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Children's Literature: Reflections of the Past

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: REFLECTIONS OF THE PAST

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Thirty picture books for children were reviewed in this study. They were compared on the basis of character development, plot, illustrations, technical aspects and marketability. By using these divisions, parallels were drawn among outstanding works which were then compared to the book written in chapter four.

Results showed that many of the outstanding picture books have withstood the test of time. Their longevity is reflected in their ability to entertain and engross the targeted reader. The task for authors of new books is to capture these time–tested, endearing qualities, ensuring success in the publishing industry.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Writing children's literature is an art that stems from storytelling, which has been in existence as long as humankind. Today, children's storytelling is a form of entertainment and a means of education. Ancient storytelling, however, served a more complex purpose. According to one author, "Storytelling has for centuries been a way of passing on the traditions and beliefs of a society from one generation to the next…" (Bicknell 8).

Societies have always valued their beliefs, traditions and morals, striving to maintain what they believed to be the most admirable of their virtues. Storytelling has been an efficient, though not entirely accurate, way to achieve this. The written word is more consistent because the writer's thoughts are recorded and must be physically altered or incorrectly translated to change the author's intent. Oral storytelling, on the other hand, changes with a speaker's voice inflections and the speaker's own interjections. These minor alterations when combined with repeated narrations can easily change a story. Oral stories can endure, however:

> For thousands of years, as people struggled and survived, learned and grew and thrived, they passed on what wisdom and knowledge they had accumulated through stories, and by doing so built on the past and moved forward into the future. (Storytelling)

A story, either oral or written, usually has an antagonist (human or abstract), a conflict and an outcome. This reflects how societies throughout the ages have persevered. One author infers that "The first stories were told before the first antelope were painted on cave walls" (Watson 61). Oral storytelling is, perhaps, one of the most effective means of communicating because storytelling is seemingly inherent to mankind. A compelling story, whether oral or written, is based on the author's own background, fantasies or imagination. Without the author's experience, a story would be bland and uninteresting to the listener or reader.

Over the centuries, children's storytelling shows a variety of topics. One of the more popular topics, throughout the world, has been "creation myths". These stories explain how the world came to be, varying from religious to mystical viewpoints. One online source notes that "Creation myths are among mankind's earliest attempts to explain some of the most profound questions about the nature and origin of the universe" (Doyle).

The type of creation myth told by ancient civilizations depended strongly on their religious beliefs. The Chinese, for example, tell the story of *Pan-gu* (also spelled *P'an Ku*):

> The first living thing was P'an Ku. He evolved inside a gigantic cosmic egg, which contained all the elements of the universe totally intermixed together. P'an Ku grew by about 10 feet each day. As he grew he separated the earth and the Sky within the egg.

> At the same time he gradually separated the many opposites in nature male and female, wet and dry, light and dark, Yin and Yang. These were all originally totally commingled in the egg. While he grew he also created the first humans. After 18,000 years the egg hatched and P'an Ku died from the effort of creation. From his eyes the sun and moon appeared, from his sweat, rain and dew, from his voice, thunder, and from his body all the natural features of the earth arose. (Doyle)

Creation myths are found in virtually every culture throughout man's existence. The type of story told has always been similar to the religious beliefs of a particular society. Although they are called myths, people in a given society generally view these stories as true. Christianity, for example, uses stories from the Bible to convey God's word and Christians believe this word to be true.

Another popular practice among storytellers has been that of retelling ancient legends and fables. These legends, which began as exaggerated truths, changed to meet the needs and interests of each generation. One of the earliest legends of Santa Claus, for instance, began in fourth century Scandanavia and is based on an actual person, Saint Nicholas. An internet site recounts a tale of how Saint Nicholas helped three sisters who were too poor to be married:

> …the bishop Nicholas was a shy man and did not like to give money directly, so he thought of a way to give it anonymously. When the first daughter was ready to marry, the good bishop tossed a bag of gold into the house at night. Later, when the second daughter prepared to marry, she too received a mysterious bag of gold. When the third daughter was prepared to marry, the poor nobleman was determined to find out who had been so generous. So he kept watch and saw the bishop drop another bag of gold into the house. It has been said that Saint Nicholas climbed on the roof and dropped the third bag of gold down the chimney where it

> landed in a stocking hung to dry, giving us reason to hang up Christmas stockings today. When the father saw what had happened, Nicholas begged him to keep the secret, but of course, the news got out. From then on, whenever anyone received an unexpected gift, they thanked Nicholas. (Santa)

Although the origin of many legends is not known, most, like the legend of Saint Nicholas, began as oral stories passed on from one generation to the next. The original storyteller often goes unrecognized. One such legend, the story of *How True Dog Came to Be*, began as a tale told by native American Indians. True Dog and her brother were abducted from their den and taken to live among the "two–leggeds". She and her brother were treated well and she became the two–leggeds' friend forever (Dog). The internet author of this version notes that "Historically, dogs have been portrayed as the guardians of ancient secrets, hidden treasures and infants" (Dog).

Storytelling has, throughout the ages, assumed various styles. The Japanese, for example, have traditionally used puppets for presenting their stories. This form of storytelling is called "Bunraku" or "Ningyo–joruri". Bunraku dates from 1684 and was introduced by a famous Japanese storyteller named Takemoto Gidayu (Johnson). These puppet stories "…usually revolved around the Confucian concepts of the importance of loyalty (to one's feudal lord, family, etc.) over personal feelings and the tragedy that arises when one blindly follows the precepts" (Johnson). Today, libraries and classrooms often use felt boards and simple finger plays to depict characters, adding tangibility to the oral stories.

