

Title	<i>The Missing Piece</i>				
Author (Text & Illustration)	Shel Silverstein				
Publication Year	1976	Publisher	HarperCollins		
Translated Versions	“Searching for Me,” Translated by Yumiko Kurahashi, Kodansha, 1977				
Words	609	Pages	112	YL Level	2.3
Synopsis					
<p>In this story, a protagonist who looks like Pac-Man travels around looking for its pie-shaped missing piece. During its journey, the creature encounters various “pieces” but cannot find the right one—one is too big, another is too small and gets dropped, one breaks when it is held too tightly, and another is wild and refuses to join the creature. One day, the creature comes across a perfectly fitting piece that, when added, forms the protagonist into a complete circle. The creature dances wildly and continues on its journey but discovers that it can no longer sing or roll slowly enough to talk to insects or admire the flowers. When the creature realizes this, it stops, lets go of the new piece, and continues its journey.</p>					
Introduction					
<p>This work is by American writer Shel Silverstein (1930–1999). The illustrations look like quick felt-tip pen scribbles. The main character, who looks like Pac-Man, spins around on a continuous line (the ground) on every page, experiencing various encounters. However, within the simplicity lies a deep question.</p> <p>The work can be interpreted in many ways, but I interpreted the creature’s journey and search for a “missing” piece as the common experience of finding a suitable life partner. The creature meets others with different personalities, gets rejected, and has good times; one day it finds the perfect complement and feels elated. However, it soon notices that rather than feeling whole, it has lost the ability to appreciate its surroundings, and it returns to being alone again.</p> <p>The book’s title in Japanese, as translated by Yumiko Kurahashi, is <i>Searching for Me</i>, which sounds like a journey of self-discovery. The book could also be interpreted as searching for the perfect job or realizing a dream. Because this highly symbolic book allows innumerable allegorical interpretations, any adult with some life experience should appreciate this picture book. It would also be interesting to hear other adults’ interpretations and compare them with children’s reactions</p>					

and interpretations.

Notes

This text has been substantially revised from a draft version of “In Search of Picture Books” [1], published April 2019 in *English Teachers’ Magazine* (Vol. 68, No. 1).

(Text: Megumi Kobayashi)