

BETTING ON BABYLIT:
THE DEVELOPMENT, BRANDING, AND
MERCHANDISING OF A BOARD BOOK SERIES

by

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A B S T R A C T

This report details the development of the first board book series produced by Gibbs Smith, Publisher (GSP), a mid-sized independent publisher located in Layton, Utah. The introduction briefly reviews the history of GSP's book lists, including publisher Gibbs Smith's beginnings as a western-USA history textbook publisher and the company's growth into design-focused genres including home reference & architecture, cookbooks, and children's activity books. A discussion of children's board book developmental strategies and recommendations from early literacy experts is followed by an examination of GSP's experience developing, branding, and marketing BabyLit®. This report then focuses on how the introduction of gift products and an emphasis on branding individual series, including BabyLit, is proving financially successful for the company.

DEDICATION

To my family and friends: all of your generous time spent in conversations along the way helped me bring this project to fruition. Thank you.

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G L O S S A R Y

TERMS

DEFINITIONS

Board Book	A book printed on thick paperboard and specially folded and bound together rather than bound by saddle stitching or glue. Board books are designed to withstand rough treatment from babies and toddlers.
Book Behavior	The physical act of reading a book for meaning, including holding a book, looking at text and illustrations, and turning pages.
Book Merchandise	Merchandise that features characters, illustrations, or themes based on published books.
Brand Extensions	Merchandise, materials, or additional book series that expand and support a book's brand through reinforcing a central character, setting, or theme.
Emergent Literacy	The stage at which young children begin to show an understanding of books and book behavior in their attempt to become fluent, literate readers.
Visual Literacy	The ability to decode and make meaning out of illustrations and design.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The sale of children’s books has often been associated with the sale of other items, including stuffed toys, educational games and puzzles, and various pieces of stationery. When these items feature the characters or setting from a book, they are known as “additional book merchandise” or “brand extensions.”

Recently, monolithic companies such as Barnes & Noble in the United States and Chapters/Indigo in Canada have shifted their retail strategies to incorporate more non-book items in their physical stores. Merchandise that was once limited to a single display rack of toys and gadgets in the children’s department is now prominently displayed in high-traffic areas alongside more sophisticated offerings for adults. Chapters/Indigo CEO Heather Reisman discussed this shift in a June 2011 interview with the *Toronto Star* in which she said, “Our interest is in beautifully designed, affordable products that continue the journey people are already taking with us. So, you’re reading and we’re into reading lamps, writing materials and desk accessories. People come to us for cookbooks and table design. So we’re extending things for the table.”¹ A quick trip through the Robson Street location of Chapters in downtown Vancouver showed this change in retail offerings was in full-swing in spring 2013: the first floor of the store consisted mostly of electronics and home goods. Only a small wall was dedicated to bestsellers. Though there are many shelves of books in the second floor children’s area, finding a quiet area to read to a child is difficult. Most of the open space is utilized by children playing games or riding small tricycles and scooters. While Barnes & Noble hasn’t shifted its retail plan as dramatically as Chapters/Indigo, the largest display area on the first floor of their Sugarhouse location in Salt Lake City, Utah, consists of puzzles, games, and child- or teen-themed stationary. Clearly, additional book merchandise is on the rise.

Gibbs Smith, Publisher (hereafter referred to as GSP), a mid-sized independent publisher located in Layton, Utah, viewed booksellers’ increasing demand for book merchandise as a financial opportunity. First, though, they needed a book series that warranted brand extensions. The opportunity came when GSP decided to publish their first board book series, BabyLit®. Through a thoughtful and creative editorial and design plan, and through the development of book merchandise that reinforced and expanded the series’ brand, in a matter of a few years BabyLit became one of GSP’s most successful series.

This report briefly reviews the history of GSP’s book lists, including publisher Gibbs Smith’s beginnings as a history textbook publisher and the company’s growth into design-focused genres including home reference & architecture, cookbooks, and children’s activity books. A discussion of board book developmental strategies and recommendations from early literacy experts is followed by an exploration of GSP’s experience developing BabyLit. This report then focuses on analyzing

1 Dana Flavelle, “Reisman reinvents Indigo for the digital age,” *Toronto Star*, 24 June 2011.

how the introduction of gift products and a focus on developing brand awareness for individual book series, including BabyLit, is helping GSP weather the current publishing climate, and aims to provide fellow publishers with an overview of GSP's effective merchandising practices during the last five years.

The history of GSP showcases the guiding business principles GSP still uses today and is so quirky and delightful that it deserves a brief discussion in this report. The following information comes from an interview conducted by the author July 24th, 2013 while sitting with Smith in his rustic, wood-paneled office in the converted barn that serves as GSP's editorial headquarters. Barn cats are loping in and out of the office; sheep, goats, and chickens are munching happily away in the pasture out front.²

HOME ON THE RANGE: THE BACKGROUND OF THE COMPANY AND OWNER

Gibbs M. Smith began his publishing company, Gibbs Smith, Publisher, in 1969 during his time as an American Cultural History PhD candidate at UC-Santa Barbara. Smith was familiar with parts of the publishing business, having turned his master's thesis (a riveting history of labor organizer Joe Hill, an immigrant from Sweden who wrote lyrics to popular folk tunes in order to spread his message to non-English speaking laborers during the early 20th century) into a full non-fiction text, published by Grosset & Dunlap. Like many publishers, Smith wanted to "make ideas, and not widgets," and this sentiment carries on in GSP's publishing mandate: "to enrich and inspire humankind."

The capital Smith earned from the sales of his book, *Joe Hill*, and the subsequent movie option from Paramount Pictures allowed Smith to create his first publishing list. Knowing he had a finite amount of resources and a need to limit risk and ensure the success of his books, Smith began by utilizing his contacts in university history departments. He sent out a survey asking professors which hardback titles of classic California history texts, of the ones that were available to be licensed and printed as paperbacks, would prove most useful to them and their students. Smith chose the top four texts requested, and those books became his first list. So began GSP's successful pattern of minimizing risk by focusing on new ways to package popular content: Those first four books remained in print for a decade.

