulfill the needs to their consumers, and free previews help satisfy this current book buyer desire.

Chapter 4.

Greystone Kids

Greystone Kids is a Vancouver, British Columbia-based imprint of Greystone Books. I interned at Greystone Books and Greystone Kids in the summer of 2021 as part of the requirements for my Master of Publishing program, learning the ropes of the company from the inside out. At this time, there were lingering concerns regarding COVID-19 but I was able to work in-office and gain experience firsthand. It is important to analyze this publishing house's practices to support the effectiveness of marketing children's picture books with help from free previews with the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to guide future practices within the industry.

4.1. About Greystone Kids' Children's Picture Books

Greystone Kids launched on January 17, 2019 ("Greystone Books Announces New Kids Program") under founding publisher Rob Sanders ("Greystone Kids"). As of January 2022 though, Jen Gauthier is publisher of Greystone Books and Greystone Kids. The Greystone Kids imprint publishes sustainably produced picture books for children alongside nonfiction books for middle-grade readers in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K ("Greystone Kids"). Being based in Vancouver, one of Greystone Kids' primary markets is Canada however 70% of the imprint's sales happen in the United States (Gauthier). Greystone Kids uses Publishers Group West for distribution in the U.S. and the University of Toronto Press for distribution in Canada ("Orders & Distribution"). This information permits Greystone Kids to contribute to North American publishing research.

Aldana Libros is an imprint of Greystone Kids that specializes in producing English-language editions of international titles ("Greystone Books"), serving to "bring outstanding books from around the world to the English-speaking market" ("Greystone Books Announces New Kids Program"). Aldana Libros is led by Patricia Aldana, a significant publisher in the Canadian children's book industry and founder of Groundwood Books ("Greystone Books Announces New Kids Program").

Each Greystone Kids title reflects the standard definition of a children's picture book set forward earlier in this report—a visually dominant illustrative short story that is

typically read by young children. Gauthier confirms that these books tend to be largely hardcover, with cloth bindings, and have very visual content. Many are produced with dust jackets to add to their selling value and library value as well. A great deal of time and attention is paid to every detail—such as editorial, design, marketing and production—in each children’s picture book, and staff concept meetings are held months in advance before publication to ensure everyone understands the unique value of every book, which in turn needs to be communicated to the industry marketplace (Gauthier).

4.2. The Impact of COVID-19 on Greystone Kids’ Picture Book Titles and Their Marketing Techniques

Before COVID-19, the Greystone Kids marketing team put emphasis on traditional channels for promoting their children’s picture books. Makenzie Pratt, Greystone Kids’ Marketing Coordinator, states that energy was “focused on in-person events [like] launches, readings, and author activities with children” to help the discoverability of their books. Deborah Sloan, a contracted American publicist for Greystone Kids, echoes that social media and eNewsletters were starting to become useful platforms for marketing teams to “reach beyond the world [they] are already connected with” (Sloan). Library conferences were also of utmost importance. People could “walk by company booths and physically see new titles they might have not known about” (Sloan) in any other way. “Meetings were essential times to get together” (Sloan) between buyers and sellers, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, these in-person gatherings were put on pause.

Greystone Kids used and produced marketing materials in a different way before COVID-19 than they do now. Galley proofs, defined as “[cheap], preliminary [draft] versions of a [children’s] publication meant for review” (“Advance Copies”), were printed in large quantities and mailed to media contacts to look over and to sales representatives “to bring to bookstores” (Gauthier). Similarly, the publishing house digitally altered book covers and interior illustrations to create posters, bookmarks, and other printed promotional materials to distribute to brick-and-mortar stores, libraries, and retail companies (Pratt). Online information and data about children’s picture books were available before the pandemic but they were not updated to the same extent as in present day (Sloan).

Now, with the reality of COVID-19 and writing in early 2022, Greystone Kids prioritizes digital strategies and free previews to sell their children's picture books. One of publisher Jen Gauthier's top concerns is "replicat[ing] the visual representation" of Greystone Kids' picture books online, and free previews offer a medium to do so. Free previews help Greystone Kids to sell their books as "object[s], not just content" (Gauthier) and add richness to a title's product page. "Online visibility became a bigger focus [since COVID-19]" (Pratt) for the Greystone Kids brand and free previews are tools utilized to help achieve this goal.

With the beginning of COVID-19, online exposure was quickly understood to be more critical for many publishing companies to gain impressions and heighten the discoverability of a children's picture book than pre-pandemic times. In Greystone Kids, Sloan emphasizes this rapid marketing transition by simply saying "everything is digital now" within the company. Connecting with librarian, teachers, media, reviewers, authors, illustrators, and other publishing houses is readily available though "one click" (Sloan). Galleys can be sent digitally through numerous online platforms like Edelweiss+ and email, and virtual events replaced in-person launches. Sloan has noticed that some media sources are "more open to being pitched to" and meetings, which didn't lose their value, can happen virtually around the world, "opening the door to [even] more conversations" (Sloan) with people that may have been unreachable before the pandemic.

As a company, Greystone Kids has increased the amount of time and resources they invest into creating high-quality free previews of their children's picture books and is expanding their exposure on various online platforms to reach consumers (Pratt). Pratt, whose role focuses in part on digital marketing, points to new lightboxes, background props, and high-resolution cameras as a part of the recent budget expenses from the Greystone Kids marketing team. These upgrades help improve the quality of the company's free preview photos (Pratt) for the expanding number of online platforms in which they would be uploaded to. Currently, the primary online outlets are Edelweiss+, CataList, Amazon, and the company's social media, but more websites like BookBub (see section 5.2 for further information) are being investigated (Pratt). The design team at Greystone Kids is also allocating additional time out of their days for creating visual assets like website banners, illustrative quotes, and other free preview content in a

streamline, eye-catching, and appealing medium (Pratt)². Greystone Kids also now invests money into industry consultants to help guide its marketing team on additional ways to improve their online reach and book promotions, and how capitalize on various digital platforms (Pratt).

4.3. How Does Greystone Kids Utilize Free Previews to Promote Their Children’s Picture Books and Why Do We Care?

Greystone Kids increases a picture book’s discoverability and impressions with free preview image assets. The publishing house ensures all their children’s picture books are available on multiple online platforms with numerous free previews for book buyers to see. These sites include, but are not limited to, Edelweiss+, CataList, Amazon, social media applications like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Twitter, the company teacher’s resource centre and the Greystone Books website (Pratt). Attention, time, and resources was paid to these sites before COVID-19, but since the pandemic, these platforms became even more important.

As mentioned before, one of the biggest differences between this range of online domains is the amount of free preview content available. Trade sites like CataList, and Edelweiss+ are used by librarians and booksellers, and these professionals require full access to complete interior spreads and final content of a children’s picture book. Librarians and booksellers need to entirely understand a title before they purchase it, and once they order and stock a children’s picture book, they are essentially endorsing it to be bought or borrowed by parents, educators, and other customers (Gauthier). Consumer websites, like Amazon, are accessed by the general public and uploading all final materials of a children’s picture book would be giving away free content. Greystone Kids keeps this information in mind through every season and the free content they upload, apart from the children’s picture book’s cover and text description, varies from interior spreads of a book to an illustrative quote or blurb endorsement to cropped scenes of the story. All these visual assets do classify as free previews, helping to

² See figures 10, 13 to 15, and 25. Figures will be individually addressed again later in this report.

deepen a buyer's understanding of what the picture book is about and what it looks like without a buyer physically touching and seeing the book firsthand.

The way Greystone Kids uses free previews is important to critique as other children's book publishing companies can note the impact they can have on a title's online promotion and discoverability. More so, this analysis can help influence future practices of digital marketing in the publishing industry.