Similarly, oral stories have portrayed a myriad of themes ranging from the fanciful to the grim. Fairytales like *Jack and the Beanstalk* tell of the inconceivable: a little man climbing a beanstalk to a giant's home in the clouds. In contrast, the Romanians had a favorite theme called *Miorita* ("the lamb"). "Miorita is an older tale from Romania about a lamb who warns his shepherd that two other shepherds plan to kill him" (Miorita). Likewise, Irish storytelling contained many somber tales about famines, which were a major part of their ancient culture (Folklore). In America, storytellers told of heroes such as Paul Bunyan and Christopher Columbus.

Eventually many of these oral tales, myths and fables became written stories handed down throughout the generations. Fairy tales evolved this way:

> Although large numbers of literary fairy tales were written in 17th century France, most of these tales which are still told and retold now are far older in origin. Many of the stories were edited and changed as they were written down, removing the darker and more gruesome elements of the stories. (Introduction)

As authors recorded stories in writing, they often changed the essence of the stories. Early oral tales of *Little Red Riding Hood* tell of Little Red Riding Hood actually escaping the Big Bad Wolf, but only after he entices her to eat her dead grandmother's flesh! "Societies which practiced cannibalism in the past believed that by eating their enemy, they would take on his strength" (Introduction). In fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood, versions by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm encourage the listener to behave. "The Grimms'

grandmother and girl need a man to save them from their peril, while the original heroines take on the wisdom which comes with age, and survive on their own wits" (Introduction).

In one of the earlier accounts of *Snow White*, Snow White's natural mother tries to murder her own daughter and then Snow White's father abandons her in the woods. The Grimm brothers replaced the mother with a stepmother, but still kept the story gruesome. In another version called the *Juniper Tree*:

> …the child as red as blood and as white as snow is a son, who is again mistreated by his stepmother, killed, and fed to his father in a stew. His half–sister buried his bones with his dead mother, at which point he turns into a bird, and eventually kills his own murderer. (Introduction)

Similar to other art forms, storytelling has evolved with mankind. The basic premise of storytelling, however, has not. Storytelling, both oral and written, can be informative, exciting and enriching, depending on the type of story being told. "Through his or her skill, the storyteller can convey religious beliefs, explain the mysteries of the natural world, reinforce the codes of behavior of a particular community, or transport the listener into an inner world of fantasy" (Bicknell 9). Oral storytelling, by itself, can further enhance a story through the teller's gestures or with props such as puppets. Storytelling games can also entice the audience. One such game, handed down through generations, *Ye Olde Rusty Lantern*, encourages players to take turns playing cards that spin a tale:

> …the players (called Bards) are dealt a hand of cards. Each card bears a word or phrase describing a possible story element. The Bards take turns telling parts of a tale, playing cards by bringing the corresponding story elements into the yarn. When a Bard finishes the story by tying off all the loose ends and playing their last card he wins. (Ye Olde Rusty Lantern)

Storytelling remains popular today. In a recent article for the *Smithsonian*, author Bruce Watson notes that "From the suburbs of Southern California to the woods of New Hampshire, more than 225 storytelling organizations will hold festivals this year" (Watson 60). Mo–Tell, the Missouri Storytelling Association, holds five annual storytelling events each year. Public libraries hold storytelling hours for children as young as two years old.

Storytelling leaves room for the listener to imagine and to come to his or her own conclusions about how a character looks or feels. Mo–Tell's website explains that "So many forms of entertainment for children provide the images for them, and children need activities which require their own imaginations to be active" (Storytelling). According to Bruce Watson, "Psychologists say that stories tap the brain's memory structures" (68). In other words, stories challenge the mind and encourage memory retention. In addition to these benefits, listeners have the advantage of being in a social setting, which allows them to interact with other listeners.

The written word, on the other hand, encourages the reader to create the tone of the story. The reader does not hear voice inflections or the teller's intonation; these are all formulated by the reader. Further, the written words do

not change with each reading…they remain constant. This need for consistency, not found in oral storytelling, contributed to the origin of the written word as a means of record keeping. Writing began as a way to record thoughts, stories and important matters in early civilizations. One author notes that "Since the capacity of the human memory is limited, it became necessary to find a new and uniform system of reference, enabling oral information to be preserved and recovered later in spoken form. This is how writing was born" (Andre–Salvin 11). Writing, therefore, developed out of necessity. As early cultures advanced, so did their need to communicate.

Archaeologists discovered the earliest forms of writing in ancient Sumeria. Around the time of 3300 B.C., Sumeria began to build the first towns in history. This rapid change and increase in the transfer of information between individuals led to the development of the first writing systems (Andre–Salvin 11). In his book *A History of Reading*, author Alberto Manguel tells how two small clay tablets were found in 1984, which dated back to early Sumeria. He explains that "All our history begins with these two tablets" (27). Although these tablets only contained fragmented symbols: they reveal the foundation of modern language.

Gradually, Sumerian writing developed meaning. Nearly 600 years after the clay tablets were carved:

> The first written versions of Sumerian literature, in which only the roots of verbs were transcribed, leaving the reader to fill in the missing elements, appeared in the era of the archaic dynasties (Around 2700 B.C.), together with contracts and other commercial

documents. (Andre–Salvin 13)

Storytelling through writing had begun, and by the end of the third millenium, B.C., poets, writers and scholars began to "…transcribe and circulate the great literary works of oral tradition: hymns to the gods, myths, prayers, epics, philosophical essays and collections of knowledge" (Andre–Salvin 13).