Smith recognized a need for diversity in order to appeal to broader audiences, and over the next 20 years he expanded GSP's lists to include state history textbooks for elementary and middle schools, architecture resource books, home reference books, and cookbooks. Each addition stayed true to his original publishing pattern: Smith expanded into categories in which he had personal contacts and an insight to the needs of the markets. Rather than wait for ideas to come to GSP, Smith was proactive in developing ideas in-house, then pulling from lists of authors, illustrators, and photographers who could take GSP ideas and create viable works. Having such a diverse list meant that GSP frequently was able to weather poor markets in one category due to the strength of another.

2 Gibbs M. Smith, personal interview, 24 July 2013.

COWBOY LOGIC: THE HISTORY OF DESIGN-HEAVY BOOKS AT GSP

Diversity of design has always been a paramount concern for Smith. During the early years of GSP, in true no-nonsense fashion, Smith wrote to the publisher he admired most, Alfred A. Knopf, seeking his advice. Knopf extended an invitation to Smith to meet at his New York office, where Smith would have the opportunity to meet with Knopf for half an hour and then spend the rest of the day perusing all of Knopf's books. Smith noted that Knopf's books had a variety of design styles and formats, but that all were of the utmost quality. This became the basis for GSP's design objectives.

Smith knew design was one area the smaller publishing company could control, and he decided against in-house designers in favor of freelance designers. Using freelance designers meant the company could be flexible with its budget and adopt very specific designs for each individual title, ensuring a diverse set of designs throughout their lists. Their attention to detail soon garnered them a reputation as a design-savvy book publisher, and GSP built solid relationships with a stable of freelance designers.

ANNIE, GET YOUR GUN: OPPORTUNITIES SEIZED BY THE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

In 2011, current Associate Publisher and Creative Director Suzanne Taylor saw an opportunity to use this focus on design to introduce a completely new genre to the GSP list: board books. Since joining the company in 1998, Taylor had focused on presenting GSP books as gift-items that felt handcrafted—the opposite of mass-market offerings from larger publishers.³ Her idea, BabyLit board book primers, which would pull content from classic literature and repackage it for babies, would be inherently design-heavy, allowing GSP to simply repurpose designs by reproducing them on a variety of gift products including tote bags, buttons, dolls, and playsets. These low-risk, high-earning gift items cleverly played on perennial sellers and parents' desire to share their interests with their children, while providing booksellers the additional merchandise they were seeking. But, before all of that could happen, GSP had to tackle the problem of publishing a category with which they had no experience.

3 Suzanne Gibbs Taylor, personal interview, 7 August 2013.

Prior to BabyLit, GSP had never attempted to produce a board book, nor any book almost solely reliant on the design and illustrations to tell the narrative. Due to the physical characteristics of board books and the particular needs of the target audience, it became imperative for Taylor to find the perfect designer and author for the project.

HEAD 'EM UP, MOVE 'EM OUT: PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PUBLISHING BOARD BOOKS

Children's board books have very specific characteristics: the entire book, including the cover, is printed directly on thick paperboard, then bound and trimmed. Board books are not saddle stitched or perfect bound, but are specially scored, folded, and bound together after printing. Each page panel consists of a minimum of two plies of paperboard, resulting in a very durable book appropriate for the hands (and mouths) of toddlers.⁴ Given the nature of producing such a book, production costs are higher than picture books, and GSP chose to set the retail price of BabyLit books at an increased price of \$9.99 to offset the production costs.⁵

When GSP first began developing BabyLit, Taylor was unable to find a board book printer in the USA (At the time of this report, there is one board book printer in the USA: Pint Size Productions.)⁶ This normally would not have posed a problem, as it's common practice at GSP to have their books printed in China, and only deal with a broker stateside; but, in this case, Taylor would have preferred to use an American company for the first printing of BabyLit.⁷ Though Taylor was confident BabyLit would become popular, using a USA printer in the beginning would have allowed her the flexibility to print smaller runs, while being able to fall back on a shorter turn-around for subsequent print runs, something not available from Chinese printers. This would have followed suit with GSP's policy to minimize risk, while still having the ability to maximize return. Luckily, GSP had minimal problems with their Chinese printer, Leo Paper Products, Ltd., noting only that due to the designs being directly printed onto the paperboard, there was a larger degree of flux in color and tone, which had to be carefully watched by the GSP production staff.⁸

While the production team wrestled with finding the most cost-effective plan for printing BabyLit board books, the editorial team faced a growing problem in the board book market: the demand for board books had increased rapidly over the last fifteen years, and many publishers had simply begun republishing picture books

4 Pint Size Productions, "What is a Board Book", http://www.pintsizeproductions.com/pintsize_board_books_USA.html. Accessed 1 September 2013.

5 Suzanne Gibbs Taylor, personal interview, 7 August 2013.

6 Pint Size Productions, "Our Story", http://www.pintsizeproductions.com/pintsize_story_about_us.html. Accessed 1 September 2013.

7 Suzanne Gibbs Taylor, personal interview, 7 August 2013.

8 Ibid.

developed for early elementary aged children as board books. These picture book adaptations have little regard for how age-appropriate the narrative or illustrations are for a younger audience, but they are extremely popular with parents, who may not realize the difference between board books and picture books. Though there was an opportunity to break into this market with a series created specifically for toddlers, it would be competitive.

Vicki Ash, coordinator of children's services at the San Antonio Public Library, made the following statement about board books in the March/April 2010 issue of *The Horn Book Magazine*:

Board books, most fundamentally, are a format-specific subgenre of the traditional picture book. Consequently, they are subject to the same evaluative criteria used when considering the larger group, namely the quality of both the text and the illustrations as well as the successful interplay of the two. Board books, however, must also be appropriate for the very youngest child, whose visual acuity, verbal skills, and attention span are in various stages of development. While the target group varies in age by only about thirty-six months, their developmental levels are remarkably different from one end of the spectrum to the other and from one child to the next.⁹

If this sounds like a tall order, it's because it is. Multiple articles have been released in recent years detailing the breakdown in quality of board books —not their physical quality, but their narrative and illustrative quality. As early as the March/April 1997 issue of *The Horn Book Magazine*, then-librarian and coordinator of special collections at the Cooperative Children's Book Center of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Kathleen T. Horning, criticized recent board book publishing habits in an article titled “Board Books Go Boom”:

