



# Anthropocentric Symbols in *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

Regga Navratilova Ariyanto<sup>1</sup>, Rahayu Puji Haryanti<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Sastra Inggris, FBS Universitas Negeri Semarang

Corresponding E-Mail: [regganavra16@students.unnes.ac.id](mailto:regganavra16@students.unnes.ac.id)

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the anthropocentric symbols found in the children's storybook "*Where the Wild Things Are*" by Maurice Sendak. This study focuses on showing the relationship between humans, namely Max, the main character in this story, and non-human creatures, shown through visual elements that have formed a narrative of human domination over other creatures. The aspects of anthropocentrism analyzed in this study include the role of wild creatures, hierarchical positions, and symbols as objects without agency that are subject to human will. To explain these symbols, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is used in this study, which explains them through three levels: denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings. This study uses a qualitative research method and a semiotic visual analysis approach that focuses on the images and words contained in the children's storybook entitled *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. A total of six main images are analyzed in depth to reveal their hidden meanings. Through the six analyzed images, the results of this study indicate that anthropocentric symbols contained in the children's storybook entitled *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak have appeared from the beginning of the story, namely Max is a representation of the center of power and wild creatures are represented as subjects who have no will. The findings obtained from this study have strengthened the argument that although children's books are intended as entertainment and educational media, children's books also function as a medium to spread an ideology including human domination over nature. The implications of this study are very important for the study of literature and children's education because it provides encouragement to adult readers, both parents and educators, to be more critical in interpreting children's books while still considering ecological and ethical values.

**Keywords:** *Anthropocentric; Semiotics; Where the Wild Things Are*

## Introduction

Literary critics have attempted to analyze all texts using a variety of ideological influences, ranging from classical literature to tattoos to mail-order catalogs (Klages, 2011). Literary critics have also repurposed children's books to insert cultural ideologies into them, giving rise to the myth that children's books are a place of transparency and innocence, especially illustrated children's books, which can attract the critical attention of literary critics (Hunt, 1999). Jacqueline Rose (1998) mentions that children's books have never been disconnected from philosophy, where using children's books has become a pure starting point related to sexuality, language, and the state. Ironically, many children's books today are influenced by ideologies that are far from innocent and transparent, and need to be critically examined. One such book is *Where the Wild Things Are*, written by Maurice Sendak.

Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* has become the most popular picture book in the history of American children's literature. It tells the story of a young boy named Max's rebellion against the constraints imposed by his family, his journey to freedom, his attempt to conquer the Wild Things he finds in the exotic land of his imagination, and his return home. Since its publication in 1963, this children's picture book has received critical attention from many audiences, and has been interpreted by many different theories. For example, in the study by Kenneth Kidd (2020), has analyzed Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* using psychoanalytic theory that focuses more on the internal struggles of early childhood development. In his psychological explanation, the dreams or fantasies that a child named Max has are signs that the child is experiencing growth and development, starting from how the child fights fear, anxiety, pain, boredom, and finds joy.

Although no research has been found on anthropocentric symbols in Maurice Sendak's work, the author found recent studies that have examined the impact of anthropocentric understandings in children's literature. For example, anthropomorphized animals in books can reinforce human-centered views of nature, which can potentially disrupt children's biological reasoning (Geerdts et al., 2016; Waxman et al., 2014). However, other research suggests that children's understanding of the relationship between humans and animals is not inherently anthropocentric and can be influenced by the media they consume daily (Waxman et al., 2014). Other research suggests using a post-anthropocentric approach in children's literature to challenge the superiority of humans over animals (Cheung, 2024). Finally, anthropocentric narratives in children's books can strengthen reflections on the relationship between humans and the environment, necessitating more ecologically conscious storytelling (Ajmal et al., 2024).

In this analysis, the researcher will also further examine anthropocentric symbols to reveal the main themes contained in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. To analyze the emblem, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. According to Roland Barthes (1994), It has been mentioned that every popular culture has been encoded with full signs into a text, allowing the audience or reader to freely interpret the signs due to the right of autonomy. When the work is finished being performed, the meaning contained in it no longer belongs to the author or maker but has become the property of the audience or reader who can interpret it themselves.