As in storytelling, written literary works evolved throughout centuries and reflected the tastes, styles and needs of each culture. Early Russian tales, for example, written and illustrated by refugee Gleb Botkin in the early 1900s, depicted the Russian revolution through the eyes of a 12–year–old bear named Mishka (Hubbard 84). Great authors such as Mark Twain, Charles Dickens and Louisa May Alcott reveal their culture and heritage in their entertaining stories. Laura Ingalls Wilder with her *Little House* series effectively captured the style of living in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Contemporary books for children reflect the more casual life of the twentieth century. Authors such as Madeline L'Engle, Chris VanAllsburg and Eric Carle mingle realtiy with the absurd. Like earlier literature, however, modern books often have an underlying theme of morality or obedience. *Come Along Daisy!* by Jane Simmons, tells the story of a baby duck who doesn't listen to her mother. Daisy suddenly finds herself lost and scared. This book teaches an important lesson to young children.

Written literature can be more revealing than oral storytelling. A book may divulge a character's deepest thoughts, something that is hard to portray orally. Blockbuster movies support this distinction. Steven King's novel, *Cujo*, became a hit movie. While the movie was riveting, his book further disclosed the very sick and twisted mind of a rabid dog. Without written stories, many wonderful tales would be lost forever.

Children's literature reflects the richness of society throughout history. This project will show how children's literature has evolved and will research the process of publishing and marketing the final product. Analysis and critiques of picture books will be included to demonstrate the characteristics of successful literature. Finally, a picture book written for this project will be compared with notable stories to validate the thesis that children's literature does, in fact, reflect our past.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Today's written language appears to have evolved from symbols used by ancient Sumerians. The emergence of formal written communication led to the development of literature, a means of permanently recording an author's thoughts, opinions, dreams and facts. Until the invention of the printing press in the 1400s, however, most written records were easily lost or forgotten. The printing press provided a way to distribute literary works to a multitude of people, adding permanence to the written word. Children's literature, however, did not develop immediately. In his collector's guide to children's books, author Eric Quayle notes:

> After the invention of printing with movable metal type about 1456, and the setting up of William Caxton's press at Westminster about twenty years later, there was still to be a long wait before any work remotely interesting to children made its appearance. (12)

One of the first known picture books for children, *Kunst Und Lehrbüchlein*, didn't emerge until 1578 in Germany. Translated, the title means *Book of Art and Instruction for Young People*. The book's intricate woodcut illustrations by Jost Amman are "...a fine early example of a young scholar using a horn–book, and also a very early printed picture of a little girl holding a doll" (Quayle 16).

Until the emergence of *Kunst Und Lehrbüchlein*, children's reading was generally limited to the Bible. One author notes that "The Bible was in every home not only the chief source of religious instruction, but also the text used for teaching reading and spelling" (Kiefer 9). Early picture books from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries paved the way for tremendous growth in the area of children's literature. Many early picture books such as *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, by John Amos Comenius, combined pictures with learning and were an:

> …encyclopedic assemblage of labelled [sic] pictures designed to give a logical pansophical view not only of the world but of learning. It begins with God and finishes with the Last Judgment, with the natural world and human life displayed between. (Hunt 8)

As in Europe, America's early literature for children was religious by nature. Hornbooks, which taught children their ABCs and the Lord's Prayer, were customary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These flat books without pages were normally of wood and shaped like paddles. One author attests that "This convenient and relatively indestructible form of presenting the alphabet (followed by a syllabary invocation to the Trinity, and the Lord's Prayer) was in common use from the sixteenth century until well on in the eighteenth" (Hunt 3). The author further elaborates that "Out of the hornbook developed the battledore, popular until the mid–nineteenth century, a folded piece of cardboard with a more enticing appearance since the alphabet was usually illustrated" (Hunt 4).

Another type of book which developed from the hornbook was the primer which focused primarily on the Christian church. The primer included psalms, prayers and portions of the actual church services. The hornbook, battledore and primer were the dominant sources of reading for young children. Even the early folk tales and myths were directed toward the adult population:

> Only a small fraction of the folk tales were composed for or told to children. A majority of the tales mirror the mature lives, customs, beliefs, and emotions of peoples all over the world, and their adult themes make large numbers of them totally unsuited to children. (Sutherland 149)

Children's literature started taking shape in the 1600s, despite the somberness of the hornbooks, battledores and primers. This early Puritan literature was:

> …meant entirely for instruction, and religious instruction in a difficult doctrine at that. Yet it was written for children and designed to match children's capabilities and tastes as the authors understood them. Realizing how much more easily verse was memorized than prose, Puritans wrote doctrine in verse for the young. (Hunt 103)

Society during this period was very rigid in the upbringing of children. Children's literature, likewise, reflected this firm approach.

In contrast to books that were conspicuous in their teachings, others encouraged learning in a less direct manner. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, by John Bunyan, published in 1678 was "…remarkable for the beauty and almost childish

simplicity of its language, the whole permeated with the author's insight into nature and evident sense of humour" (Quayle 22). Children's books from this eara, however, were few and far between.

By the 1700s, there was also a trend in children's literature to educate children on their manners and conduct. Children were expected to behave a certain way in all social situations and the consequences for disobedience were severe. In her book, *From Dr. Mather to Dr. Seuss: 200 Years of American Books for Children*, author Mary Lystad notes that "Another important purpose for writing books directed at the young in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was instruction in social behavior" (9). Likewise, books were generally serious in content and not very engaging.