With the current boom in board books, it seems that nearly every best-selling picture book is destined to become a board book, whether the content is suited to babies and toddlers or not. Conversely, we see fewer and fewer original board books being published — those that are specifically created with the interests and needs of the youngest in mind. In the rush to repackage successful picture books as board books, it seems that the ultimate audience for board books has been entirely disregarded.¹⁰

So what *does* make a quality board book? Horning suggests a limited amount of text detailing straightforward concepts such as object naming paired with “simple, flat, boldly colored artwork.”¹¹ Most importantly, Horning says, board books need to “help babies begin to understand the idea of books: here is an object that has

9 Vicki Ash, “What Makes a Good Board Book,” *The Horn Book Magazine*, March/April 2010, 86.

10 Kathleen T. Horning, “Board Books Go Boom,” *The Horn Book Magazine*, March/April 1997, 157.

11 Ibid.

something to look at and something to say, and we make it work by opening it up and turning the pages like this.”¹² Sadly, board books that combine these qualities still seem to be lacking in the market, despite the growing demand for books for babies.

In her article “More Board Books, Please!” in the Spring 2007 issue of *Canadian Children’s Book News*, Carol McDougall, program director of the Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program and former librarian for the Canadian Children’s Book Centre, details her very unique job: to provide a bag of books to every baby born in the province within twenty-four hours of their birth. McDougall notes the same problems with re-published editions of toddler books as Horning, and passionately calls for Canadian publishers to invest in board book publishing by disagreeing with the idea that board books are too risky and niche to develop a successful series. She believes the demand for board books will continue to increase due to parents’ growing interest in their children’s early cognitive development, the increase in programs like Read to Me!, and the demand for baby reading programs at public libraries.¹³

For these children’s literacy experts, success of board books becomes compromised when ideas are too broad and complicated for an infant’s attention span. Both Horning and McDougall use the same example when detailing a poorly executed board book — a book that sounds, at first mention, quite similar to Taylor’s vision for BabyLit — a boiled down version of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which begins “Long ago most forms of life were much different than they are today,” and concludes, five pages later, with, “We’re lucky to share our world with so many different animal friends!”¹⁴

It’s one thing to be able to physically produce a quality board book. But how would GSP avoid the same pitfalls and backlash other publishers were facing? The key was in the attentiveness of GSP’s creative team to both content and design, and their selection of author and designer.

BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID: CHOOSING THE PERFECT AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR FOR THE CONTENT

Prior to Taylor’s “lightning strike” moment, which set the ball rolling for the development of BabyLit, she had been contemplating the recent increase in interest in the classics, particularly in the works of Jane Austen. Focus Features had released *Pride & Prejudice* starring Keira Knightley and Matthew MacFadyen in November 2005, Sony Pictures had released *The Jane Austen Book Club* in October 2007, and Quirk Books had just released *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* in May 2009. Taylor was looking for a way into the “Janeite” market, and felt strongly that a board book

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Carol McDougall, “More Board Books Please!” *Canadian Children’s Book News*, Spring 2007, 2.

¹⁴ Kathleen T. Horning, “Board Books Go Boom,” *The Horn Book Magazine*, March/April 1997, 155.

series based on classic literature would appeal to parents' personal interests and would play on many parents' desire to share their hobbies and preferences with their children. Taylor also knew she wanted the board books to give the feel of each classic, without necessarily retelling the whole story. Rather, her vision was for each board book to be a "primer" that would teach basic concepts like counting, colors, and vocabulary. On top of that, she needed a team that would be able to produce something that felt handcrafted and special, and would warrant a retail price higher than what was currently on the market. What she needed to bring this vision to life was an author and illustrator who had a deep love for the classics, as well as the flexibility and creativity to stray from the original text, while keeping the themes of the classics intact.

GSP's creative process typically begins with an idea tossed around in-house. If enough members of the editorial and sales teams express interest, market research is conducted and a preliminary search for an author and photographer or illustrator (depending on the project) begins. For BabyLit, this search was kept close to home in order to ensure another publisher did not pick up the idea. Following their practice of low-risk investments, GSP editor at the time, Jennifer Adams, a Janeite herself, wrote the text for the first BabyLit book: *Pride & Prejudice: A BabyLit Counting Primer*. Having the author in-house allowed Taylor and the creative team to supervise the project closely and provide a large amount of input.

Because of GSP's practice of working with a variety of designers, Taylor was able to pull from her large contact list to find the perfect illustrator and designer for BabyLit: Alison Oliver, of Sugar Illustration & Design in New York City. Oliver, who had worked with GSP on a previous project, had the bold and charming style Taylor wanted.

Since Taylor felt strongly that BabyLit would become a successful seller, she wanted to pass that impression onto booksellers by creating a series right from the get-go. GSP had decided on *Pride & Prejudice*, given the buzz Austen's book had in the market at that time. They chose *Romeo & Juliet* as the companion release title because of its enduring popularity and familiarity within their target market.

Interestingly, GSP's creative team did not consult any early literacy resources while developing the BabyLit series, though Taylor felt strongly that "smart baby" had not been done well by other publishers to this point; rather, she noted how mass-produced and poorly designed many board books were. Taylor and the editorial team pulled from their personal experience as parents and their instincts as publishers to focus on combining minimal text with colorful designs in a way that they hoped would appeal to parents as well as children. GSP's lack of awareness of toddler literacy isn't uncommon: in "Emergent Literacy and Children's Literature," Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, an advisory editor for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* (2006) and professor at the University of Tübingen, notes

that the majority of emergent literacy studies focus on “children aged four to six”.¹⁵ BabyLit’s target market is children aged birth to three; only recently have studies been conducted on this age group.

WRITING FOR WHIPPERSNAPPERS: A DISCUSSION OF TODDLER LITERACY THEORY

A collection of essays by a variety of early literacy experts edited by Kümmerling-Meibauer entitled *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3* provides a window into the emerging field of toddler literacy theory — providing valuable information for companies looking to publish books for toddlers. For literacy theorists, the first step of learning to read is learning the “rules of book-behavior.”¹⁶ According to Kümmerling-Meibauer, this includes “sitting still, turning the pages, holding the book in the correct position, and looking carefully at pictures.”¹⁷ An adult models these behaviors as they read to a child.