4.4. A case study on *Teatime Around the World* to Exemplify Greystone Kids' Free Preview Practices

This section will analyze one Greystone Kids' children's picture book title to demonstrate the effectiveness free previews have on helping market and promote a title online in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In fall 2020, Greystone Kids published *Teatime Around the World* (see figures 3 to 8 for digital photographs of the book to reference) and used various free previews across a range of online platforms in their digital marketing campaign³ ("Teatime") (Pratt). Fall 2020 was "in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic" (Pratt). Pratt emphasizes there were "still closures" and digital marketing continued to be of utmost importance to Greystone Kids to reach book buyers. *Teatime Around the World* received "very little traditional media" (Pratt) due to COVID-19, making it an exemplary title to elucidate the importance free previews can have on a children's picture book digital promotion ([Link to View](#)).

Teatime Around the World is written by Denyse Waissbluth and illustrated by Chelsea O'Byrne ("Teatime"). It is a full-color children's hardcover picture book, 48 pages long and measures 9 inches wide by 11 inches tall ("Teatime"). It was published by Greystone Kids in North America on September 29, 2020, and the ISBN is 978-1-77164-601-7 ("Teatime"). For children ages 3 to 7, this picture book explores "tea cultures around the world with vibrant images and sweetly simple text" ("Teatime") and

³ See figures 9 to 23 for reference. Figures will be individually addressed again within each corresponding paragraph.

encourages children to learn about the diversity of their own heritage and that of their friends (“Teatime”). The U.S. price is \$17.95, and \$22.95 in Canada (“Teatime”).

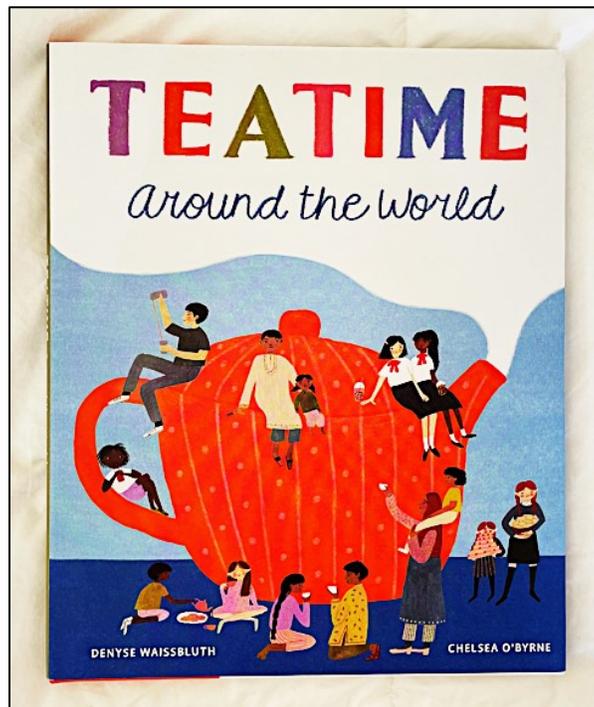


Figure 3 Digital photograph of *Teatime Around the World's* jacket cover (Johnson)

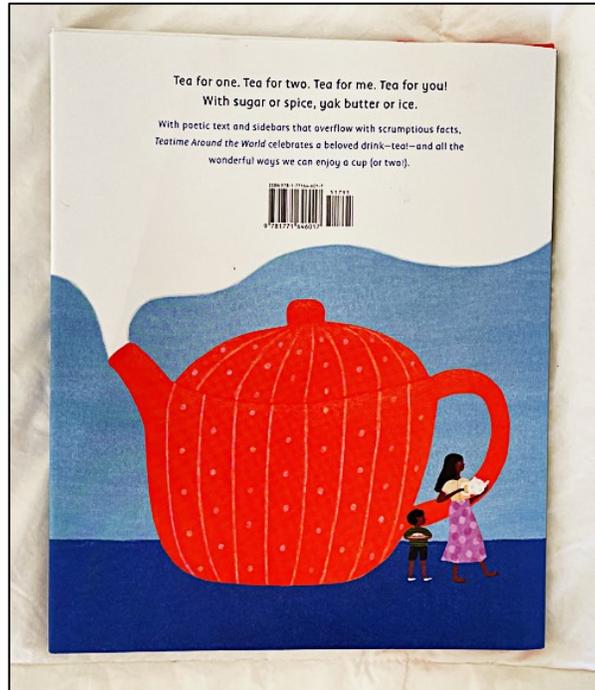


Figure 4 Digital photograph of *Teatime Around the World's* jacket back cover (Johnson)



Figure 5 Digital photograph of *Teatime Around the World's* jacket flap and case (Johnson)



Figure 6 Digital photograph of *Teatime Around the World's* endpapers and jacket flap (Johnson)



Figure 7 Digital photograph of *Teatime Around the World's* hardcover binding (Johnson)



Figure 8 Digital photograph of an interior spread from *Teatime Around the World* (Johnson)

Greystone Kids

TEATIME
Around the World

Teatime Around the World

Illustrated by: [Chelsea O'Byrne](#) 🇨🇦 By (author): [Denyse Waissbluth](#)

[Edit this record](#)

9781771646017	\$22.95 CAD
Hardcover, Picture book	Forthcoming
English	11in x 9 in
Children/Juvenile: Interest age, years 3 - 7, US school grade range P - 4	48 pages
Oct 28, 2020	Greystone Books
	Greystone Kids

BISAC: JUVENILE NONFICTION / Diversity & Multicultural

[Stock Availability](#) +

[Add to catalogue](#)

Description
Key Selling Points
Author Bio
Reviews

Explore tea cultures around the world with vibrant images and sweetly simple text.

This poetic picture book takes children of all ages on an adventure around the world to discover new cultures and friends through tea. Did you know that po cha, the traditional tea in Tibet, is thick and salty like soup? Or that in Iran, tea is served with a rock? (A rock candy, that is!) Or that afternoon tea was dreamed up in England by a duchess who complained of being hungry between lunch and dinner? *Teatime Around the World* welcomes the youngest of readers with simple, vivid poetry complemented by unique facts about different tea cultures. Vibrant, detailed pictures by Chelsea O'Byrne bring to life debut author Denyse Waissbluth's joyous celebration of diversity and deliciousness.