Barthes (1994) also mentioned that representation through a text can form a meaning that includes a comprehensive sign system that can be recycled so that it can add various meanings that are combined with the culture that exists in society. This meaning can also be distorted to be more commercial, where the meaning includes the structure of a sign. Therefore, the study of semiotics expressed by Roland Barthes, focuses more on the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth. For example, when an object that can be a report or news contains signs that are displayed visually, linguistically, or other signs to represent something, a level of connotation is created that is attached to the sign. This process is called the phenomenon of the creation of myths because signs and connotations are present to convey certain messages (Sudipa, 2021).

In the process of observing Maurice Sendak's work, *Where the Wild Things Are*, the author found that a child needs to be able to accept the process of maturity built on the fantasies he has and the behavior he receives in his social and family environment, until a child can transform himself well. Therefore, this research is very interesting to be studied further because children's books today do not only have a function as moral education or entertainment media, but are also used as a medium to spread ideology, cultural values, and how humans, especially children, establish relationships with nature and non-human beings.

In this context, studying the anthropocentrism contained in children's books is very important, especially amid the global environmental crisis and the increasing awareness of the importance of an ecological perspective in education from an early age. Children's books such as *Where the Wild Things Are* have implied how children are no longer only learning about the human world but also building imaginative relationships with wild creatures and nature that are often positioned subordinately in anthropocentric narratives. Max, the main character in this story, not only escapes into a fantasy world of his own making but also becomes the leader or king of the creatures there, symbolizing human dominance over nature, packaged in the form of a children's adventure. This is the central idea of anthropocentrism, subtly demonstrated in shaping children's thinking about the relationship between humans and other creatures.

As a children's story filled with images, visual analysis was conducted in this study using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. By using this approach, the illustrations in the children's story are not only seen as images that show a story

but as signs that convey hidden ideological meanings. For example, when Max wears a wolf outfit that has a denotative meaning as a costume, but its connotative meaning shows the instinct of freedom and wildness, while mythologically it can be seen as a symbol of the transition from the obedient world of children to the controlled wild world. The depiction of wild creatures with large bodies that also submit to Max has also shown how human dominance over nature is embedded symbolically in visual texts. Conducting this visual sign analysis has enabled this study to uncover hidden ideological messages and also show how children's books can be a medium that shows the formation of human perspectives on the world around them.

## Method

The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method which focuses on interpreting the visual meaning contained in the illustrations in Maurice Sendak's children's book entitled *Where the Wild Things Are*. This approach was chosen because with this approach, the researcher is able to reveal every meaning that appears not only on the surface, but also hidden meanings that are mythological and ideological

The data in this study are in the form of illustrations contained in Maurice Sendak's children's book entitled *Where the Wild Things Are*. The data collection technique was carried out using visual documentation, namely all visual images contained in Maurice Sendak's children's book entitled *Where the Wild Things Are* were collected, then analyzed as visual representations containing signs and symbols that can be analyzed using Barthes's semiotic framework.

From the many illustrations in the storybook *Where the Wild Things Are*, this study only selected 6 main images as objects to be analyzed that have fulfilled three main criteria, namely: 1) Narrative function where the image has marked an important change in the storyline or the development of Max's character; 2) Visual density where the selected illustrations have many symbols and complex visual compositions; and 3) Potential ideological meaning where the selected images have explicitly or implicitly represented the relationship between humans (children) and non-human creatures or the surrounding environment. The images in this children's storybook were also selected by looking at the context of the story and the role of the illustrations in building a representation of anthropocentrism.

Data analysis in this study was carried out by paying attention to the three levels of sign readers mentioned by Roland Barthes, including:

- 1) Denotative Meaning: The meaning that first appears from a text, visual, sign, and so on. The meaning that appears is also a generalization, so in Barthes' terminology, denotation is the first stage of the system of significance.

- 2) Connotative Meaning: Meaning that has a "cultural history behind it", namely a meaning that can only be understood in a certain context. Connotation is the mode of operation in the formation and encoding of creative texts such as poetry, novels, musical compositions, and works of art.
- 3) Myth: In this section, myth has the function of providing justification and expressing values that appear dominantly based on history and scientific justification, so that these dominant values appear eternal.