During this period, children's literature was inclined to be instructional in nature; however, this era saw the beginning of books written for entertainment:

> Children required schooling in order to fulfill a Christian life, as well as preparing for a good death; nevertheless, illness and early death continued to preoccupy writers. There were also descriptions of children's glorious deaths in chapbooks, but these were now competing with a flood of material which dwelt on children's amusement — fairy tales, rhymes, riddles, games — of which emphasized their educational development and healthy physical growth. (Hunt 46)

Although the emphasis on children's reading continued to be religious in nature, the 1700s instilled a desire in society to read for pleasure.

A preference for appealing literature continued to increase throughout the eighteenth century. One author theorizes that "Aspiring artisans could now afford books and offer their children a superior education, while the growing provision of elementary education to the working classes caused literacy levels to rise rapidly; a readership was being created which was hungry for popular reading" (Marcus 33).

This change in social structure indirectly influenced the course of children's literature, resulting in the beginning of formal publishing houses that marketed children's books. Publishers such as John Newberry, acknowledged the various trends in children's literature and created an industry that is still growing today: "Newberry's publishing for children coincided with the increasing preoccupation with educating children for social accomplishment in addition to teaching them moral precepts and religious principles" (Hunt 35).

As the 1700s progressed, society's view on children's behavior changed. Though still firm and rigid, adults began to see children as individuals, allowing greater flexibility in their upbringing. This shift in child rearing was reflected in the metamorphosis of children's literature:

> The changing status of the early American child may be given tangible expression by the books provided the "little men and women" for the period 1700 to 1835. The very appearance of the small volumes indicates not only an evolution in American tastes and customs but also a transition in adult response to the needs of childhood. (Kiefer 6)

Between 1836 and 1855, however, 77% of the books at least partially emphasized religious behavior in America (Lystad 8).

Most children's books during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were authored by men, those members of society with the greatest influence over children's social behavior (Lystad 14). Women were still not equal to men in the eyes of the law, so society considered men to be the motivating forces behind child development. Ironically, during this time, young girls comprised a substantial portion of the readership of children's literature:

> As girls gained greater access to schooling in the late eighteenth century, literacy rose above the basic level for many women, creating a whole new class of readers, one which would have enormous influence on nineteenth century publishing, including that for children. (Hunt 104)

By the middle of the nineteenth centuries, children's literature had once again, changed dramatically. Again, the status of the child evolved, influencing literature to be directed toward the child rather than at the child's behavior. This shift led to the introduction of formally recorded fairy tales: "During the nineteenth century, the world of the fairy–tale became a familiar setting for children's stories. It was treated with varying degrees of seriousness, though some element of moral teaching was usually present" (Hunt 138). Fairy tales became quite popular, with over 500 versions of *Cinderella* catalogued (Gould).

Between 1850 and 1890, stories of adventure and fantasy emerged that were targeted toward children. Often, these adventures were coupled with moral lessons that still appealed to the reader:

> *Little Women* was the book, and Alcott the author, that the mainstream children's market had been waiting for. Here was a girls' book that brought tradition and change together in a "simple and true" story with both sound moral messages and enormous appeal for girls. (Hunt 127)

Series books also gained popularity, and by the end of the nineteenth century female authors dominated the field.

A subsequent development in the nineteenth century was the emergence of periodicals. Magazines such as *Our Young Folks*, *St. Nicholas* and *Harper's Young People* were aimed at America's youth, both before and after the Civil War (Marcus 62). These periodicals were typically managed by popular authors:

> Several of the most enterprising 19th century American writers for children, including Samuel Griswold Goodrich (who wrote under the pseudonym Peter Parley), Louisa May Alcott, Mary Mapes Dodge and Frank R. Stockton, doubled as editors of the periodicals. (Marcus 62)

The growth of periodicals had a great impact on the subject matter of children's literature. The mass distribution of periodicals along with the increased exposure that writer's enjoyed, inspired a greater freedom of written storytelling not seen in published books.

The progression of children's literature at the turn of the century reflected the maturation in society's perception of children. In her book spanning 200 years of children's literature, Mary Lystad concurs that "Just as there were, in books over the years, changes in social values, there were changes in views of children and of the ways in which they should be socialized" (228). Lystad further concludes that these changes are also influenced by developing views of the world as a whole:

> Changes in book content, over the decades of our country's history reflect changes in people's feelings about what is significant in the world and what is to be prized in human relationships and human achievement. (Forward)

By the turn of the century, publishing had fast become a profitable industry. In 1919, Macmillan opened the first children's department in their publishing house. "Books for Boys and Girls" was run by Louise Seaman Bechtel for 15 years. "She was a pioneer in the field of children's book publishing and was among the first to broadcast a children's story hour on the radio" (Marcus 63). Another publisher who contributed greatly to the industry was Frederic G. Melcher (1879–1963):

> As secretary of the American Booksellers Association, Melcher played a central role in garnering support for Children's Book Week, an idea first proposed just prior to the outbreak of World War I and brought to fruition immediately after the war. (Marcus 66)

Children's publishing soon became entwined with a growing number of public libraries. One author notes that "As children's library work became a national phenomenon, publishers realized the value of having specialists of their own to address the particular needs of this well organized group of book buyers" (Marcus 63). Librarians, in fact, did much to influence the nature of the children's book market.

Until the 1920s, many public libraries only allowed admittance to adults. Anne Carroll Moore, a librarian for the New York Public Library, established a precedent by allowing children admittance as long as they could sign a register book (Marcus 63).