Sales Rights +

Supply Detail -

Distributor: UTP Distribution

Availability: Not yet available

Expected Ship Date: Sep 25, 2020

Carton Quantity: 20

\$22.95 CAD

Figure 9 Greystone Kids' CataList page for *Teatime Around the World*

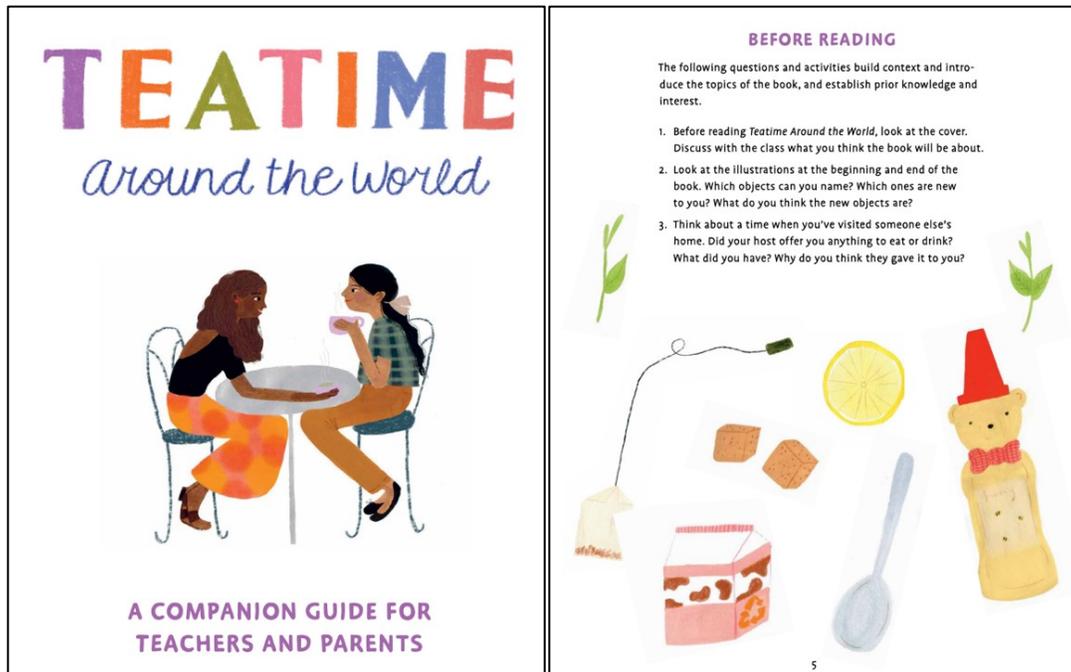


Figure 10 *Teatime Around the World's* teacher's guide

Edelweiss+ is where the most enriched Greystone Kids free previews can be found (see figure 11). For *Teatime Around the World*, every interior spread image was uploaded to Edelweiss+. There is less concern about sharing the children's picture book's content here, as this site is only fully accessed by "book professionals" (White), like "booksellers, librarians, [and] publisher sales rep[resentatives]" (White). Pratt emphasizes the way Greystone Kids puts free previews "on Edelweiss+ is more for the professional and institutional buyers who will [purchase] the books to [then] put in their library and store... that's why [Edelweiss+] get[s] a larger amount of content". Sloan further supports the cruciality of uploading "as rich content as possible" to this marketing platform, particularly in regard for librarians to see the books. Librarians are "ambassadors[,] the bread and butter, the experts" (Sloan) of the children's picture book market, becoming like "an extra sales force" (Sloan) for Greystone Kids. By providing these book professionals with an array of free previews, in addition to an image of a title's cover, professional and institutional buyers can be assured they are purchasing a product with appropriate content that is likely to be bought or borrowed by their patrons. More so, by having "consistent visuals" (Pratt), a publishing house's reputation can be

“trusted” (Pratt), and their page on digital catalogue sites returned to. If one publishing company presents no free previews of their children’s picture books, buyers, whether industry professionals or the general public alike, may be more inclined to turn to another business’ profile that can offer them more visual proof of a product (Sloan). The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced this practice as necessary, and Greystone Kids continues to upload every interior spread of their children’s picture books.

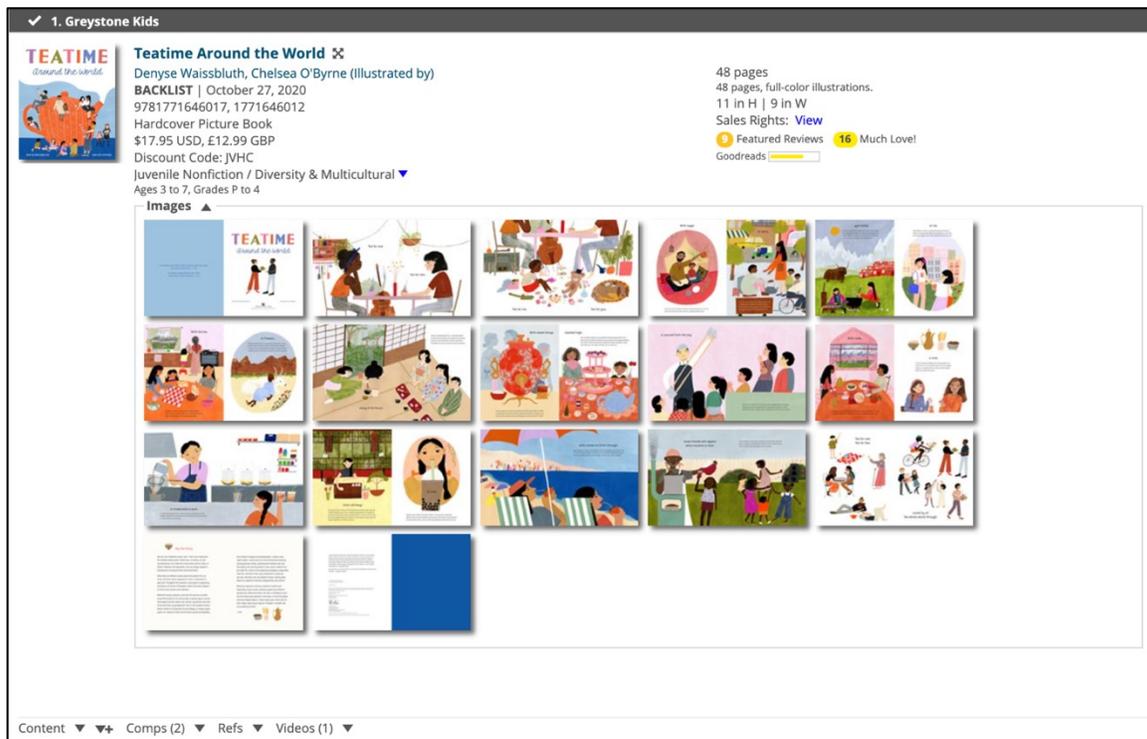


Figure 11 Greystone Kids' Edelweiss+ Page for *Teatime Around the World*

Similar to Edelweiss+, Greystone Kids ensures it has free previews of every children’s picture book available on their website too (see figures 12 and 13). With *Teatime Around the World* typically only two to three interior picture book spreads are uploaded per title as the company doesn’t want “to give too much away” (Pratt). These spreads present the layout, the colors and characters of the children’s picture book without exposing the entire story, practicing the use of free previews to show the product more thoroughly. Buyers that land directly on Greystone Kids’ product page and have quick access to free previews from within the book may then not feel the need to research the title again through third party search engines, increasing the likelihood of

having a direct sale (a direct sale is preferable since publishers can gain information from the customer to engage with them in the future and do not need to split a book's sale with a third-party seller). The Greystone Kids marketing team can also gain data from that customer via embedded links to market to them in the future (Pratt).

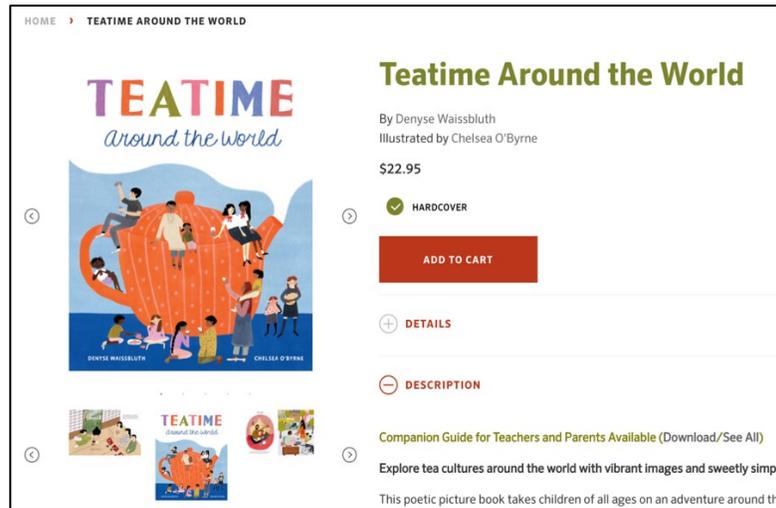


Figure 12 Greystone Kids' product page for *Teatime Around the World*



Figure 13 Example of Greystone Kids' free preview of an interior spread on their product page for *Teatime Around the World*

Amazon A+ content, a tool for creating enhanced images and text placements on an Amazon product page ("Amazon Seller"), is helpful in promoting Greystone Kids children's picture books. *Teatime Around the World* used various modified A+ visuals to

aid in the book's discoverability and deepen consumers' understanding of the product in a concise manner (see figure 14). Enabling the general public to see more of a children's picture book helps answer Sloan's marketing question of "who wants to spend \$18.99 [U.S.] on a book they haven't been able to see more of?" while simultaneously protecting the Greystone Kids' book property by keeping the content limited. Amazon A+ content offers a middle ground between Greystone Kids and buyers by supplying key selling points and information in a visually interesting manner. "A review is turn[ed] into illustrated content that looks beautiful" (Sloan) alongside cropped imagery from within the actual picture book, offering people quick and comprehensive preview. These are effective in the sense that people can see the book as more than just text but instead the title is "represented [as a] whole package" (Gauthier) digitally. Amazon A+ content is "something that will stop people on a book's page and make them buy [the product]" (Gauthier) instead of "clicking through" (Sloan). Sloan also insists online "consumers always have other choices" and Amazon A+ free previews encourage people to buy the Greystone Kids' children's picture book (Sloan).