Barthes states that myth is also included in the type of speech, meaning that myth is part of the communication system used to convey a message. In this case, myth in Roland Barthes' concept cannot be used and seen as an idea, concept, or object, but myth is related to how to interpret something. Anything can be a myth as long as its presence is seen through discourse. In the myth put forward by Barthes, there is a three-dimensional pattern, namely the signifier, the signified, and the sign. This can be seen in Barthes' map of signs quoted from the book *Communication Semiotics*, by Alex Sobur (in Fauzan & Sakinah, 2020):

1) Signified	2) Signifier	
3) Denotative Signifier		
4) Connotative Signifier		5) Connotative Signified
6) Denotative Signified		

Based on the image above, it can be seen that the denotative sign consists of a signified and a signifier. Then, at the same time, within the denotative sign there is also a connotative signifier, which means that this is a material element that only appears when the researcher recognizes a sign (for example, the sign of a lion) by interpreting it connotatively as courage, ferocity, and arrogance. Therefore, in Roland Barthes' concept, a connotative sign not only has additional meaning, but also contains both parts of the denotative sign that underlie its existence. Therefore, each image that has been obtained will be analyzed sequentially from its denotative meaning to connotation to myth in order to be able to obtain every hidden meaning in each image that has been obtained.

There are several strategies that researchers use to ensure interpretative validity in this study, namely: 1) Reference triangulation; namely the results of the interpretation that has been done are compared with other supporting literature related to children's literary criticism, child development psychology, and children's visual symbols; 2) Peer debriefing examinations carried out by discussing them with lecturers and colleagues to avoid subjectivity when interpreting images; and 3) Transparency of analysis procedures where researchers provide open explanations of each step when interpreting images so that other researchers can re-examine them.

Unfortunately, this study also has several limitations. It focused only on one child's illustrated book, making the results limited in their generalizability to other children's illustrated stories. Because this study used qualitative methods, its semiotic interpretation is not absolute and depends on the sensitivity of the analysis and the theoretical framework used. Finally, the cultural context of Maurice Sendak, a Western author, cannot be fully relevant when read from a non-Western cultural perspective, such as Indonesia.

The following is the analytical framework that the author used in this research for each image that was found and that meets the criteria mentioned:

Analysis Degree	Instructional Question	Research Focus
Denotation	What is literally appeared?	Character, form, color, and object
Connotation	What symbolic meanings are in the element?	Norm, social-cultural value, and emotion
Myth	What ideology is formed from the visual?	Human identity over the nature, domination, and power representation

This analytical framework is used because the researcher is trying to dismantle the visual construction in children's books, which is not only used to convey a story but also to shape the way of thinking in viewing the world, especially in relation to the relationship between humans and non-humans.

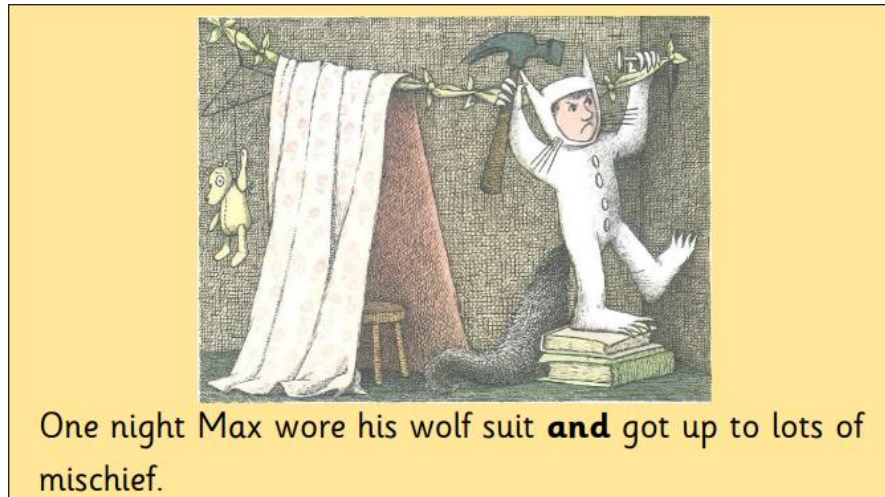
## Results

The images presented in the children's story *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak are rich in meaning that can be analyzed using semiotic theory. Semiotics is a method used to analyze meaning and signs, because the signs displayed by the media often represent an object, and then the meaning becomes the link between the object and the sign (Wibisono & Sari, 2021). The semiotic approach proposed by Roland Barthes was chosen because, by using semiotics, we can reveal the structure of meaning hidden by the filmmaker and combine it with existing reality (Natasari, 2023). Semiotics seeks to explore signs that emerge from syntactic and grammatical rules so that complex texts can find hidden meanings that depend on culture.

