

Designing Children's Book: Tommy & Darkness to Overcome Fear of Shadows (Ages 6-12)

Budi Darmo^{1)*}, Budi Sanjaya²⁾, Maylea Crysantie³⁾, Meiliana Tjiu⁴⁾, Matthew Agustino⁵⁾

1), 2), 3), 4), 5) Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Visual Art and Design, Universitas Tarumanagara, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email : budid@fsrd.untar.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Children often feel fear of shadows in the dark, which frequently arises from imaginary creatures or their dreams. This fear disrupts their emotional development and affects their sleep routines, leading to issues like insomnia and anxiety. Addressing this issue through effective educational tools such as children's books is crucial, especially in Indonesia where children's interest in reading is still very low. This project aims to create a children's book titled "Tommy & Darkness," designed to help children aged 6-12 overcome their fear of shadows. The story follows a young boy named Tommy who learns to confront and understand his fear with the help of a friendly guide. The book employs the Design Thinking method from the Hasso-Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford to creatively and engagingly demonstrate that fear can be overcome through empathy and courage. This method emphasizes understanding the user's experience, encouraging children to relate to Tommy's journey. The book also aims to enhance children's emotional resilience in facing everyday challenges by showing that fear is a natural part of life and can be managed with the right mindset and support. Illustrated with vivid, colorful artwork, "Tommy & Darkness" captures children's attention and makes the story more engaging. Ultimately, this project seeks to foster a culture of reading in Indonesia while providing valuable lessons in emotional intelligence and resilience.

KEYWORDS

Book Design
Children's Book
Children
Education for Children

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INTRODUCTION

Every child has a different nature and personality. Usually, a child will feel various feelings, one of which is fear. Feelings of fear arise because they are triggered by events or objects that create insecurity in a person, so fear becomes a signal for the body as a form of protection from an object that is considered unsafe (Pertwi, 2019). Children often experience a variety of fears. Some of the most common are fear of loud noises, animals with scary visuals, dark places, heights, being alone, and meeting strangers. These fears are of course supported by imaginary creatures or imaginations that arise from the child's dreams (Muris, 2010). This is common because the emotions the child is feeling are new to them, so it is natural for them to feel frightened seeing something strange like a dark shadow. The role of parents is certainly important in anticipating and responding to what the child feels. Parents need to provide habituation and introduction through play as well as teaching children knowledge so that children become calmer and more accustomed to seeing something that is considered frightening to them.

In 2016, UNESCO reported that Indonesia's reading interest index stood at 0.001% (Florenxia

et al., 2023). Then data from the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia (*Perpusnas*) shows that the reading level of Indonesian people in 2022 reached 63.9 points, an increase of 7.4% compared to the previous year. This proves that children's interest in reading in Indonesia is still very low, of course this indicator is influenced by several influencing factors including lack of motivation to read and limited infrastructure for reading. Seeing this, there is an urgency to design fairy tale books that are rich in visuals and the need to make comprehensive distribution efforts at public reading facilities to increase children's interest in reading.

Children's books have various benefits, of course, this can educate children. Children can understand the world around them and get various life messages. Through children's books, it can teach children how to deal with conflicts, desires, and healthy human relationships (VisikoKnox-Johnson, 2016). Children's books are generally dominated by illustrations that appeal to readers (Husna et al., 2017). Illustrations containing images and colors are a form of message delivery pattern that can function to dramatize, clarify, increase visual value, and even influence audience attitudes.

Children's books can help children understand that fears can be overcome in creative and playful ways through several psychological mechanisms. First, children's books often depict real problems in the form of fantasy worlds, which allows children to process scary situations in a safe space (Seltz, 2020). Secondly, children's books can sharpen children's imagination in visualizing creative solutions to problems they face. When a child identifies with a character who successfully overcomes obstacles in the fairy tale he or she reads, the child will mirror that behavior so that this creative thinking pattern will be embedded in the child's psychology (Gafford, 2024). Third, children's books foster a sense of resilience in children. "*Hansel and Gretel*" or "*Cinderella*" are examples of fairy tale books that provide examples for readers, that no matter how difficult the challenges faced by the main character, they can eventually solve the problem bravely (VisikoKnox-Johnson, 2016).