Figure 14 Example of Greystone Kids' Amazon A+ content for *Teatime Around the World*

Greystone Kids has increased their usage of free preview content on their social media posts too. Instead of just a book cover, social media users are being shown snippets from inside the actual book's interior spreads, creating a "greater degree of awareness of the book" (Pratt) online. Free preview social media posts sometimes mimic

the Amazon A+ content too, reaching a new demographic of users with the same informative visuals (Pratt). Looking at *Teatime Around the World*, there are various formats of book posts presented from before publication to months after publication. Pratt used free previews on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to gain impressions on *Teatime Around the World* (see figures 15 to 22). Sloan notes that at the time, in fall 2020, these online platforms were the “best [way to] spread the word digitally” and Greystone Kids has “so many titles, [the budget] need[ed] to be divide[d] up” (Sloan) properly. Social media is one of the “most cost effective [types] of advertising [a company] can do” (Sloan) to “try and influence click throughs” (Sloan). Pratt summarizes “[m]ore and more people discover books online instead of from a newspaper” and the effectiveness of using free previews on social media may be in part due to the “age of people having kids and their online resources” (Pratt). Some users have even commented on Greystone Kids’ Instagram posts asking to see sample interior images from the picture book, providing some proof of the consumer demand for more access to a book in the marketplace before a purchase decision is made.



Figure 15 Example of a cropped free preview image to fit Instagram’s proportions for *Teatime Around the World*



Figure 16 Example of social media and online engagement with *Teatime Around the World*



Figure 17 Note the comment on the right side of the figure from an online user asking for more free preview content of *Teatime Around the World*



Figure 18 Example of a Facebook preview for *Teatime Around the World*

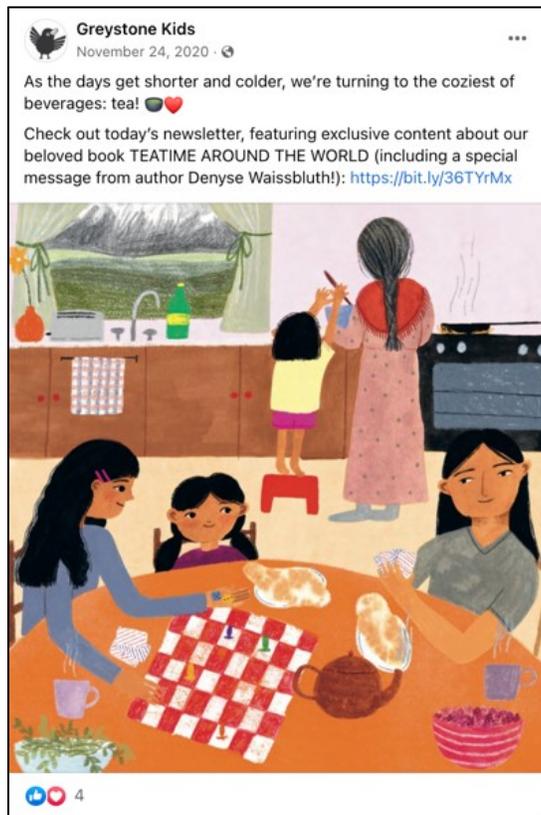


Figure 19 Another example of an interior image as a free preview on Facebook for *Teatime Around the World*

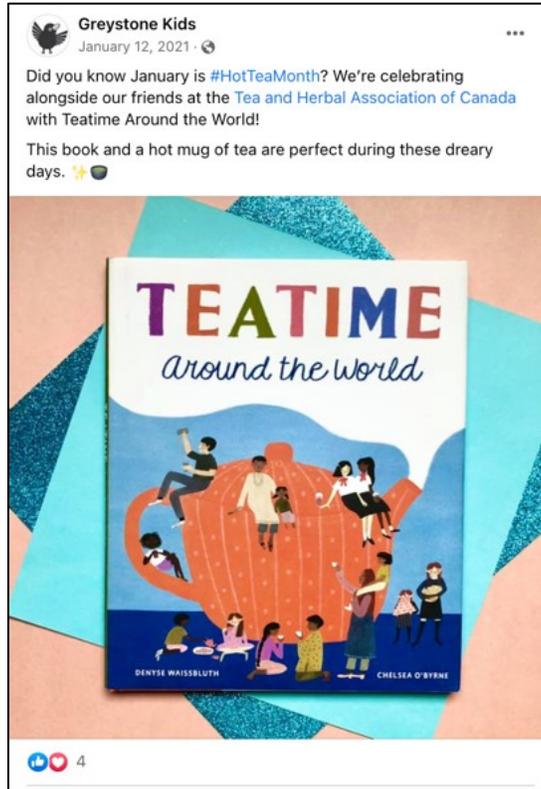


Figure 20 Additional example of a Facebook free preview and digital marketing post for *Teatime Around the World*



Figure 21 Example of a Twitter free preview and digital marketing post for *Teatime Around the World*

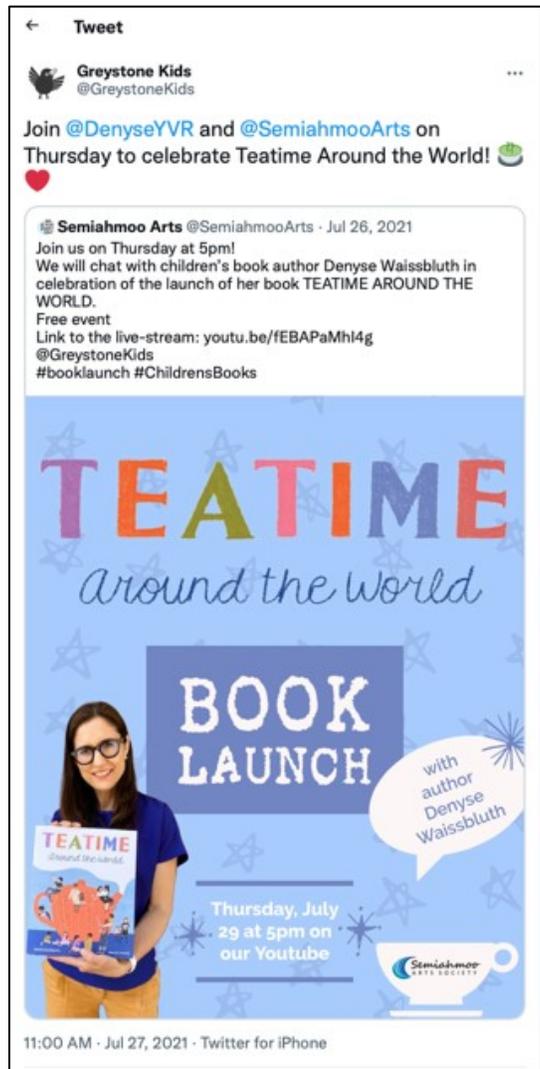


Figure 22 Another example of Twitter's free preview content featuring a poster for *Teatime Around the World*

Influencers like and propel free previews, aiding in Greystone Kids' children's picture books discoverability. Pratt mentioned that "organic influencer outreach" (Pratt) has become very valuable to the marketing team in order to create buzz and gain impressions for a children's picture books online. She uses free previews to initially garner interest and continues to "nurture" (Pratt) these influential relationships into the future. *Teatime Around the World* "really took off with influencers" (Pratt) and there was a spit-ball effect online, reaching more people than the marketing team expected. Pratt notes that though Greystone Kids "can't trace a direct link between [free previews online] and sales, that doesn't necessarily mean that effort isn't helping" the title. There is an

evident domino-like effect with influencers creating buzz for a book, which is effective to capitalize on as the present media era continues to be bombarded with COVID-19.