Unlike librarians today who choose books based on the public's wants, librarians of the early 1900s chose books based on what they felt the public should read. In particular, librarians despised series books, including those by authors such as Laura Ingalls Wilder and Edward Stratemeyer, preferring instead, books that still taught social behavior. Ironically, Wilder's series books all became Newberry Honor books and in 1954, she received a lifetime achievement award created in her name from the American Library Association (Marcus 64).

Throughout the mid 1900s, major advancements occurred in children's literature. As a direct result of the world wars, the quality of books temporarily declined. However, the emergence of the Little Golden Books in 1942 was a big boon to the industry. These popular, colorful books sold for 25 cents in contrast to the trade books that averaged $1.50. The trade books were not only more

expensive, but they also showed fewer pictures due to cost–cutting during the wars.

The 1960s and 1970s became an era intent on shock tactics. Books such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, (1963) depicted a rebellious child venturing out into a wildly illustrated imaginary kingdom. Another controversial book was *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton (1967):

> …another first novel that shocked some readers with its frank depiction of class conflict and gang warfare in an apparently typical American town. Adding to the drama surrounding the book was the fact that the author was still in her teens. (Marcus 68)

As the twentieth century progressed, society became increasingly technological. Books quickly developed into more than just reading material. Publishers began targeting not only bookstores and libraries, but also the toy stores and discount stores. Eventually material such as board books, pop–up books and felt story books became classified as toys. Illustrations became more and more elaborate. Children's literature had become more dependent on a marketing concept rather than occupying a niche. Today's books reflect the accumulation of tastes, styles and needs of a society throughout the ages:

> By the mid–1990s, the once separate world of children's book publishing had come more and more to resemble that of adult publishing, with its emphasis on frontlist sales and perennial quest for blockbuster titles, star authors and media tie–ins. (Marcus 70)

Largely as a result of the evolution of children's literature, society's main purpose for reading has changed. Reading is no longer simply a means of education; reading has become a pastime for today's society. People read to learn, but also for information, pleasure and escape. One author explains that:

> Having a personal purpose for reading which leads to a connection between something in the writer's message, that's the game. We can comprehend only that which we can relate; we can relate only that which we know. Thus, purpose for reading is as personal as thought. (Thomas 12)

Children have their own agenda with reading, depending on their age, culture, environment and interests. Today, many programs throughout the United States are geared toward generating interest in reading as early as infancy, and even to unborn children still in their mothers' wombs. Scholars hold the belief that early exposure to reading will encourage future literacy levels. In her book, *RX for Reading*, author Barbara Fox notes the obvious by stating that "One of the things we know about children who read for pleasure is that they are better readers than children who do not choose reading as one of their recreational activities" (36).

Studies are continuously administered to determine the effects of repeated exposure to books or lack thereof on literacy rates in America. Many books are published encouraging teachers to help with literacy problems in children. One such book, *The Reading/Writing Teacher's Companion: Building a Literate Classroom*, by Donald H. Graves, highlights several positive effects of reading on

children:

- Reading parallels our own experience
- Reading extends our own experience
- Reading helps us to understand people
- Reading provides storehouses of information
- Reading provides relief and escape
- Reading provides a taste for language
- Reading moves us to act

(67–70)

Encouraging young children to read is not always an easy task for parents, care givers, or teachers. Literature must appeal to their senses and keep their attention. Captivating literature has several characteristics:

> Listeners/readers are strongly influenced by six aspects of literature in descending order of importance: (1) appealing illustrations, (2) interesting story content, (3) useful information, (4) broad humor, (5) surprise elements, and (6) appealing, recurring refrains. (Gillespie 58)

The author further concludes that "Literature for children and adolescents has value only to the extent to which they respond to it. Literature to which children and adolescents cannot relate has on place in their world" (Gillespie 4).

A story's plot or theme is one of the key elements that can hold a reader's interest. Preschool children, for instance, are fascinated by the absurd and are unable to distinguish between fact and fantasy. Books by renowned author Theodore Geisel (best known as "Dr. Seuss") are a favorite in this age group because his books convey nonsensical, ridiculous themes. Although books such as

Green Eggs and Ham are highly repetitive, the redundant words and phrases lend a certain comfort to the child (Hurst).

School age children embrace a multitude of themes. "Children in the early school years respond positively to literature about animals, other children, familiar experiences, fanciful nature stories, and simple fairy tales" (Gillespie 59). Not surprisingly, this age group still prefers appealing illustrations and quick–moving plots. Author Jan Brett's retelling of *The Mitten*, an old Ukranian folktale, is an excellent example of a simple plot with remarkable illustrations. Her illustrations are two–fold: the center picture spans two pages and shows the current events, while each page is justified by smaller pictures depicting what is happening and what is going to happen while the main event is told.

Older children show a preference for themes that are unrealistic. Unlike the preschoolers' desire for comfort and familiarity, middle graders, ages 8 through 12, prefer the macabre. They also gravitate toward exaggerations. The *Goosebumps* books by R.L. Stein are so popular, libraries often keep dozens of copies of each book in the series. *Goosebumps* are a strange mixture of horror, fantasy and humor, attributes middle graders yearn for. One author notes that the middle graders "…love humor, and the scarier a book is, the funnier it should be too" (Lance 23). Like the *Goosebumps*, many books in this age group lead to sequels and entire series: "Kids like them for the same reason they like to hear some stories again and again: they're familiar" (Mosle 99).