Children's books provide many benefits and are often used as part of therapy to help children who have difficulty processing emotions in a safe and meaningful way. There are many children's books that present stories about courage with fantasy characters, but there are no children's books that use stories or characters related to something that is easily found in children's daily lives. The purpose of this design is to create a children's book specifically designed to help children aged 6-12 years overcome the fear of shadows in the dark, by presenting stories and characters that are related to their daily lives.

METHOD

The design of this Children's Book uses the Design Thinking method, developed by the Hasso-Plattner Design Institute at Stanford (Plattner, 2010) which consists of five processes, ranging from empathize, define, ideate, prototype, to test.

1. Empathize

An approach to the audience is carried out. Literature study was conducted by searching for literature on *Google Scholar* about the characteristics and psychological needs of children aged 6-12 years about the ability to imagine and understand emotions.

2. Define

The process of analyzing data from the literature study that has been done. Then formulated into a finding which is the big idea for design.

3. Ideate

The visual design of the book, which involves drafting a script, creating a mood board containing color choices, fonts, and illustration style references, followed by character drawings and storyboards.

4. Prototype

The process of illustrating and placing text on the book to realize design ideas into draft form, using Procreate and Adobe Illustrator software.

5. Test

Testing and evaluation of the prototype, involving consultation with experts, revision and finishing to perfect the prototype before printing

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Empathize

Key facts were found in the literature study on the characteristics and psychological needs of children aged 6-12 years regarding the ability to imagine and understand emotions.

- a. A person's character develops based on the potential they carry from birth, with the involvement of parenting to support their character formation significantly (Hasanah, 2016).
- b. In Indonesia, 6-year-old children begin their education at the elementary school level. From a psychological perspective, this age is categorized as late childhood, group period, or adjustment period (Lestari et al., 2020).
- c. Emotional resilience can help children overcome behavioral problems and improve their well-being (Daniel et al., 2020).
- d. More comprehensive interventions are needed to support children's psychological needs and reduce the negative impact on emotional and behavioral development of school-age children (Mahmoodi et al., 2023).
- e. Children can improve their emotional development skills well if facilitated and given positive space in their environment. This is also supported by good parenting, so that children can develop significantly. Not many parents pay more attention to their children so that they do not have the ability to process emotions well. This makes children find out for themselves when entering school and become undirected. Whereas the role of parents as facilitators for their children is quite crucial (Lubis, 2019).
- f. From an early age, some children face fears that they may hide to avoid being stigmatized by their peers as "cowards" or "timid" (Pardede, 2020).
- g. Swedish psychologist Carl Jung came up with a theory that every human being carries a shadow. Shadows are part of our emotional side and are often synonymous with fear and vulnerability. However, this can be overcome by recognizing the shadow with a pleasant perspective (Beeharilal, 2020).
- h. The reason why children are afraid of shadows can be traced back to their genetics which are connected to the DNA of their ancient ancestors, who had a high level of vigilance in dark places, considering that in ancient times people survived in the dark (Midlight, 2023).

2. Define

Children's psychological and emotional development is fundamentally different, but they have the same instincts in dealing with an emotion, so it requires an active role of parents and a positive environment in facilitating their emotional regulation and confidence development. The idea of designing a children's book that helps them understand their emotions and strategies in overcoming fear and stress experienced in everyday life is needed.