The study of meaning is related to denotative and connotative meaning (Sudipa, 2021). Barthes explains significance at the first stage, namely the relationship between the signified and the signified in a sign to external reality, which Barthes calls denotation. Connotation is another term used by Barthes to explain the second stage of significance, because at the second stage of significance, there is an interaction between the feelings or emotions of the reader and the cultural values depicted.

The following is each analysis that shows the anthropocentric symbols contained in the children's story, *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak.

**Figure 1.** Children Have Their Imaginations



Source: Maurice Sendak (1963)

At the denotative level, the picture above shows a child named Max wearing a wolf costume complete with ears and a tail. The picture shows Max standing on a pile of books, holding a hammer with his hands above his head, and he appears to be dropping something. A blanket hangs from a rope that Max tied to it with a doll hanging nearby. Sendak provides the opening line, which is: "One night Max dressed up in his wolf costume and got into a lot of mischief."

At the connotative level, Max is seen wearing a wolf costume, which embodies animal instincts such as freedom from social norms, rebellion, and wildness. The way Max stands on the book suggests a rejection or misuse of knowledge, where books are not used as a step to learn new things, but are used to show subversion. The items around Max, such as the tent and toys, are items that Max made himself, which shows that as a child, he had his imagination, but he wanted to return to nature. Max, when making his tent, also shows an expression filled with emotion and determination, which is a deviation from the self-control often associated with maturity.

From a mythological perspective, the illustration reinforces the narrative of anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are central to the control of the environment and other creatures. Max, dressed in a wolf costume, not only imitates the animal but also dominates it and makes it his identity. Max not only becomes the animal but also seeks to master his imagination and personal space. The wolf costume worn by Max projects human traits such as rebellion, curiosity, and anger. This is mentioned in research conducted by Linnell & Cretois (2018) that wolves

have a natural tendency to always be angry and rebellious. Max's dominance is also demonstrated through his actions in disrupting the order of the house and replacing the functionality of objects ranging from cloth, chairs, to books into tools of rebellion and individual expression.

The myth formed through the image has supported research by White (2006) that children or humans have the right to define nature or the environment, reshape it, and subdue it according to their wishes from an early age. In conclusion, this visual has incorporated an idea that control and domination over other creatures, objects, and spaces are part of the natural process towards adulthood that has been reinforced through the image of Max's leadership that begins with the chaos he created in his own home.

**Figure 2.** Humans Are Superior to Nature



Source: Maurice Sendak (1963)

At the denotative level, the image shows Max, still wearing his white werewolf costume, chasing a small white dog inside his house. Max holds a fork and smiles broadly as if it were his weapon. Max displays a very happy expression, while the dog he is working with appears frightened and runs away from him.

Furthermore, on a connotative level, Max's pursuit of the dog reflects a predator-prey relationship, but this is done by a child chasing his pet for play, not for food. Symbolically, the fork Max holds makes him a civilized predator, not an animal ready to devour its prey at any time. Overall, what Max does is a form of showing the human emotion, namely love, by playing like a predator and prey.



At the mythical level, Max is a dominant figure marked by his wearing a wolf costume and his activities chasing his pet. Although the dog is a form of real reality, he still runs away from the human child who is imitating animal behavior. This scene shows the anthropocentric myth that even though humans are imitating nature, they are still superior. The dog, which is a symbol of nature, has become a support in the child's imaginative and emotional world (Walsh, 2009). The wearing of costumes, the use of forks, and the environment inside the house have become Max's imaginary space.