Character development is pivotal to the success of any age–level children's book. While plots have a short supply of variation, character development is unlimited:

> ...the mistake many writers make is looking at the classics too closely; they think the plot is what has survived the generations, rather than the theme or characters. It's the subtle, timeless elements of books from 30–40 years ago that started the change in children's literature that we see today. (Backes)

Authors must know their story's characters in depth, even if very little of the character is portrayed. Without this knowledge, inconsistencies develop which present a story that is confusing to the reader or listener.

A story's theme is tied directly to the character's personalities, attributes and goals. The reader must be able to relate to the main character in a positive way. Author Margaret Gillespie concurs that "Children and adolescents seek heroes and heroines who have obstacles to overcome, conflicts to solve, difficult goals to achieve" (5). Consequently, children do not want to read about themselves, they prefer to read about the extraordinary. Noted children's author Eloise McGraw illustrates:

> In my childhood, I liked to read about characters as different from me as possible, living in foreign or fantastic places, in other times and circumstances. Not about children like me — I already knew about them. (McGraw 9)

These extraordinary characters must grab and hold a child's attention or the book will be set aside. One such enticement is having the characters " . . . want something important, and there should be serious consequences if they don't get it" (Lance 24).

Today's authors appear to agree that an important aspect of children's books is the significance of each and every word. Children's books, whether preschool picture books or middle grade novels, are much shorter than their adult counterparts. Likewise, a writer must make every single word count. Added embellishments that do not lend meaning to the story are generally edited out. Many of the classics, however, are often highly elaborate. One author concludes that "The tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter, for example, has not survived 94 years because it's the story of a cute talking bunny, but because the bunny defied his mother's rules and had an adventure in the forbidden territory of the farmer's garden" (Backes).

The true test on longevity of a children's book is the book's impression on the child readers. How often does the child read the book? Is the book worn out? Is the adult who is reading to the preschooler tired of the same story? While many people may believe that children's literature is among the easiest to write, the opposite appears to be true:

> It is rightly observed that children's fiction is the most demanding to write. Writing for the preliterate age group presents particular problems. Like great poetry, it must be good enough both to withstand repetition and to evoke pleasure. Furthermore, it addresses a double audience. (Craig 34)

For the preschooler, especially, the author is not only wanting to keep the child's attention, but also the parent's or teacher's who is reading the story aloud. Picture books must also provide a double purpose as they " . . . must work when read aloud, and also when read silently to oneself. Every syllable counts" (Kuskin 159).

Because of the complex nature of children's literature, writers often encounter many difficulties while seeking to publish their material. The publishing houses rarely accept unsolicited manuscripts from unpublished authors and works by established authors are closely scrutinized. Editors weed through so many manuscripts that many writers find their material lost in a publisher's slush pile. Self–publisher, Dan Poynter, believes that with manuscripts, "Many big publishers are not interested in whether it is a good book; all they want to know is whether it will sell" (17). The task of the children's writer is formidable.

Every editor's dream is to publish the next Newberry or Caldecott award winning children's book; however, "It is worthwhile remembering that these awards are given by adults based on adult criteria. The values of the adults who sit on panels judging books perhaps do not reflect the interests of the children who read them" (Fox 24). Consequently, an author should strive to present a book that

is so pleasing to the child that the book will appear to be award winning material to the publisher. Fledgling authors should strive to write for the children, based on their instincts and their study of a broad range of children's literature. The award winning books should not necessarily be viewed by the writer as the role model for a successful book.

Technically, most children's picture books are 24–32 pages long, or between 200 and 1,000 words, and are produced in multiples of 8 pages (Bicknell 59). When an author is finally successful in finding a publisher, the manuscript is then matched by the editor with an established artist. Unless the writer is also the illustrator, artists chosen by the author are discouraged by the publishing houses. Generally, the publishing houses keep artists on staff to match both writing and illustrating styles. The size and length of the children's book, combined with the artwork, increases the expense to publish these books well over the cost of adult books. The expense of multi–color printing is also a consideration. Marketing a newly written book, therefore, becomes an arduous task for the author. An author's marketing skills begin with a cover letter directed to a specific editor or agent. John Wood, in his book *How to Write Attention–Grabbing Query & Cover Letters*, stresses that "You need to be sure to send your query to the proper editor — always call first and *ask*. Also check their exact spelling and title" (24). By following this advice, authors show a potential publisher that they are conscientious and dedicated to their work. Wood further explains that the query letter must draw the reader into the writing through an effective lead:

> The goal of the lead is to stun the reader and pull him into the text, which is against most editors' nature. Reading queries is tedious. The last thing an impatient, overworked, bored editor wants to do is read every query letter from beginning to end. She's skimming each one for any excuse to bolt. (30)

In addition to effective query letters, authors must know for what market their book is intended. Often, the target market is known before the piece is written. "Kids between the ages of 8 and 12 comprise the biggest reading group among young people" (Lance 22). Many authors target this middle grade age group before writing their book. Other authors have a particular book in mind. These authors will analyze publishing markets after the book is completed to determine where to submit their manuscripts. In her article, *They're Everywhere you Look*, author Judith Rosen relays statistics on consumer markets for children's books:

Discount stores	29%
Book clubs	18%
Large chain bookstores	10%
Food/Drug stores	7%
Mail order	6%
Independent/small bookstores	5%
Toy stores	5%
Variety stores	3%
Warehouse/price clubs	2%
All others	15% (122)

In another article, Judith Rosen notes that " . . . children's bookstores have gone the way of fat in milk — they have been considerably reduced, so that they now make up a small percentage of the children's book market" (Beyond 134). Publishers are aware of this trend and market their books accordingly. Often, their books are based on already established characters, written solely for the purpose of marketing. Blue's Clues, the popular Nickelodeon show for preschoolers, for instance, is a national children's phenomenon. Books are constantly being churned out to accommodate this craze.