Aside from learning book-behavior, children also learn the structure of conversation through being read to by an adult. The majority of board books have such limited text that a narrative created by an adult, usually in the form of a question-answer structure (e.g. “What is that? Is that a ball? It is a ball! Can you point to the ball?”), becomes a natural part of reading the story. Kümmerling-Meibauer summarizes literacy theorists Kerstin Nachtigäller’s and Katharina J. Rohlfing’s argument that this type of interaction teaches toddlers that “a question elicits an answer, and that gestures and questions are clues to starting a communication process.”¹⁸

Where in the past it was often thought that children learn to read in elementary school, and instruction before that age wasn’t of great importance, now, a multitude of literacy theorists agree that the “first encounters with picturebooks exert a great influence on the child’s developing sense of literacy.”¹⁹ To put numbers on it, Kathleen Ahrens summarizes a variety of studies in “Picturebooks: Where Literature Appreciation Begins”:

Westerlund and Lagerberg (2008) found that 18-month-old children whose parents read to them six times a week had a larger amount of expressive vocabulary, regardless of the child’s gender. Rodriguez et al. (2009) found evidence that the overall literary experiences of toddlers

15 Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Emergent Literacy and Children’s Literature,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 1.

16 David Lewis quoted by Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Emergent Literacy and Children’s Literature,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 1.

17 Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Emergent Literacy and Children’s Literature,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 1.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

at 14, 24, and 36 months explained the differences in the children's respective language skills by the age of three.²⁰

This is where board books come in. Though literacy theorists would love to see children exposed to books as early as possible, picture books just don't quite fit the bill for the rough hands of babies who are still learning book-behavior. Board books, with their sturdy paperboard and wipe-able glossy pages, withstand tosses across the room and slobber from curious mouths. If introducing children to books early and often is highly recommended by literacy experts and more and more parents are listening to experts' advice, publishers should take the time to consider spending more time and energy on developing original board book series that meet the standards set by literacy theorists.

Howdy do?: Comparing and Contrasting BabyLit Board Books to Literacy Recommendations

You may be thinking, "This is all well and fine, and fairly convincing, but how do we evaluate the narrative quality of a book with so few words?" Comparing and contrasting BabyLit's narratives to the recommendations of literacy theorists will hopefully shine some much-needed light on this topic.

According to Pauline Davey Zeece and Susan L. Churchill of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Taylor's hunch that parents would appreciate board books based on books they know and love was spot on: "Children of all ages develop a passion for literature from adults who share enthusiastically and responsively. Thus, some of the first books shared with babies should contain stories best loved by adults."²¹ Ahrens says emphatically, "...in order for the caregiver to continue to enjoy reading time, it is also an important (but often overlooked) point that the material also be engaging at some level for him or her."²² For Ahrens, the key to engaging both children and adults is some form of narrative. Many board books are straight naming books ("A is for Apple" or "Cow," "Truck," "Farm"), and lack what Ahrens calls the "satisfying thump" readers experience when closing a book at the conclusion of a story.²³

Though BabyLit books are primers (or, what literacy experts call "early concept books") that teach concepts like counting, colors, and vocabulary, they also have a light narrative based on the original classic text. For example, though the text of *Pride & Prejudice: A BabyLit Counting Primer* simply counts items such as "1 English

20 Kathleen Ahrens, "Picturebooks: Where Literature Appreciation Begins," *Emergent Literacy: Children's Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2013, 78.

21 Pauline Davey Zeece and Susan L. Churchill, "First Stories: Emergent Literacy in Infants and Toddlers," *Early Childhood Education Journal*, Winter 2001, 101.

22 Kathleen Ahrens, "Picturebooks: Where Literature Appreciation Begins," *Emergent Literacy: Children's Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2013, 79.

23 Ibid.

village, 2 rich gentlemen, 3 houses,” the illustrations include captions that introduce toddlers to the characters of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley, and to the Longbourn, Netherfield, and Pemberley estates, and so forth, and ends with the tongue-in-cheek “10: 10,000 pounds a year,” giving a sly wink to the actual ending of Austen’s classic.²⁴

Romeo & Juliet: A BabyLit Counting Primer was treated in the same fashion. Readers count friends, love letters, and roses, until the final page, which ends with “10 kisses” followed by the quotation “...parting is such sweet sorrow...” which invites parents to kiss their babies goodnight.²⁵

However, having a narrative isn’t the only requirement for an emotionally satisfying board book. Ahrens details three things publishers (and parents) should consider:

- 1) whether there is a change in the main character or the state of events from the beginning to the end of the book
- 2) whether the text deals with a relevant developmental stage for the child (e.g. bedtime, waking up, eating)
- 3) whether the text is short and easily read aloud.²⁶

Using these criteria, most of the BabyLit books only achieve 2 out of 3. All of the BabyLit books are short and easy to read aloud; the other two criteria are harder to achieve. Some BabyLit books, such as *Wuthering Heights: A BabyLit Weather Primer*, which details changes in weather that young children are interested in investigating (wind, rain, snow, etc.), lack an overarching change in situations. Others, such as *Dracula: A BabyLit Counting Primer*, hints at an overarching narrative by beginning at “1 castle” and ending with “10 garlic flowers” thus mimicking the storyline of Bram Stoker’s classic, but lacks a direct relevance to the realities of toddler life.

Luckily, failing to achieve all three of Ahrens’ criteria doesn’t automatically make a board book substandard. Rather, Ahrens notes that these are simply guidelines that will help parents and caregivers be more discerning in their choices of board books, and give them a vocabulary to use when contemplating a bookcase of options at their local bookstore.²⁷ Publishers looking to publish board books can use these same criteria when developing an idea for a board book series, and when evaluating individual manuscripts during the editorial process.

24 Jennifer Adams, *Pride & Prejudice: A BabyLit Counting Primer* (Layton, UT, Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2011).

25 Jennifer Adams, *Romeo & Juliet: A BabyLit Counting Primer* (Layton, UT, Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2011).