This reflects that humans can withstand, imitate, and tell nature without ever giving up. Another implicit message shown is how children's power and freedom are justified in the domestic sphere as part of the child's growth process. Dominant, expressive, and aggressive boys are tolerated because they are part of normal growth, even though this behavior, according to child psychology research conducted by Liu et al. (2012), has trained a power relationship model that is rooted in the ideology of dominance over other living creatures. Therefore, from the illustration, it has shown the existence of power dynamics that are still on a small scale that can be seen from Max's relationship with his pet, but the ideological structure is much larger where humans are the center of anthropocentrism who feel inferior when controlling and owning other creatures even in the context of playing.

**Figure 4.** Children's Imagination Can Conquer Fear



Source: Maurice Sendak (1963)

In the denotative aspect, through the picture above, there are four giant creatures that have a strange appearance with fur, sharp claws, horns, and large bodies. There is also a smaller creature that looks like a mouse that is sitting on one of the giant creatures. The monsters are also raising both of their hands and opening their mouths very wide as if they are scaring or roaring. The text that reads "The wild things flashed their spiky teeth, roared sizzling fire and pointed their

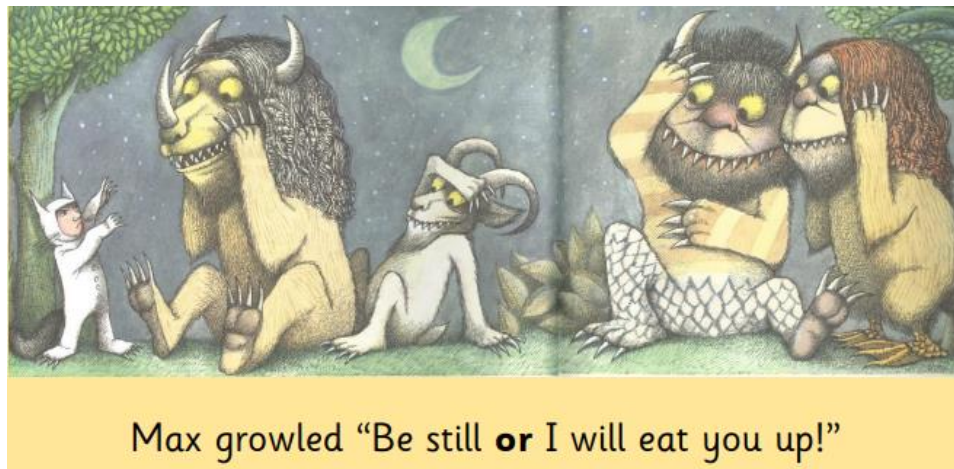
sharp claws" further shows the explanation of the wild and aggressive actions of the monsters.

This depiction connotatively suggests a sense of chaos and fear. These terrifying creatures are depicted as ferocious, capable of intimidating or attacking at any time, yet they are visually portrayed in a humorous and non-threatening manner. The caricature of the characters and the use of playful colors create an ambiguity between play and threat, something that appears terrifying yet still enjoyable and tame within the context of a child's world. These creatures emotionally represent Max's uncontrolled emotions of frustration, anger, and a powerful drive that he still doesn't fully understand. Ultimately, he overcomes the image of these terrifying creatures by positioning children as powerful figures within his own world within the book.

Finally, in the mythical aspect through the image has shown a strong anthropocentric symbol that can be seen from Max riding a wild creature where this has the meaning that humans have control over anything even in the wild which has uncontrollable power. This is also mentioned in other research conducted by Lennox et al. (2022) that the efforts made by humans to conquer the wild are one way to survive in places that have never been seen before so that various obstacles and trials must be faced, one of which is by conquering wild creatures like what Max is doing. The illustration of "wild things" that are terrorizing but can be controlled conveys the message that all uncontrollable things (including nature, animals, and emotions) must be controlled or subdued by humans, even by children.

This reinforces the Western cultural ideology demonstrated in the analysis written by Haugaard (2022), which often places nature within Western cultural ideology as something to be controlled and attained, rather than equated or embraced. Therefore, overall, this illustration demonstrates that the representation of wild creatures as manageable threats reinforces the myth that humans are central, and other creatures are objects to be tamed. In the context of children's books, this narrative seems simple and enjoyable, but ideologically it contributes to the spread of anthropocentric values that place humans, even children, as dominant figures over others.