Most publishers recognize that parents are the primary buyers of children's literature. "Parents who read aloud to their children become, quite often, self–consciously, teachers as well. Publishers know this and devise their offerings with adults in mind" (Mosle 97). Parents are looking for books that will stimulate and entertain their children. In an article from Publishers Weekly, this tendency shows an increased awareness by the parents:

> ...adults who buy children's books play an important role in a child's development. Consequently, the majority of children's book buyers take seriously the process of choosing books for children. (Ferguson)

Book tours are another marketing tool used by publishers to promote their authors in schools, libraries and bookstores. One author explains that Scholastic is an influential publisher " . . . where a major goal of appearances is to gain support from teachers, acceptance in the schools is considered crucial to an

author's success" (DiMarzo 136). The author further notes that:

> When an author is on tour, the goal, according to publicists, is to get the word out with news items and features in local papers and interviews on radio and television. Publishers' web sites also list tour schedules, but the more media coverage, the greater the audience for a signing, which is important because stores and publishing houses do not, as a rule, spend much money on advertising children's–author appearances. (136)

Writing and publishing children's literature can be a rewarding process. The pleasure children receive from reading books more than compensates the author for time spent on a book's completion. The author also has the gratification of knowing that his or her book has helped a child's development and helped to increase literacy rates. Although the course of an author's journey from idea to execution can be demanding, the end result is, more often than not, a prize beyond measure.

The literature reviewed in chapters one and two was based on sources covering oral storytelling, the history of children's literature, education through children's literature and book publishing. Research of periodicals, books and internet sources was conducted. The amount of research available on these topics is phenomenal.

Oral storytelling was the hardest research to uncover. While there is a multitude of information on oral storytelling as it relates to education in today's society, actual history of this art form was not as easy to obtain. The majority of

information was gleaned from the internet. Internet sites which covered ancient myths and legends were most helpful, such as www.Powersource.com and www.tas.gov.au/fahan/fairytales. Other web sites such as www.pantheon.org and www.infi.net/ had several articles and actual legends which were also of great use. One of the most useful sites dealing with fairy tales was www.easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~cdaae/fairy/. For puppetry and games, two web sites contributed greatly: www-leland.stanford.edu and www.cbu.edu.

Information about current trends in storytelling is readily available. The Missouri Storytelling Association has a wonderful website at www.motell.org which covers current storytelling events and has several useful articles. Bruce Watson wrote a very interesting article in the March, 1997 Smithsonian dealing with the art of storytelling today.

Research about the history of children's literature was more available than storytelling. The best sources were found in books such as *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* and *Children's Books: Then & Now* which cover a wealth of information on the evolution of children's literature. Basic history on this subject was also very prominent in books cited by Monica Kiefer and Mary Lystad. While historical information was taken from periodicals and internet resources as well, books on the subject are abundant. A good place to start for research on this topic is the card catalog at a local library.

Information about the educational benefits of children's literature is considerable and can be found in books and periodicals. The resources are endless. The best periodicals for researching this topic include The Hornbook Magazine and Publishers Weekly. Both of these magazines are distributed among teachers and librarians, with a wealth of information on the benefits of reading. Many books are also available on this subject, but will take more time to review. Depending on the research needed, the time taken with these books will be worth pursuing. Books such as *RX for Reading* and *The Reading/Writing Teacher's Companion: Build a Literate Classroom* were invaluable.

Children's book publishing is a booming industry and was likewise, the easiest topic to research. Books, periodicals and web sites dealing with this subject are bountiful and overwhelming. Most of the research done for this paper was limited to information about large publishers, self–publishing and marketing.

Many books such as *How to Write & Illustrate Children's Books*, give insight to the publishing industry, covering what sells and how to sell the completed work. Periodicals such as Publisher's Weekly and Writer's Digest are extremely beneficial because they cover current trends in children's book publishing. Research of various web sites such as www.write4kids.com and www.carolhurst.com will reveal an even greater wealth of marketing and publishing information.

Children's literature is a popular subject for research because of the high emphasis on reading in American culture. Unlike some topics, rather than struggling to find information, the hardest task for the researcher will be narrowing down the sources to pinpoint the exact information needed. Further, this topic is invaluable for teachers, librarians and parents who are striving to better educate students through literature.

Chapter III

SELECTIVE REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF RESEARCH

This chapter covers the reviews of thirty children's picture books, with the analysis separated into five major categories: Character Development, Plot, Illustrations, Technical Aspects and Marketability. These reviews are intended to aid the researcher in establishing guidelines for the critique and evaluation of the children's genre.

Section I — Character Development

Picture books written for children ages four and up tend to emphasize character development. *Dandelion*, written in 1977 by Don Freeman, does a wonderful job of developing the leading character, a lion named Dandelion. This is a delightful tale about a lion who is invited to an afternoon "come–as–you–are" party. Dandelion spends the better part of his morning changing his appearance. By the time Dandelion gets to the party, the hostess doesn't recognize him and leaves him out in the rain. The rain of course washes Dandelion back into the lion everyone knows and he eventually gets into the party. The reader sees the character develop emotionally and socially as Dandelion learns that his friends like him the way he is.