26 Kathleen Ahrens, “Picturebooks: Where Literature Appreciation Begins,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 80–81.

27 Ibid.

WELL LOOKIE HERE: CONSIDERATIONS IN ILLUSTRATION AND DESIGN FOR TODDLERS

Literacy theorists have almost more to say about illustration and design than about text when discussing the merits of board books. This makes sense given that when very young children investigate books without an adult intermediary, it is their visual literacy they rely on rather than textual literacy to make meaning out of stories — and it is their visual engagement that keeps toddlers returning to the same books time and again. Therefore, it is extremely important that publishers and illustrators and designers understand the visual needs of toddlers when developing board books.

Though many early elementary educators are familiar with the three ways to read — reading and talking about the pictures, retelling a previously read story, and reading the text — most parents and publishers are not.²⁸ The first way many educators teach kindergarteners and first-graders to read is by “reading the pictures,” an idea that sounds deceptively simple, since, well, isn’t that what young children do when they’re looking at books anyway? Unfortunately, no.

A variety of literacy theorists argue that children have to learn how to understand pictures much in the same way they have to be taught how to decode words to learn how to read. In fact, many early-concept picture books require an extremely complex amount of visual awareness. Kümmerling-Meibauer notes that these books “require the young child to acquire rather complex strategies such as the distinction between figure and ground, the reconciliation of a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface, and awareness that colors, shapes, and lines are essential parts of illustrated objects.”²⁹ This doesn’t even mention the need for children to be able to decode emotion on faces, movement depicted two-dimensionally, and implied surroundings, such as a flower and a tree indicating an entire park or playground. So, how can we teach children to read pictures and how can illustrators and designers help parents and educators accomplish this task?

Many theorists agree on two main attributes as best practices for illustrations in board books: a use of bright, primary colors and a main focal point distinguished clearly from a solid color background. These recommendations seem like common sense, but the explanations for why these practices work best are a bit more complex. Annette Werner discusses the first attribute of successful illustrations — color — in great detail in “Color Perception in Infants and Young Children: The Significance of Color in Picturebooks.”

She notes that “one month old infants spontaneously prefer colored pictures over gray stimuli” and that “color is a salient feature of children’s visual perception and

28 Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, *The Daily Five*, (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2006), 47.

29 Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Emergent Literacy and Children’s Literature,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 7.

more impressive than shapes or numbers.”³⁰ She goes on to cite other research (Clare Painter, 2008), which details additional functions of color in picture books:

*...the different functions of color in picture books can be understood in terms of three so called ‘metafunctions’: hereby, the ‘ideational function refers to the support of the content of a story, by providing additional information about the appearance of objects, animals, etc. The second, ‘textual function’ refers to the support of the organization of a story by highlighting important aspects by the choice of color for particular elements of a picture. Finally, the ‘interpersonal function’ refers to relations and feelings expressed in the narrative; this is perhaps the most important aspect of color in narratives, since colors evoke emotions, and create an emotional atmosphere or ‘ambience’.*³¹

Clearly, color has quite the job to do in a board book! But what hue, saturation, and brightness is best? Due to young infants’ preference for “spectral extremes”, Werner suggests highly saturated colors such as red and blue, followed by yellow and blue-green.³²

The second “best practice” for illustrations seems a bit unusual when given closer examination. Martin Roman Deppner notes in “Parallel Receptions of the Fundamental: Basic Designs in Picturebooks and Modern Art” that objects represented against a plain colored background are actually an abstract concept since they have no relation to their typical environment (e.g., an apple on a tree or in a fruit basket), and are often represented without reference to their true size or, in some cases, color.³³ Nor are everyday objects seen in real life with thick, black outlines, with no shadows or movement as they are often depicted in board books. Infants are required to both recognize the shape or object presented on the page, recall the word associated to it, and reconcile both of these things with their recollection of the object in real life — essential attributes to a healthy imagination. This is no small task, and one that requires modeling and practice to be mastered. Despite the complexity inherent in single-object, primary color board book design, this mode is still more beneficial and less confusing for babies aged 0–3 than detailed drawings of groups of objects with life-like shading and texture, as they can focus on practicing object-name correlation with only one clearly depicted object at a time.

30 Annette Werner, “Color Perception in Infants and Young Children: the Significance of Color in Picture books,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 39.

31 Ibid.

32 Annette Werner, “Color Perception in Infants and Young Children: the Significance of Color in Picture books,” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 40.

33 Martin Roman Deppner, “Parallel Receptions of the Fundamental: Basic Designs in Picturebooks and Modern Art” *Emergent Literacy: Children’s Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company, 2013, 57-58.

Lassoing Little Ones: Comparing and Contrasting BabyLit Illustrations and Designs with Literacy Recommendations

How does BabyLit stack up to these recommendations? Alison Oliver's work walks the line between the simple, straightforward, colorful illustrations that literacy theorists recommend, and the quirky, detail-oriented designs that many adults tend to prefer. While in many cases the illustrator and book designer are two different artists, since Oliver both illustrated each book and created the overall design (including font choice, color schemes, and layout), the following analysis will focus on the aesthetics of the BabyLit books as a whole.

The first BabyLit book, *Pride & Prejudice: A BabyLit Counting Primer*, features heavily saturated colors contrasted with white backgrounds on alternating pages. As it is a counting book, each page features a group of items (rather than the typically recommended one focal item), such as three houses and five sisters. The items in each group tend to be illustrated with different colors, though the brightness of the different colors is homogenous (e.g. light pink, light green, light blue), which provides a much-needed unifying factor; however, unlike the plain, uncluttered illustrations some literacy theorists recommend, Oliver's illustrations have a multitude of fine details, from speech bubbles and nameplates around characters to detailed design elements around each number featured. The second BabyLit book, *Romeo & Juliet: A BabyLit Counting Primer*, features the same sort of details and multi-colored illustrations of groups of items against solid-colored backgrounds. These fine details and abundance of color are likely too much for many babies, and may make it difficult for babies to process the images and relate them to real life.