**Figure 5.** Humans are the Rulers of Nature



Source: Maurice Sendak (1963)

At the denotative level, the image shows how Max, a small child wearing his wolf costume, is standing with authority in front of a group of wild creatures in the forest. He raises one hand as a sign of command. The large creatures also appear to be listening to Max's words, namely "Max growled, 'Be still or I will eat you up!'".

On a connotative level, Max is a symbol of human power. Max's small stature contrasts sharply with the wild creatures he encounters, demonstrating how humans are able to adapt easily while still maintaining their identity and dominance. Even when humans imitate nature by wearing costumes, they are still able to maintain control. Furthermore, the wild creatures' obedience to Max has shown that even though they have faces far more frightening than Max, they can be tamed by human authority and language. However, the statement "Be still or I will eat you up!" shows the confusion between power and love, as also in the previous depiction. The threat of "eating" is presented not only as a form of control, but also as a feeling of love and a sense of ownership like a child that is very absolute, instinctive, and emotional.

At the mythical level, humans as the rulers of nature show an anthropocentric symbol that human intelligence and speech can defeat even the most primitive power (Scotto, 2024). In addition, the reaction shown by the wild animals to the threat given by Max, namely "Be still or I will eat you up!" shows that nature is also emotionally dependent on humans. This mythologizes that nature is emotionally very responsive to human desires and nature needs human presence to have a purpose or form.

**Gambar 6.** Alam Mencari Kepemimpinan Manusia



Source: Maurice Sendak (1963)

At the denotative level, the image shows how Max walks in front with his confidence while the four wild creatures follow him obediently. There is a text that says, "The wild things shook with fear and named him the most wild thing of all".

On a connotative level, Max, nicknamed the "wild thing of all," wears a crown on his head, indicating his authority. Furthermore, with Max as the king of the wild creatures, it is implied that wild creatures in nature are creatures that must be subdued. The text of the story, "they named him the wildest thing of all," reinforces Max as the wildest character, yet ironically, he controls everything outside, including himself.

At the mythical level, it shows that humans are the highest creatures compared to other creatures. Although the wild creatures around humans have bigger, stronger bodies and scary faces, they are still subject to the emotional power possessed by humans. In this case, what happens in Max's life supports the myth of human supremacy, especially through language, imagination, and naming (Bhan & Govindrajan, 2023). In addition, the image indicates that nature is basically looking for leadership from humans. This shows the anthropocentric symbol that nature is waiting for guidance from humans, that the wild nature will be incomplete or will remain chaotic without the structure and meaning brought by humans (Affifi, 2017).

The crown Max wears signifies absolute sovereignty, indicating that the wilderness is now under human control. This story reflects research by Koski et al. (2015), which demonstrates that order and power do not derive from physical strength, but from social structures and symbolic statuses remembered from



childhood and also from children's books. The recognition Max receives from the wild creatures reinforces the anthropocentric ideology: the non-human world can only be tamed, mastered, and interpreted if humans are the focus. The concept of "wild" is also interpreted and controlled by humans. This image as a whole shows how, in children's stories, too, the ideology of humans as absolute controllers of the non-human world is formed symbolically and visually from an early age.

**Figure 7.** Inherent Traits of Humans, namely, Leadership



Source: Maurice Sendak (1963)

At the denotative level, the picture above shows Max wearing a crown and holding a golden staff, being carried by wild creatures. His hands are raised upwards, indicating a victory that he has achieved. All the big and wild animals also show happy faces. This is reinforced by the text "He was the King of all wild things!"

On a connotative level, the crown Max wears is not just a game or a costume; rather, he is a king in his imagination, implying control, power, and a hierarchical order in which humans stand above nature. Furthermore, the animals in the picture, though frightening with their fangs, claws, and horns, appear cooperative, docile, and even happy to be led by Max. This suggests that human leadership is necessary even in the wild. This emotionally culminates in Max's "symbolic maturation" stage: from a wild, punished child to a master of a world that was initially frightening and alien. This, in the narrative context, marks the beginning of Max's experience of complete respect and acceptance.