By using free previews on a wide range of digital marketing platforms, the reach for *Teatime Around the World* extended and the picture book gained a notable number of more impressions when compared to previous Greystone Kids books (Pratt). The same colors, fonts, and pictures used by all free previews were meant to overlap and “stand out” (Sloan) online. The Greystone Kids marketing team adheres to the marketing principle that a book “needs to be seen seven times” (Gauthier) for buyers to “clue in” (Pratt), and consistent exposure to these images helps generate a sense of interest in a particular title. The free preview digital marketing practice is used for all new Greystone Kids titles, and though the type of image assets alter depending on the various platforms, each picture remains classified as free preview content.

Gauthier reports that *Teatime Around the World* is one of Greystone Kids’ strongest selling titles, and as of the writing of this report is going into a third printing. The book received numerous reviews from big publications, like *Quill & Quire*, *The School Library Journal*, and *Kirkus*. *Quill & Quire* even included a free preview of an interior spread from the book in their assessment (“Quill & Quire”) (see figure 23), demonstrating the media and consumer desire to have access to this content, while also reinforcing the ease in which free previews can be used online to catch the eye of more people, casting a wider reach for a product to a bigger audience. The free preview content on social media was so compelling that “influencers went [as far as] to nominate *Teatime Around the World* for the “Bookstagram Influencer Award” (Pratt) and it won #Bookstagang Best Books of 2020 in the Picture Book category (“Inclusive Story Time”).

Quill & Quire | COVID-19 | Industry News | Book Reviews | Kids' Books | Author Pr
Job Board

Teatime Around the World
by Denyse Waissbluth and Chelsea O'Byrne (Ill.)




Reviewer:
Sue Carter
Publisher:
Greystone
Books,
Greystone Kids

DETAILS
Price: \$22.95
Page Count:
48 pp
Format:
Cloth
ISBN: 978-1-
77164-601-7
Released:
Sept.
Issue Date:
September
2020
Categories:
Kids' Books,
Picture Books
Age Range:
3-7



Fancy upscale tea parties trace their roots back to the Victorian era, but when the china dolls and miniature cups are packed away and replaced with more grown-up pastimes, the ritual tends to disappear until later in life (when, for a mere \$1,500, aspiring socialites can enjoy tea time at the Plaza Hotel in New York and imagine life as the beloved children's book character Eloise).

Denyse Waissbluth studied tea culture in China, where the drink originated thousands of years ago. The former Vancouver journalist brings her expertise and enthusiasm to the charming new picture book, *Teatime Around the World*, exposing younger readers to the pleasures of a nice cuppa in various cultures beyond Eloise's "Rawther Fancy Tea."

Teatime Around the World invites readers to enjoy maté on a beach in Argentina, sip sorrel at a family gathering in the Caribbean, and observe the dramatic ritual of pulled tea in Malaysia. Vancouver artist Chelsea O'Byrne – who previously lent her talents to Candace Savage's *Hello, Crow* – uses watercolour, gouache, coloured pencil, and other media to create soft but rich scenes that are as soothing as chamomile. O'Byrne's artistic style is deceptively sophisticated but not alienating; one can imagine her illustrations of tea accoutrements as a print hanging on the wall of a trendy café.



While tea time is mostly presented as a communal experience to share with friends and family, Waissbluth opens her book with a simple rhyme of "Tea for One. Tea for Two. Tea for Me. Tea for You," as one of two young girls is depicted daydreaming over a steaming cup across the table from her talkative friend.

Figure 23 A *Quill & Quire* September 2020 article using free preview imagery from *Teatime Around the World*

4.5. How Will Greystone Kids Market Their Children's Picture Books in the Future?

Greystone Kids plans to continue to use free previews to digitally market their children's picture books in the future. *Teatime Around the World* provided proof for how effective free preview assets could be in helping increase impressions and widen a book's discoverability online, setting precedent for how future children's picture books would be digitally promoted. Engagement rates with this title raised across all online platforms despite buyers and reviewers not being able to see the book in person as easily as they could before the COVID-19 pandemic (Pratt). Gauthier mentions that it's

almost “ironic” that companies “can’t [directly] tie [sales] to digital marketing [methods]” but “every little visual—whether an Amazon ad or Facebook ad or store ad” leads to impressions which are “more valuable than we can quantify” (Gauthier). “Seeing those impressions” (Pratt) is a great sign to the Greystone Kids marketing team and helps continually propel a book forward, even past its original publication date.

For further support of the revitalized free preview marketing strategy utilized by Greystone Kids, in the spring of 2021, the imprint published a completely “wordless picture book” (“Kinder Books”) for children ages 3 to 7 (“Grasshopper”). This book was titled *Grasshopper* and it relied solely on imagery and “spatial relations and visual distortion” (NYT Krauss) to tell its story. Every free preview strategy used for *Teatime Around the World* was utilized again for *Grasshopper*’s digital marketing campaign. *Grasshopper* went on to be honored as one of the Best Picture Books of 2021 by *Kirkus* (“Kirkus Grasshopper”) and featured in *The New York Times* Book Review (“NYT Krauss”). Without free previews to accompany the promotion and product information pages of this children’s picture book online, it’s plausible that buyers would not have been able to understand the content as much as they normally may have been able to. Furthermore, it’s reasonable to believe that *Grasshopper* would have not done as well in the still pandemic-influenced book market without the free preview marketing strategy adopted from *Teatime Around the World* in the publishing season before.

4.6. How will Greystone Kids Use Free Previews for Their Children’s Picture Books in the Future?

Greystone Kids will continue to adapt to new digital marketing methods for promoting their children’s picture books, as well as expand their use of free previews in the future. The acknowledgement that online content will prevail in the publishing industry is understood by the marketing team and, in turn, they continue to investigate additional “formats that allow people to access their books in other ways” (Pratt). Pratt notes that there is a certain “convenience and potential for greater [discoverability] that online [marketing sites] offer” and going back to the same level of traditional marketing “feels unimaginable” (Pratt). Small improvements are already underway by adding more information, such as extra links to complimentary videos and digital catalogues when available (Pratt) (see figure 24). Additional free preview content is being designed and created too, such as larger image banners to digitally display multiple books in a series

at once or to take up more screen space on online platforms like Edelweiss+ (see figure 25). Greystone Kids is working to more thoroughly show the materiality of their children’s picture books by taking digital photographs of the physical product and uploading these images alongside other free preview content—a practice that will be implemented in their forthcoming publishing seasons too. A request was received over the course of my internship for an audiobook free preview of an upcoming title, and the marketing team is presently deciding how to make their children’s picture books “more accessible for people” (Pratt) with these unprecedented demands.