Yet, the fine details provide something that is perhaps of more importance to the BabyLit reading experience than the actual text: by pulling content from the original works, Oliver provides parents with more talking points to relay to their babies. A page that could have simply read "5 sisters," now prompts those important question-and-answer conversational moments: "Five sisters. Can you see all five? There is Elizabeth; she is very tough. Can you point to Elizabeth? This one is Mary. She is reading a grammar book. She is very smart," and so forth. Of course, the particulars of this type of conversation are too complex for babies, but listening to the rhythm of the conversation has been shown to increase early literacy rates.³⁴ Pull quotes incorporated into the designs also mimic the feeling parents have when they read the classics in their entirety, making the reading experience rewarding for the adult as well as the child. As mentioned previously, this type of enjoyment is key for a healthy caregiver-child reading experience, and keeps parents and babies coming back for more, which is something every publisher wants.

Thomas Leddy, a professor of philosophy at San Jose State University who has written repeatedly on art and design, notes that aesthetically "adults and children

³⁴ Kathleen Ahrens, "Picturebooks: Where Literature Appreciation Begins," *Emergent Literacy: Children's Books from 0 to 3 in Studies in Written Language and Literacy, Volume 13*. John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2013, 78–80.

simply prefer things closer to their respective interests.”³⁵ While he does not advocate replacing “our adult-centered aesthetics with a child-centered aesthetics,” when it comes to children’s books, he says it seems “reasonable to replace it with one that is not completely focused on one age group.”³⁶ One way to do so is to incorporate a sense of “coziness” or “warmth” into children’s design, which play on the emotions of both children and adults.³⁷ Oliver’s designs seem to do just that, which is music to marketers’ ears. Though board books designers and illustrators must be aware of how their creative choices impact the reading experience of the adult and child, they must also be keenly aware of how books get into the hands of babies in the first place: by being purchased.

A joint consumer study by Bowker and the Association of Booksellers for Children in early 2011, summarized in the January 31, 2011 issue of *Publisher’s Weekly*, states that 75% of children’s books are purchased in a physical store, and that of those books, 80% of those purchases are not planned, and 40% are pure impulse purchases.³⁸ In the article, former executive director of ABC, Kristen McLean, says, “Seeing a book matters. [Customers] don’t come in to buy a book. They’re buying a book they see.”³⁹

Since adults often determine what books are purchased for children under seven, having a design that is attractive and interesting for adults as well as children is incredibly important, especially when targeting impulse shoppers. Middle class women who have a median amount of income and education make 70% of children’s book purchases, which means publishers must be extremely conscious of the tastes of this demographic.⁴⁰ Charming children’s versions of beloved classics, illustrated with warm and cozy, detailed illustrations make perfect sense for these purchasers. As a result, the BabyLit series has currently sold more than 300,000 copies and was featured in the October 26, 2013 Sunday Edition of the *New York Times*.^{41,42}

35 Thomas Leddy, “Aesthetics and Children’s Picture-Books,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Winter 2002, 44–47.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Judith Rosen, “What Do Children’s Book Consumers Want?” *Publisher’s Weekly*, 31 January 2011, 16–17.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Gibbs Smith, Publisher, Autumn 2013 Catalogue.

42 Julie Bosman, “A Library of Classics, Edited for the Teething Set,” *New York Times*, 26 October 2013.

BRANDING BABYLIT AND ITS BRAND EXTENSIONS

Given the success of BabyLit's first two titles, GSP began publishing at least two new titles per season. There are now twelve BabyLit titles in GSP's catalogue, with *Huckleberry Finn: A BabyLit Fishing Primer* and *Jungle Book: A BabyLit Animals Primer* scheduled for release in spring 2014. Of the twelve current titles, six are listed in GSP's autumn catalogue as part of their top thirty most popular books. From the first two BabyLits to the last two, very few changes have been made to the publishing formula; other than an increase in quotations from the classics to add more of a narrative feel, each book has the same author and illustrator, and the books' designs are unique to each title, but unified as a whole. What were the key factors for GSP's BabyLit branding success, and how can GSP replicate and extend their success in the future?

TRUST YOUR NEIGHBORS, BUT BRAND YOUR CATTLE: STRATEGIES FOR A SUCCESSFUL BRAND

The branding of BabyLit began with GSP's creative and marketing teams' belief that the idea of BabyLit would be popular enough to constitute an entire series. This sparked the creation of a cohesive set of design aesthetics that could be tweaked to make each book in the series look unique, yet have the series look cohesive when lined up together on a shelf. Small details like "Little Master" and "Little Miss" followed by the original author's last name (e.g. "Little Master Dickens") in a banner across each book, as well as a small graphic pulled from each story and placed at the top of the each book's spine helped build this cohesion and a feeling of a fine, handcrafted work.

GSP invested early on to create a BabyLit website that was separate from the GSP website. This allowed the website to use the BabyLit fonts and color palette rather than GSP's, again reinforcing the BabyLit series brand. The website also features the image that became the BabyLit logo: a small bird with a graduation cap. The BabyLit logo is used on business cards and the like, though GSP's logo, a graphic of a peregrine falcon, is still used for the spine of the books.

Originally, the meta-data description for each BabyLit book used on websites such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble was roughly the same; however, a decision was recently made to differentiate each title within the series by creating unique product descriptions now that the series brand is well established. These product descriptions follow the same basic formula: two introductory sentences with allusions to each book's individual content, followed by references to the series as a whole. With this tactic, GSP hopes to encourage parents to buy every title by acknowledging that though there are multiple numbers primers in the series, each individual numbers primer is slightly different.