At the mythical level, the image shows that a small child is able to organize and control nature. This strengthens the opinion of Akinsulure-Smith et al. (2009) which states that humans can bring their governance structure into the midst of the chaos they are facing. In addition, this also strengthens the idea put forward by

Vitale & Bonaiuto (2024) that nature is not only subject to humans, but nature also wants to please humans by adjusting to the imagination possessed by humans. Max, who went through the transformation from a child who did not obey his parents' orders to being punished by being locked in his room and turning into the king of wild creatures, shows the idea that humans have an inherent nature, namely, to be a leader. Max's status as king (visually exalted and crowned) reinforces the narrative that a child is even worthy of ruling the non-human world and its creatures, as long as he has courage and determination. This becomes a myth that human power over nature is unnatural, not to be considered and praised. "*He was the King of all wild things*" as a sentence not only indicates narrative reality, but provides legitimacy to human control that is formed in social structures even from an early age.

Most depictions show a hierarchical relationship between the "wild things," Max, and the main character as a sign of the non-human world. In the fourth sentence (Max threatens: "*Be still or I will eat you up!*") and the fifth (the wild things crown Max as the wildest), Max takes power over the non-human world with verbal threats, hand waves, and body expressions. The sixth sentence also shows him riding the wild creatures, asserting absolute control. From the first image to the last, there is a visual progression from a naughty child at home (chasing the dog and making a mess), to a child who controls the non-human world, and then back to a child who is more self-controlled. This pattern shows a narrative of maturing from control, but with the risk of spreading an anthropocentric narrative of power (Gajendran & Sivakaminathan, 2025).

Although the title's power is quite pronounced, Maurice Sendak's depiction still employs a graceful beauty: curved lines, pastel colors, and Max's facial expression, which is more playful than sinister. This suggests that Max's power is not evil, but rather part of a game. This approach can be understood as a way for human domination over nature to appear playful and natural, masking ideology with benign imagery, a technique often used in children's narratives to make control seem "non-threatening" (Kret et al., 2020).

With its combination of text and visuals, *Where the Wild Things Are* creates the myth of humans as the center of control of the world, even within the imagination of young children. Through the application of Barthes's semiotic approach, it becomes clear that understanding the depiction lies not only in the visible, but also in the ideological structures and symbols that follow, thus, the anthropocentric narrative is refined into a beautiful children's story.

## Discussion

Based on the analysis that has been done on the series of images obtained from the children's storybook entitled *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, it shows that Sendak tries to build a very anthropocentric narrative where

the character Max, a small child, gradually asserts his dominance over the wild world. In addition, the anthropocentric narrative can be seen using Roland Barthes' theory. At the denotative level, the story provides a depiction of a child interacting with expressive wild creatures, wandering in unfamiliar places, and finally growing up and becoming a king of wild creatures. At the connotative level, the images in the storybook symbolize human traits, starting from emotional complexity, leadership, authority, and reason associated with the environment and non-human creatures.

The journey that Max made in his bedroom is an obsession that wants to control everything and his desire to be a king as seen through how before Max entered the wild world in his room, he always tried to chase his pets and upset his mother because of the mistakes he made which made him think that his mother no longer loved him because she punished him without giving him dinner. His desire to control and become a king he poured into the wild world he encountered and it turned out to make him change for the better. This is by what is mentioned in the anthropocentric perspective, where humans are above nature because humans are the rulers of nature who are able to change it (Aldiansyah et al., 2023).

The changes made by Max to the wild world and wild creatures are examples of anthropocentric perspectives. Max riding wild creatures, ordering them to accompany him on his journey, and taking Max back to his ship are examples of anthropocentric things where humans exploit nature as they please to fulfill their needs without any awareness to protect nature. As a result, this anthropocentric perspective is believed to be the main reason for the current environmental damage (Aldiansyah et al., 2023).

The animals in the story are not just monsters, but the monsters are symbols of human social hierarchy, emotions, and behavior. Max's journey is a process that Max goes through to get to know himself better for growth. Finally, at the myth level, it shows that the story spreads a cultural ideology where nature is not only subdued by humans, but nature is incomplete without humans. Although Max is still a child, Sendak shows in the story that humans naturally have the nature to lead, impose meaning, and rule. The use of the crown and the respect given to him by wild creatures reinforce the myth that humans are not only born normative but are also destined to lead other creatures.