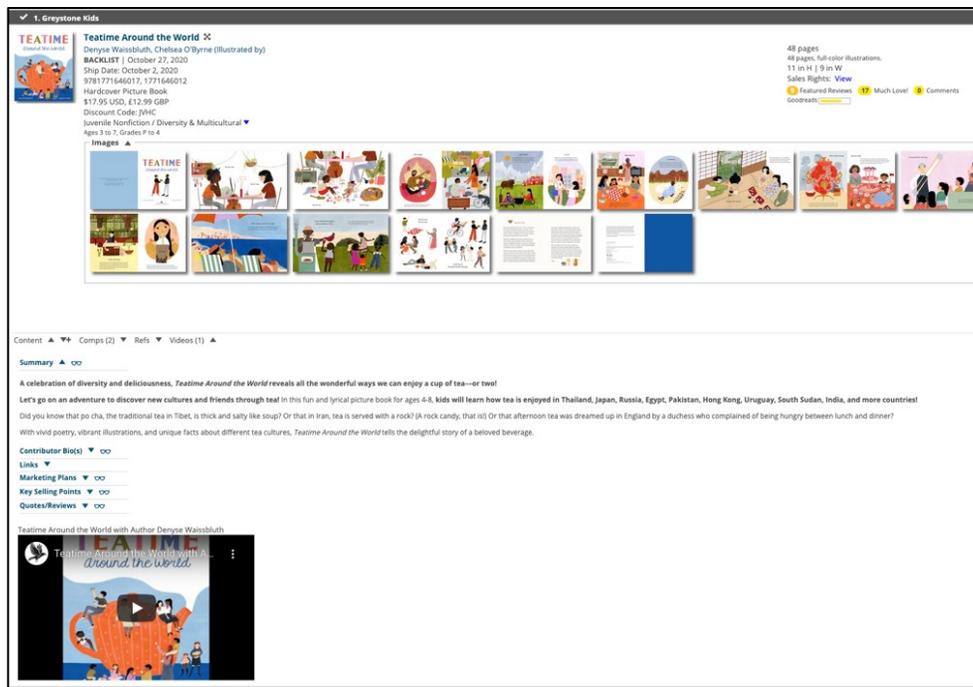


Figure 24 A newly added video for *Teatime Around the World* to the Edelweiss+ page

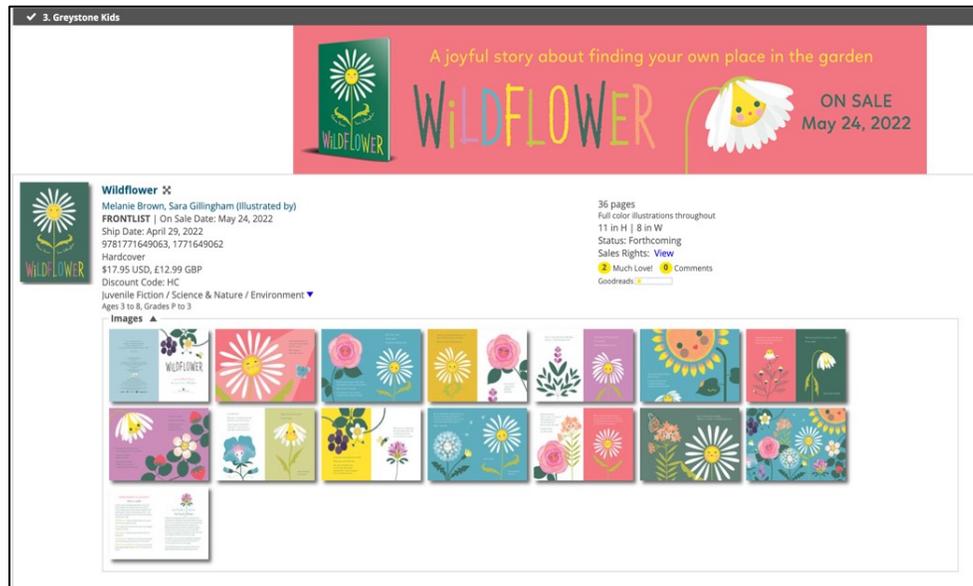


Figure 25 A new Edelweiss+ banner image at the top being used to help market a forthcoming Spring 2022 Greystone Kids’ children’s picture book

Greystone Kids acknowledges how effective free previews are in marketing their children’s picture books online, and publisher Gauthier wants to continue to advance digitally, but she also notes that she doesn’t see the company completely foregoing print materials either (Gauthier). “Print is expensive” (Gauthier) and Greystone Kids prides itself on being environmentally conscious (“Greystone Kids”), but there is still a “difference to see [children’s picture books] virtually than in print” (Sloan). In the case of the company’s print catalogues, the consensus is Greystone Kids “want[s] to be able to leave something with someone [that is] beautifully designed and will stand out” (Sloan) for reviewers or buyers or librarians or media contacts to flip through repeatedly. Thus, both print and digital catalogues are actively invested in. Especially in an era of COVID-19, with “Zoom fatigue” (Sloan) becoming more frequent, this is when “print materials are really important” (Gauthier) alongside free previews in sponsoring the Greystone Kids imprint brand.

Chapter 5.

Future Opportunities for Children’s Picture Book Publishers to Advance Their Free Preview Techniques

Many children’s picture book publishing companies in Canada are making digital advances to their marketing campaigns due to COVID-19. Free previews are becoming important tools to help convey and spread awareness about a book online, as marketing strategies within the publishing industry are shifting to prioritize online visibility to reach book buyers.

5.1. Insight into Other Canadian Publishers’ Marketing Response to COVID-19

Like Greystone Kids, the shift to high-quality and expansive digital free previews of children’s picture books can also be seen within House of Anansi Press and Orca Books. During my internship, I was able to sit in on an Association of Canadian Publishers Professional Development Seminar⁴ between all three publishing houses and listen to how each company was adjusting their practices to cope with the reality of COVID-19. More notably, I could hear how they’re attuning their digital marketing campaigns for the future. This is significant to note as it demonstrates that the Canadian publishing industry is already modifying digital marketing practices that will influence new campaigns in years to come.

House of Anansi Press is one of “Canada’s leading independent publisher[s]” (“House of Anansi”) and home to the Groundwood Books, a children’s book publishing imprint created by Patricia Aldana back in 1978 (“Groundwood Books”). Jessey Glibbery, Sales Manager for House of Anansi, mentioned that her company is investing more resources and time to ensure their books are actively visible online, and with COVID-19, there was a new “pressure to do it quickly” (Glibbery). Like Greystone Kids, free previews accompany every children’s picture book product page and online catalogues

⁴ August 24, 2021

(see figures 26 and 27), providing buyers with more materiality than text description alone. One major difference though is the amount of free preview content, with Greystone Kids adding every children's picture book interior spread to industry used sites like Edelweiss+, and Greenwood Books adding only a few.

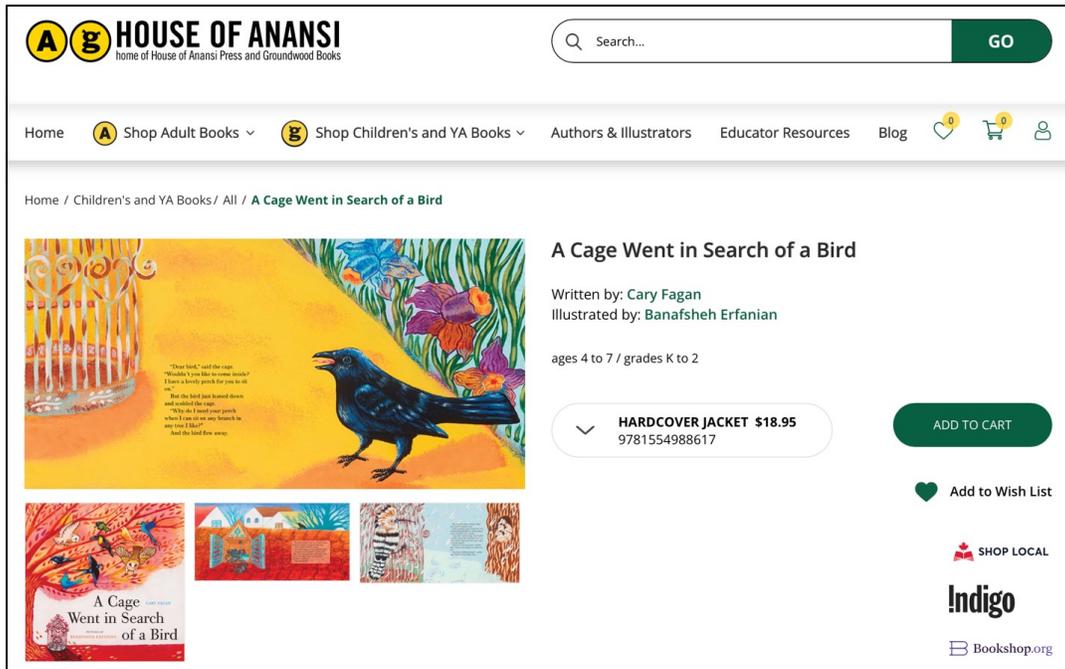


Figure 26 House of Anansi's free preview selection of a children's picture book's interior spreads