Interestingly, to protect the brand's image of being special and handcrafted, Taylor was selective about where BabyLit was sold. After BabyLit's first burst of popularity, Costco approached Taylor in the hopes of carrying BabyLit in their stores. Surprisingly, Taylor turned down their offer, explaining that the BabyLit brand image was based on the idea that its consumers had unique taste and a preference for individualized items—certainly not the image associated with big-box stores that tend to place gaudy low-price or discount stickers all over the covers of their books. Taylor felt the risk to the brand and the risk of unusable returns due to damage from pricing stickers, coupled with the markdowns Costco proposed, were too high, and felt there were other, safer opportunities where she could maximize profits. (Fast forward to fall 2013, and Taylor is able to proudly say that her pushback on Costco worked. She recently reached an agreement in which Costco may carry only older BabyLit titles, shrink-wrapped to protect the books from pricing stickers, at a smaller markdown than originally proposed.)⁴³

Perhaps the most important thing GSP did for BabyLit's brand was to not think of BabyLit as just a book series. Quite quickly, BabyLit expanded into dolls, tote bags, buttons, and more. After the release of *Pride & Prejudice: A BabyLit Counting Primer* and *Romeo & Juliet: A BabyLit Counting Primer* the illustrator, Alison Oliver, sent Taylor a gift — a Mr. Darcy stuffed doll she had created using a website that allowed her to create custom fabric out of her own illustrations. The GSP staff loved the doll, and Taylor decided to contact a manufacturer she had met at a gift fair to produce BabyLit dolls to accompany the books. Taylor was able to broker a deal with the stuffed doll manufacturer to make 1,000 dolls each of Mr. Darcy, the Mad Hatter, and Dracula. They were released in fall 2012; Mr. Darcy sold out of the first 1,000. By using a smaller American manufacturer with which she had personal contact that was willing to produce smaller lots, and using illustrations pulled straight from the books, Taylor was able to gauge the interest of the public in BabyLit merchandise without risking too much financially.

From there, Taylor and GSP continued to find small, American manufacturers to test a variety of merchandise. Taylor found a Missouri company that makes entire tote bags (rather than simply screen printing on foreign-manufactured tote bags) to create BabyLit bags, which has allowed for faster turnaround and smaller batches of orders. Taylor met her button manufacturer, Badge Bomb, a specialty button company based in Portland, Oregon, at another gift fair, and was able to negotiate a trial set of twenty boxes of 200 BabyLit buttons each. This opened the door for another, entirely separate, merchandise endeavor: LoveLit — book merchandise for bookish adults. Taylor quickly put together a group of graphics with bibliophile-gear-ed sayings, such as “I like big books and I cannot lie”, to be produced by Badge Bomb and sold to booksellers in the GSP catalogue. LoveLit soon spread to tote bags and small notebooks as well. These types of personal, small business relationships have been key to BabyLit's and LoveLit's merchandise success, since it has allowed

⁴³ Suzanne Gibbs Taylor, personal interview, 7 August 2013.

GSP the flexibility of testing a multitude of designs and products in a matter of a couple of years. Of these additional pieces of book merchandise, the tote bags have been the biggest seller, followed by buttons, dolls, and prints (which are manufactured personally by Oliver).⁴⁴ Taylor plans to continue to expand GSP's book merchandise gift lines to include tin signs and large magnets within the next season.

For the current fall 2013 season, GSP developed their first BabyLit playset. The *Pride & Prejudice* playset features cardboard cutouts of the characters and scenery, and is packaged in a box containing the board book. GSP felt it was a natural extension for the board book to also offer toys so that toddlers and parents can act out the scenes in the book including marriage proposals and strolls in the English country side.

Given the relative strength of BabyLit's brand extensions, GSP is looking to further develop the BabyLit brand into new series for future seasons, including BabyLit Next Steps books, picture book classics for ages 4–6, which, like BabyLit, introduce the themes and characters in classic literature, but through kid-friendly stories. Scheduled for release in spring 2014 is the first LittleLit title: *Edgar Gets Ready For Bed*, an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, in which Edgar is a baby raven who responds to all requests from his mother with one word — “Nevermore!” Under the BabyLit umbrella GSP hopes to eventually include new series focused on topics other than the classics.

GSP is also launching a new direct-sales initiative through BabyLit parties, in which a brand ambassador hosts a party in their home or community to introduce BabyLit to friends and family and earn a commission based on sales from these get-togethers. At the time of this report, GSP was working on ways to recruit BabyLit ambassadors they feel are suited to represent the brand.

THERE'S GOLD IN THEM THERE HILLS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FINANCIAL SUCCESS OF BABYLIT BRAND EXTENSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LICENSING

Ultimately, Taylor hopes the combination of books, book merchandise, and marketing will lead to licensing deals for GSP series. Since GSP developed the BabyLit brand in-house and owns the rights to the content, the company has been able to play with the brand and add merchandise and additional book series as a way to feel out this new style of publishing that relies heavily on brand extensions. BabyLit book merchandise has added dramatically to GSP's profit margins in a little under a year since its introduction, and sales to independent booksellers were up noticeably in early 2013 over the previous year, due in part to the increased selection of gift items that appeal to booksellers trying to supplement their book

44 Ibid.

sales.⁴⁵ For the time being, it seems there is no stopping BabyLit, and Taylor is eager to replicate and build off of BabyLit's brand success in future GSP series.

One way to do so is by creating a brand that has a strong enough market presence to make it appealing to large licensees, such as Mattel and Hasbro. GSP Marketing Director Dan Moench attended the Licensing Expo in Las Vegas, Nevada in June 2013 to research how GSP could position itself to get licensing agreements in the future. Moench's main takeaways from the conference were that large licensees look to take on properties that are already wildly popular, that create demand from retailers for more products, have a backstory which can be developed to encompass a multitude of products, are attached to an "evergreen" subject such as princesses or dinosaurs, and can be marketed clearly to either boys or girls.

Though BabyLit doesn't currently fit all of these criteria, it gives the GSP creative team clear goals to strive for as they continue to develop the brand. GSP's experience developing book merchandise for BabyLit without licensing the property has also given them insight to what is popular for that type of content, and what is less popular. Having this experience might make GSP more attractive to licensing agents, who will have more examples of potential products to show licensees. This is key, since Moench notes that having a licensing agent is a must if a company wants to get a meeting with large licensees.

In a recent "Licensing Spotlight" feature in *Publisher's Weekly*, "Books as Brands", Valerie Garfield, Simon & Schuster's Vice President, notes that her "imprints are doing a lot more homegrown brands where we control the rights," in order to more easily be able to license that content without an author trying to retain rights.⁴⁶ Given GSP's acquisitions model of developing ideas in-house before finding an author and illustrator, GSP might have an edge when it comes to licensing, since they often retain rights to the original concept.