So, it can be seen that the syntropocentric symbol contained in the story *Where the Wild Things Are* can be seen through humans who have an important role in the sustainability of nature. Douglas Jonh Hall (in Aldiansyah et al., 2023), a famous theologian from Canada, said that humans are above nature, in nature itself, and are one with nature. The meaning of humans being above nature is that humans tend to prioritize their own interests compared to the impacts they cause which can be in the form of damage to nature which can be seen through humans who only focus on their own comfort and welfare by exploiting nature arbitrarily. Then, humans in nature means that humans are part of the existing creation that is interdependent and needs each other because humans are one with nature. Finally,

humans with nature which means that humans also do not control or are above nature but also do not experience degradation but humans together with other creatures live side by side with all the differences that exist which means that the exploitation carried out by humans is not done as humans please but they continue to try to maintain and bear all the impacts based on solidarity because there is a sense of mutual need between humans and nature.

From the anthropocentric explanation, the symbol has been clearly depicted from the figure of Max who is a small child who needs nature to help him explore himself and to become a child who can be more responsible. Although Max was previously a child who had difficulty obeying his mother's rules, Max finally managed to adapt to being a human with nature where even though Max exploits his monster friends in the wild to make him king and arranges them to take him to his world again, Max still needs them so that the impact of Max's exploitation of wild creatures is still Max's responsibility. Therefore, through the anthropocentric analysis reviewed through Roland Barthes' approach, it has shown that the anthropocentric ideology is strengthened through the narrative that even though nature and the creatures encountered by Max the little boy seem terrifying, Max, who is a little boy and human, is able to conquer, understand, and even control them, where this is a form of human dominance over nature through children's imagination.

Max's positive interactions with the environment can encourage the development of environmental ethics, so the story in *Where the Wild Things Are* shows that positive feelings in children at an early age need to be developed and linked to nature. According to Arola et al. (2023), if the relationship between children and nature is not cultivated from an early age, this will make children see themselves as separate and not part of nature. If the development of a child's sense of self is disconnected from nature, then nature will be seen as something to be controlled, not to be preserved.

Based on research conducted by Bulgarelli & Jones (2023), it is stated that empathy in children aged four to seven years needs to be developed because if it is not developed, children will actually develop bio phobia that arises from discomfort and fear of nature. Therefore, Max's continuity and interaction with nature as expressed by Maurice Sendak tries to show the importance of human interaction with nature so that during childhood, children can grow their empathy with nature, especially non-human creatures such as animals. Animals are an endless source of wonder for children because children who engage in interactions with animals can develop their emotions.



## Conclusion

Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* has become the most popular picture book in the history of American children's literature. It tells the story of a young boy named Max's rebellion against the constraints imposed by his family, his journey to freedom, his attempt to conquer the Wild Things he finds in the exotic land of his imagination, and his return home. Based on the analysis, the anthropocentric symbols contained in the children's story entitled *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak have appeared since the beginning of the story, namely since the transformation of Max's bedroom into a forest to Max's exploration of the forest that grew in his room until he was crowned "King of all wild things".

This story has consistently focused on humans as creators and rulers of the world around them. The wild creatures that are depicted have finally submitted to the authority exercised by Max. These symbols have reinforced the ideological myth that humans are superior and destined to dominate nature. Therefore, this book no longer only tells the imagination of a child, but it also visually emphasizes the relationship between nature and humans, where humans are the controllers of all things in nature.

The results of this study have several implications. The results of this study have implications for parents and educators because through this book, if read more critically, parents and educators can use this storybook as a discussion tool regarding the relationship between humans and the environment so that children can develop ecological awareness from an early age. When compared to other anal storybooks such as the book written by E.B. White with the title *Charlotte's Web* which gives agency to non-human creatures, namely spiders, and *The Gruffalo* which shows the intelligence of small animals when facing a threat, then *Where the Wild Things Are* seems to emphasize human dominance without giving space to the will of wild creatures,

It must be acknowledged that this research is still subjective and interpretive, where the various meanings that emerge in this study still give rise to the possibility of other alternative meanings. For example, readers may judge that the dominance demonstrated by Max is a metaphorical form of a child's self-control over his emotions or that the wild world that Max travels is simply a psychological manifestation of Max's anger that is locked up by his mother. Nevertheless, it is very important for children's literature studies to not ignore the ideological dimensions shown through visual elements, especially in shaping children's perspectives on the world around them.

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