3. Ideate

NASKAH STORYBOARD BUKU ILUSTRASI ANAK TOMMY AND DARKNESS

Pages	Deskripsi	Teks	Ilustrasi
Cover	Depan	A Journey of Sacrifice and Courage Tommy, Kith & Darkness Maylea Crysantie (Logo Untar)	[Ilustrasi karakter Tommy yang memegang senter dan kith melihat ke arah cahayanya]
	Belakang	Cerita ini mengisahkan Tommy, seorang anak laki-laki yang harus pergi Study Tour selama 3 hari 2 malam. Namun dia merasa cemas harus meninggalkan kucing kesayangannya, Kith yang sangat takut dengan kegelapan. Tommy bertekad mencari solusi untuk mengatasi masalah ini hingga dia mendapati senter dapat membantu Kith agar tidak ketakutan. Petualangan ini membawa Tommy pada pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang rela berkorban, keberanian dan komitmen. ©Maylea Crysantie 2023. (Logo Untar)	Plain paper
0	Pengantar	A Journey of Sacrifice and Courage Tommy, Kith & Darkness This book belongs to: (Rela berkorban tak hanya tentang diri sendiri, tetapi juga tentang cinta dan keberanian untuk melindungi yang kita cintai.)	Plain paper
1	Introduction	Terlihat Tommy sedang memandang kucingnya dengan cemas.	[Seorang anak laki-laki duduk di lantai sambil melihat kucingnya dengan ekspresi cemas]
2	1 halaman dengan Introduction	Besok Tommy harus pergi mengikuti Study Tour selama 3 hari 2 malam.	[Seorang anak laki-laki dan teman-temannya di dalam bus]
3	1 halaman	Tommy merasa cemas karena akan meninggalkan Kucingnya, Kith yang takut dengan kegelapan.	[Seorang anak laki-laki duduk di meja belajar terlihat cemas dan kebingungan]
4		Dan berpikir "Bagaimana caranya agar dia bisa lega meninggalkan kucingnya untuk pergi Study Tour?"	[Seekor kucing terlihat ketakutan dengan kegelapan di sekitarnya]



Figure 1. Script & Mood Board Preparation
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)



Figure 2. Tommy and Kith Character Depiction
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)

The illustration style used is expressive by utilizing facial lines, bright colors, and large eyes to clearly show the emotions and feelings of the characters.

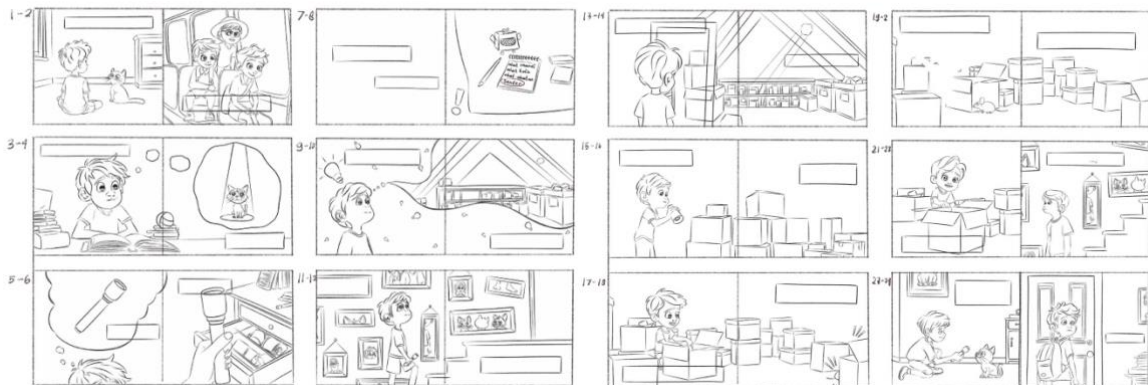


Figure 3. Storyboarding Process
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)

4. Prototype

The book media was made with landscape orientation measuring 22 cm x 20 cm, using Procreate and Adobe Illustrator software.



Figure 4. Illustration Process with Procreate
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)

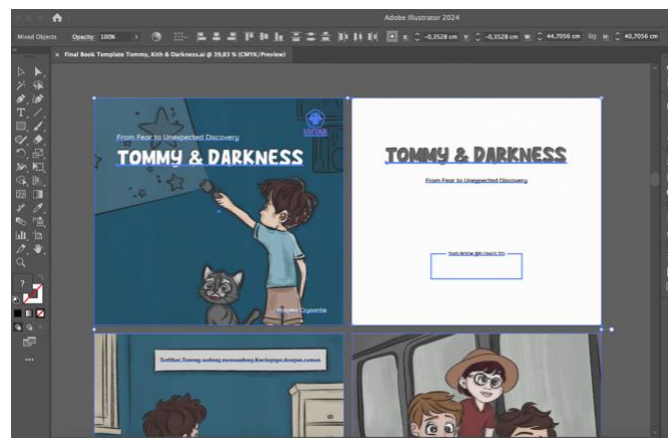


Figure 5. Text Placement Process with Adobe Illustrator
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)