Another "Licensing Spotlight" notes that where huge companies such as Disney, Nickelodeon, and Lucasfilm used to rule licensing with large licensees, at the 2012 New York Toy Fair, the presence of these companies was noticeably less visible, with some licensees noting that characters from popular books seem to sell themselves, regardless of whether they also appear in TV shows or movies.⁴⁷ Karen Raugust concludes this article by saying "This is good news for publishers and authors who want to license puzzles, games, and toys as a way to generate income, raise awareness, and sell more books."⁴⁸ This is exactly what GSP wants to do. Going forward, both with series under the BabyLit umbrella and new acquisitions, GSP aims to evaluate their children's books not just by quality of story and illustration, but by their ability to be expanded into more through the popularity of a central character.

45 Gibbs Smith, GSP email correspondence, June 2013.

46 Karen Raugust, "Books as Brands," *Publisher's Weekly*, 15 October 2012, 18.

47 Karen Raugust, "Toy Fair Shines Light on Evolving Licensing Business," *Publisher's Weekly*, 27 February 2012, 22.

48 Ibid.

In particular, GSP is on the lookout for a female character, as licensees note a gap in the market now that *Dora the Explorer* has begun to lose popularity; however, finding this character is easier said than done.

FOOL'S GOLD: DEVELOPING NEW SERIES WITH LICENSING POTENTIAL

GSP had thought at one point that they may have a popular character in *Chloe, the Clumsy Fairy*, a picture book they distribute from Sourced Media Books, a book packager; however, the book has yet to have the popularity needed to become a viable product for licensing. Given GSP's size and the competition it faces from other publishers, it is more likely that GSP will need to come up with a character and storyline itself and find an author to work with rather than wait to be approached by the perfect combination. Part of the challenge for GSP moving forward is how to develop a formula for creating publishing ideas in-house.

The GSP creative team excels in their ability to take a popular book and expand it or repackage the content into well branded series. Evidence of this can be seen with their *101 Things to Do With* series, *Pocketdoodle* books, and *Pocket Guide* books. Creativity abounds when the editors are faced with finding a fresh topic for any of these series. The much trickier task is coming up with a brand new idea for a brand new series. The most common problem for GSP's creative team is finding the time to devote to researching ideas that have not yet been saturated by other publishers, that fit GSP's lists, and that have a built-in audience or popular author to support the new product. It is a tall order for any group of editors, let alone the eight editors at GSP who produce roughly 80 books a year out of a renovated barn in suburban northern Utah.

Between their regular marketing and editing duties, the editors have little time left to spend perusing the Internet for articles on interesting people or ideas. Add the pressure to meet publication deadlines for a wide variety of titles and a high number of books and it's easy to see why finding new publishing opportunities tends to fall by the wayside. It's much easier to simply add more titles to existing series. Moreover, though GSP has remained true to its western beginnings and still publishes books in that genre, they have expanded their lists to include quite sophisticated home reference, cookbook, and children's titles. This can be tricky to explain to those unfamiliar with GSP. (As one recent author wrote in reference to GSP in his acknowledgements page, "Whoda' thunk you could make such sophisticated magic on a sweet farm full of chickens, sheep, and — thank God for Claritin — cats!")⁴⁹ For all of these reasons, creating new series and finding new authors is a challenge that GSP faces.

One way GSP could make acquiring new series more of a priority is by carving out a few hours a week for each editor to devote to scouring media sources for new

⁴⁹ Steven Stolman, *Scalamandré: Haute Décor*, (Layton, UT, Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2013), 256.

book ideas and contacting potential authors GSP might be interested in working with; however, building this time into the editor's schedules would require taking time away from something else. One idea is for GSP to examine their P & Ls from the last five years to see if there is a pattern of types of books that do not sell well and use a large amount of editing time. Those types of books could be removed from future GSP lists to create extra time for editors to find better quality ideas and manuscripts. One could also make a strong argument for GSP reducing the number of books they publish overall, in favor of fewer books with greater appeal and likelihood for financial success.

It may also be beneficial for the managing editors to create a list of categories in which new books are needed for upcoming series and assign each editor one or two of the categories to help focus their searches. That way, the editors can immerse themselves in a genre that appeals to them and not feel spread so thin. Adding deadlines for idea-generation would also add urgency to the task. Ultimately, it will take a willingness on the part of the editorial team to change the way they approach acquisitions for GSP to find the next hit series.

S U M M A R Y & C O N C L U S I O N

GSP's venture into board book publishing has proved extremely fruitful. Part of the success was the attitude with which the project was approached; in the words of Taylor, GSP had to attack the project as if it were already successful so that book buyers would believe that BabyLit would become "a thing" even before it was published. To do so, GSP had to create an editorial and design formula that would keep them clear of the pitfalls of other board books that fail to be developmentally appropriate for babies and toddlers, while providing age-appropriate content and design that adults find appealing too. As a result of the effort GSP put into their editorial plan for BabyLit, GSP was thinking of future titles and book merchandise as soon as the first two books were published, and positioned the books and the brand accordingly.

Also key to the success was GSP's focus on minimizing risk while ensuring their ability to maximize opportunity. Keeping book merchandise production state-side and using small, niche manufacturers allowed Taylor to negotiate the price and size of orders to suit BabyLit's changing needs, as well as expand into a variety of gift markets, including gift stores which do not necessarily carry books. One notable example of this is gift retailer Black Ink in Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which decided to carry, and prominently display, *Moby Dick* BabyLit tote bags, but not actually stock BabyLit books. These types of sales, while not promoting GSP books directly, have what Gibbs Smith calls "merit", because they indirectly support the BabyLit brand, which in turn supports GSP and their ability to publish books. In this way, GSP's lines of book merchandise provide the content that booksellers are demanding at an increasing rate, while supporting their publishing mandate of producing quality books.

If GSP is able to keep their pulse on the needs of the children's market, they should be able to continue to use their expertise in book merchandising to eventually develop a series with a marketable character, which will hopefully result in lucrative licensing deals. In the meantime, their experience with book merchandise has opened up doors with small manufacturers that will allow GSP to create a multitude of gift products that celebrate book culture. All of these endeavors, whether book-based or gift-based, will hopefully give GSP the financial security to continue their ultimate goal: to publish books that "inspire and enrich humankind."

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