

BAD MOONS RISING

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Abstract: Children's picture books often depict the moon inaccurately. In displaying over three dozen examples of erroneous illustrations and/or writing, this poster calls on planetarians to improve the pool of children's picture books.

The errors in picture books fall under a few recurrent themes. The most frequent miscue occurs when an illustration shows a waning crescent moon in the early evening. If the illustrator wants to show a thin crescent moon just after sunset, the moon should be drawn as a waxing crescent. A thin waning crescent moon seen out of a window suggests the sun will soon be rising.

Another mistake occurs when the moon in the story lacks continuity from scene to scene. For example, both a full moon and a crescent moon may appear in a story that takes place in only one given night. In some books, a waning crescent moon appears on one page while a waxing crescent moon is seen on a later page.

I make the assumption that the selected books are written from a mid-northern latitude perspective. The sun will be in the direction opposite from the direction in which the cusps of a *thin* crescent moon point. Some books, however, show the cusps of a thin crescent moon pointing downward, suggesting the sun is visually above the moon at nightfall.

Authors and illustrators also misstep when the text and illustrations do not correspond to the motion of the real moon. For example, the illustration may suggest the rising sun and setting moon cross paths while moving in opposite directions.

For this poster, on one side of a laminated page is a color copy of the original illustration. Several items are on the back side, including a listing of the title, the author, the illustrator, and the publisher. A summary of the story is followed

by my comments. An illustration shows the changing moon and its respective phases on the back of each page, too.

The method for finding children's picture books with faulty moons was neither scientific nor random. During a casual search at home and at the library, I pulled from the shelves and quickly scanned any books with suggestive titles. If a book contained a bad moon, I cited it. Obviously, erroneous illustrations from many other books have been omitted to allow the illustrator artistic license.

Improper depictions of the moon were pervasive. Anecdotal speaking, the vast majority of crescent moon illustrations had shortcomings. A full moon, while a commonly illustrated phase, offers less fodder for criticism by virtue of its uniform shape.

In my casual search I did come across several very good picture books. For the poster I cite the sequence of illustrations in *Goodnight Moon*. This classic picture book reasonably depicts the rising full moon moving across a window frame while a mantle clock provides a time reference in ten minute increments. *Goodnight Moon*, written by Margaret Wise Brown and illustrated by Clement Hurd, was first copyrighted in 1947 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

While highlighting these errors, this poster calls on planetarians to improve the pool of children's picture books. Simply put, I appeal to planetarians to write those books you have always wanted to author. In the category of children's books, the need clearly exists.