5. Test

At this stage, the designer consulted with Mr. Andreas as a lecturer of Digital Illustration course at *Universitas Tarumanagara*, and Mrs. Herlina Kartaadmaja as a professional illustrator who has published 79 children's books and has 13 years of experience in her field to get in-depth and constructive feedback. The following discussion is organized following the review stages:

- The first stage of the review involved presenting the concept and initial illustrations to Mr. Andre and Mrs. Herlina, who provided feedback on the suitability of the illustrations to the story script, including color alignment, character design, and illustration support for the storyline.
- The second stage of the review focused on clarifying the storyline by identifying parts that might be confusing for young readers and providing suggestions for improvement. They also evaluated the effectiveness of the illustrations in conveying important emotions and actions in the story.
- The final stage of the review assessed the improvement of visual appeal, with Mr. Andre and Mrs. Herlina assessing the page composition, use of space, and other visual elements, and providing suggestions for adjustments to make each page more dynamic and appealing to children.

Detailed refinements are made to ensure each page of the book reaches the expected quality standard, including minor improvements in illustrations, text compatibility, and final preparation before entering the printing stage. In accordance with the initial planning, this book is landscape-oriented measuring 22 cm x 20 cm with a total of 24 pages, printed on 150 GSM matte paper with a matte laminated Soft Cover.

6. Form of Work

The results of this evaluation ensure that the book not only conveys the moral message effectively but is also able to attract the attention and interest of young readers through attractive illustrations that match the story.



Figure 6. "Tommy & Darkness" Children's Book Display
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)

This Children's Illustrated Book titled "Tommy & Darkness" in the genre of fiction, fantasy, and psychology tells the story of Tommy, a brave boy, who has to go on a Study Tour for three days. However, Tommy feels anxious because he must leave Kith, his favorite cat who is very afraid of the dark. Tommy is determined to find a solution so that Kith is no longer afraid, and eventually discovers that a flashlight can help overcome this fear.



Figure 7. Preview of "Tommy & Darkness" Children's Book
(Source: Crysantie, 2024)

This children's book is an educational media tool that aims to help children understand fear that can be overcome in a creative and fun way, as well as teaching courageous attitudes and empathy that are full of important values to be applied in daily lives.

CONCLUSIONS

The process of designing this children's book uses the Design Thinking method developed by *the Hasso-Plattner Design Institute at Stanford* (Platner, 2010) which consists of five processes. The Empathize stage was conducted to approach the audience by conducting a literature study on *Google Scholar*. The Define stage contains the big idea of the design which is the result of the analysis of the data obtained. The Ideate stage involves drafting the script, making mood board, determining character images, and drafting storyboards. The Prototype stage is the process of executing the design into draft form. The Test stage is carried out to perfect the prototype draft, by consulting with experts.

This book is specially designed to help children overcome the fear of shadows in the dark, often triggered by imagination or dreams. By presenting stories and characters that relate to their daily lives, this fairy tale book uses illustrations that support the story while decorating empty spaces, dramatizing, clarifying, and enhancing visual value and influencing readers' attitudes. Fairy tales depict real problems in the form of a fantasy world, allowing children to process scary situations safely and creatively. Fairy tale books are also often used in therapy to help children process emotions in a safe and meaningful way. Understanding the developmental stages of children's psychology is essential to tailor the content to their level of understanding and interest, thereby enhancing the appeal of the story. Through these stages, the resulting children's books not only convey moral messages effectively but are also able to capture the attention and interest of young readers with illustrations that are engaging and relevant to their daily experiences.

To ensure the success of a children's book design, it is advisable to conduct in-depth research on the audience, their interests and the problems they face. Interacting with educators, psychologists and parents can provide valuable insights into the fears and interests of children in this age group. Incorporating interactive elements and visually appealing illustrations can increase engagement and understanding. By integrating these strategies, this book can effectively address children's fears and promote a love for reading.

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