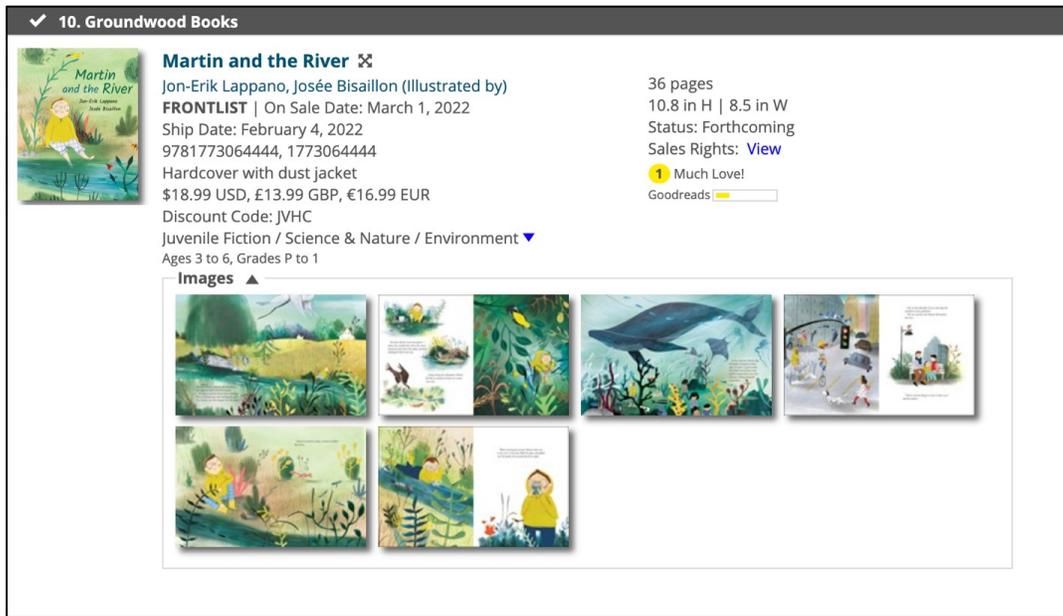


Figure 27 Greenwood Books using free previews on their Edelweiss+ product page too

Orca Books in Victoria, British Columbia, is “an independently owned Canadian children’s book publisher” (“Orca”) that echoes Greystone Kids’ heightened desire for greater digital marketing. Marketing Director, Leslie Bootle, notes that the publishing industry is currently in a period of time when companies can “reach people through inboxes” (Bootle). With the amplified need to be visible online due to the pandemic, Orca Books is “relying on technology that is going to get information across” (Bootle) and free previews are helping provide visual proof of the product. More free previews of children’s picture books are being used than before (see figures 28 and 29 for comparison) and Bootle emphasizes there is a “uptick in sales” (Bootle) when preview content and access is offered. A “publisher who is open to digital novelties and who moves with the times” (Kubala-Chchnowska), will be stronger than the companies that do not. Like Greystone Kids, Orca Books believes “if there was ever a time to start trying new technologies [for promotion], this is it” (Bootle).

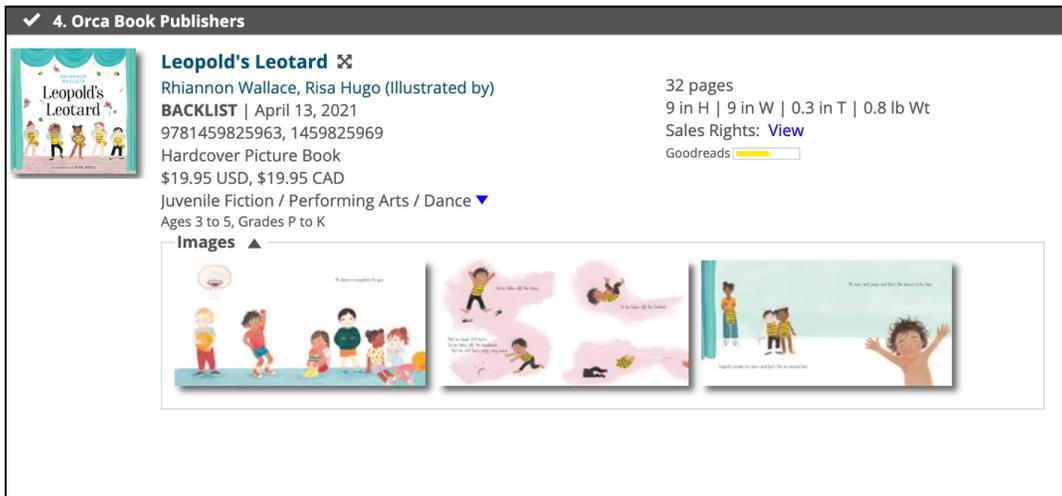


Figure 28 Orca Books’ children’s picture book product page on Edelweiss+ (2021) has three free previews of interior spreads

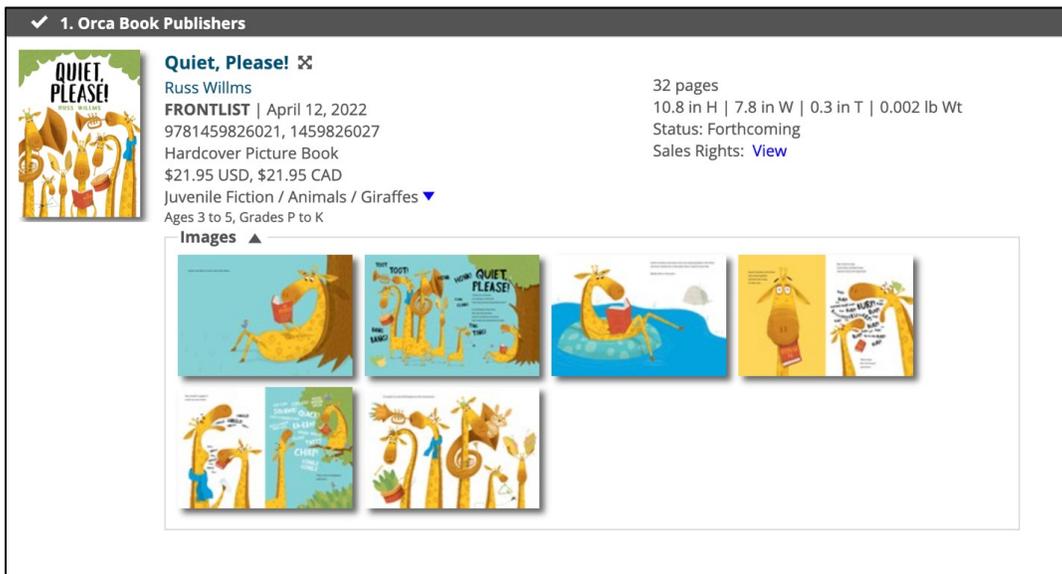


Figure 29 Orca Books’ children’s picture book product page on Edelweiss+ (2022) has five free previews of interior spreads, an increase from the year before

5.2. Free Preview Platforms That Are Available Now for Children’s Picture Book Promotion

BookBub is an online free preview platform that helps the discoverability of children’s picture books and should be considered by publishing houses to use in the future. BookBub is a “free service that helps [people] discover books [they] will love

through unbeatable deals, handpicked recommendations, and updates from their favorite authors” (“BookBub”) and companies. BookBub “doesn’t sell books” (“BookBub”) but instead provides consumers with greater access to new titles in a digital way by sending promotional newsletters, with free preview content, directly into subscribers’ inboxes. For children’s picture books, “more than 510,000” (“BookBub Partners”) individuals will be contacted and an average of “500 picture books will be sold per title” (“BookBub Partners”). These statistics and information are important to note as BookBub improves a children’s picture book’s reach and its number of impressions through this site. BookBub offers publishers a differing degree of promotional placements too, depending on the house’s budget and needs.

BookSends is a new website that promotes books and uses free previews to gain impressions. This site provides a space for publishers to connect with customers directly, in a similar way to BookBub. Customers can customize the types of books they would like to be notified about, and daily emails are sent to subscribers along with ads, discounts, and links to free previews for some of the requested titles (“BookSends”). Publishing conglomerates like Penguin Books and HarperCollins are among other some of the companies already using the platform, which could be influential to other, smaller presses (“BookSends”). BookSends is asking businesses to pay around \$100 USD per title promotion (“BookSends”) and to have 5 or more online linkable reviews, a completed cover, and a discount of at least 50% off full price (“BookSends”). Extra free preview image assets are encouraged (“BookSends”). Currently, the category for children’s picture books boasts approximately 16,500 subscribers (“BookSends”) and this number is expected to grow as digital accessibility and promotion continues to ramp-up within the book publishing industry.

Aerio is a digital “platform built around promoting, sharing, and selling books online” (“Aerio”). Supported by Ingram Content Group, Aerio provides a space for publishers to promote their children’s picture books and reach a larger demographic of customers. It is designed “to give users multiple avenues to engage with their audience” (“Aerio”) and share free preview content. Aerio creates a special link to previews and can “be used on websites, blog posts, in email marketing or social advertising, basically any online platform or social stream” (“Aerio How It Works”), making it easy for marketing teams to get their free previews in front of a large number of book buyers. The image upload process is straight forward and accessible to all publishers inside and

outside of the United States (“Aerio How It Works”) and companies can keep their content controlled by customizing what they want the customer to be able to see, similar to other marketing sites. Aerio pricing ranges from \$250 USD to \$2500 USD per year (“Aerio How It Works”) depending on the amount companies wish to spend and how many people they want to reach.

Social media is currently, and will likely continue to be, an important and accessible tool for publishers to post free previews and reach their consumers. “Social media has ascended so quickly that today[,] only a minority of media remain without a social component” (Sheldrake 17) and companies that don’t adapt, they will digitally disappear behind those that do. Social media sites like Facebook and Instagram have become “culturally significant” (Sheldrake 17) in North America and for many, “the primary domain in which [people] receive vast amounts of information” (Appel and Grewal 4). This is significant given that understanding how people are gathering their information is crucial to know for successful marketing strategies. Furthermore, social media is a unique free preview platform in the sense that it doesn’t discriminate on company size and financial resources—small and large publishers can utilize it, anytime, free of charge.

Influencers on social media cannot be underestimated either in their ability to help promote children’s picture books and propel free previews to a larger audience. In *The Future of Social Media in Marketing*, Assistant Professor of Marketing at the University of Southern California Gil Appel and Assistant Professor of Business at Dartmouth College Lauren Grewal (Appel and Grewal 1) highlight that “influencer marketing has a lot of potential to develop further [in the publishing] industry” (18). Connecting with people on social media instead of being targeted through a paid promotion or ad is deemed to be “more trustworthy” (Appel and Grewal 17) to consumers. Publishing houses can manifest these relationships with bookstagrammers and bloggers to showcase a children’s picture book, write reviews, and sponsor a title, gaining more impressions without any cost. Influencer posts have the ability to act as variations of free previews too, helping illustrate the perks and unique features of the book in a modern and digital way.

Revised digital marketing platforms and expansive use of free previews will continue to be more readily available in the publishing marketplace as it continues out of

the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastoria plainly states that “[a]s we come out of the pandemic, online consumerism will remain significant and widespread’ (Lastoria 10) so when brainstorming new ways to market and sell children’s picture books, “[p]ublishers must treat bookselling online—digital first, physical second” (Gruen 12) as the key principle. *Publishers Weekly* wrote that “virtual handselling” (“Publisher’s Weekly”) is the way of the future, and with the evident rise in the number of online spaces for publishers to promote their books, there is proof of this shift already taking place. Technology will continue to advance and with this, the buyers’ need to have content accessible to them will shift digital marketing strategies too.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion

Free previews are important assets for effectively digitally marketing children's picture books in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be significant as the publishing industry proceeds into the future. In chapter one, a description of free previews was explained to provide readers with a deeper understanding into what these tools are and how they work within digital marketing to help promote books in the publishing industry. It is critical to comprehend that free previews are tools to help market a product online, not to give away free content. With COVID-19, free previews helped publishing companies showcase their books online when customers were discouraged from coming into stores and seeing titles in person. Now in the spring of 2022, two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, free previews continue to be important assets to digitally market books.

The second chapter provided a baseline understanding of children's picture books. Readers learnt the product attributes and design characteristics of a printed children's picture book and the size of the children's picture book marketplace in North America. Children's picture books benefit greatly from having free preview content on their product page since image assets more thoroughly explain a title than text descriptions alone. More so, free previews of children's picture books are vital because a children's picture book relies heavily on its illustrative content and use of drawings to convey story meaning, adding to the overall product value.

In the third chapter, I used personal experience from my internship position at Greystone Kids to provide proof that free previews are actively and effectively being used by publishing companies in present day as part of their digital marketing strategies for children's picture books. An analysis into one title, *Teatime Around the World*, and its digital marketing campaign supported my research. The final chapter noted similar digital marketing strategies adopted by other Canadian independent publishing houses and explored new online platforms that are becoming readily available for publishers to post free preview content and reach larger audiences.

The purpose of this project report is to reflect on the ways publishing companies have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and to guide readers through the modified methods in which publishing houses can digitally market their children's picture books. The COVID-19 pandemic amplified the need for publishing houses to pivot their marketing strategies to become more visible online and to expand their digital marketing resources to connect with book buyers. Free previews are one of the key ways in which publishing companies have countered this new reality. It is important for publishers to utilize free previews as part of their digital marketing strategies since the way consumers access information has shifted to be more online and digitally reliant than pre-pandemic behaviors. Further, it has been investigated in this project report that free previews help satisfy the current consumer demand for greater access to a product before purchase and help a product stand out online. Regarding children's picture books, free previews have already become part of the norm in some publishing houses to promote these illustrative titles more strongly, and there is evidence that free previews help increase the discoverability and visibility of a children's picture book in present day. This research lays out effective strategies for future book professionals on how they too can use free previews to market and promote children's picture books.

In the future, as the publishing industry comes out of the COVID-19 pandemic, people may see more free previews of books available within the publishing industry—whether this is through additional Amazon A+ content, extra Edelweiss + images, or new online free preview book sites like BookBub. The publishing landscape will keep changing and free previews of books may start to be available for other genres of literature too, such as adult fiction or nonfiction, as publishing companies repeatedly adjust their marketing strategies to satisfy marketplace demands and find methods to provide consumers with what they are looking for and what they desire. The way consumers access books will keep advancing in the years to come, and it is necessary that publishing houses adapt with these changes to continue connecting with book buyers. In closing, the use of free previews will remain a fundamental digital marketing tool for successfully promoting children's picture books as the publishing industry proceeds into a future beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

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