Stone Soup: An Old Tale, written by Marcia Brown in 1975, is another example of strong character development. While Dandelion learns a valuable lesson, the three main characters of *Stone Soup* teach the readers a lesson. In this humorous story, three tired and hungry soldiers happen upon a poor peasant town. None of the villagers are willing to feed the soldiers or provide them with shelter so the soldiers decide to make stone soup. Amazed, the peasants bring their vegetables and meat to put into the soup, believing the soldiers are geniuses to be making soup from stones. Meanwhile, the soldiers are pleased with themselves for fooling the town into providing them with a feast.

Another illustration of strong character development is *Town Mouse, Country Mouse*. In this 1994 remake of an old tale, author and illustrator Jan Brett beautifully depicts the story of mice who believe they would be happier in another place. The two town mice switch places with the two country mice and one disaster after another occurs. Both the readers and the mice learn to be careful what they wish for.

Maurice Sendak's books, written mostly for the 4–8 year old age group, usually emphasize the characters as well as their actions. In his classic Caldecott winner, *Where the Wild Things are*, published in 1963, Sendak goes to great lengths depicting the wildness of the main character, Max. After being banished to his room without supper, Max dreams up an adventure where he becomes "king of

the wild things." In his adventure, Max does every wild thing he can dream of before he decides he is hungry and wants to go home.

Many of the children's authors use defiance by the main characters as a means of indirectly teaching the readers a moral issue. I *Don't Want to go to Bed* by Julie Sykes, 1996, shows a defiant little tiger who refuses to go to bed. As baby tiger wanders through the jungle on his own at night, he realizes that being back with his mommy isn't such a bad thing. *Curious George*, the 1976 classic by H.A. Rey, also depicts a defiant character — a curious little monkey named George. Curious George's antics lead to all kinds of trouble until he is finally saved by the "Man with the Yellow Hat."

Another common method of character development used by authors is to define an already good character by having the character show an act of kindness. In Max Lucado's 1998 book, *Jacob's Gift*, a young boy named Jacob excitedly works on a carpentry project so that he can be selected to help on a more large–scale, important project. Instead, Jacob sees a young baby who needs something to sleep in and gives his masterpiece (a rolling feed trough) to the young baby. Jacob doesn't realize the baby is Jesus and of course, receives blessings.

Varying on this theme of kindness, the classic story of *The Little Engine that Could* shows a kind little engine that doesn't think he can get over a

mountain to help deliver toys to the next town. Through the little engine's perseverance, however, he does make it over the mountain to help the little children. Not only does the main character show kindness, but another dimension of self–assurance is added to the character's development.

Sometimes children's authors will emphasize a character's weakness. In *The Monster at the End of this Book*, lovable Sesame Street character, Grover, doesn't want the reader to keep turning pages because the title of the book tells of a monster at the end. Despite his fear, Grover manages to get to the end of the book where he finds the only monster is himself. *Blueberries for Sal,* written by Robert McCloskey in 1976, shows a young girl, Sal and a young bear getting mixed up with the wrong mothers. Sal and the young bear are too young to know that they are in trouble, but the mothers are frantic. The mothers' fear lead them to find their right children.

Picture books directed at children under the age of four, often do not include main characters. For example, *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, 1989, is a colorful rhyming book where the lower–case alphabet, like little children, climbs a coconut tree. The tree cannot hold all the letters and they all fall down. Young children tend to remember the vivid polka dots and the rhyming sounds. In *Round Trip* by Ann Jonas, 1983, unknown people take a trip. The author has cleverly illustrated the book so that when read forward, the reader sees a day trip. When

the book is turned upside down and read backwards, these same illustrations become a night trip. No characters are needed because the young children are fascinated by the illustrations.

Section II — Plot

Similar to character development, plot seems to become more complex as the targeted reader ages. Younger children tend to enjoy rhyming or nonsensical books. *Time for Bed*, a delightful rhyming book by Mem Fox, shows various animals tucking their babies in for the night. Though there is no plot, there is a recurring theme on each two–page spread. The rhymes are simple, but catchy: "It's time for bed, little calf, little calf. What happened today to make you laugh?" Even older children of 3 and 4 can enjoy the book because they can memorize the verses and read them to younger siblings.

Another popular rhyming book is *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?* by Bill Martin, Jr. This fun, colorful book illustrated by Eric Carle, is along the line of the old chime, "Pete and Repeat". The book is a circle of one animal seeing another animal and eventually a classroom of children which see them all again. The simple rhymes like: "Brown Bear, Brown Bear what do you see? I see a Red Bird looking at me." are catchy and again, easily memorized by preschoolers.

Goodnight Moon by Margaret Brown, is another example of a popular children's book with no plot. The narrator simply describes and illustrates "the great green room" and says goodnight to various items in the room with each turn of the page. Despite the absence of characters, this book has become a children's classic. The Magic House in Kirkwood, Missouri, even has a display dedicated to the book. The display is an exact replica of the room in *Goodnight Moon*.

As the author's targeted reader ages, the plot takes on more shape. Although the plot is minimal, Caldecott winner *White Snow, Bright Snow*, 1948, depicts a city still able to function despite being covered with snow. The story is told with poetry and illustration. *Big Red Barn* by Margaret Wise Brown is another book that moves past simple rhyming into descriptive storytelling. The narrative describes a day on the farm for the animals and takes the reader from sunrise to nighttime.

Picture books directed at children three and up become more advanced in plot. In Dr. Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham*, the main character, Sam, tries to get his friend to try green eggs and ham. After Sam annoys his friend to the point of exhaustion, his friend tries green eggs and ham, only to discover he loves them rather than hates them. The story is humorous and the author has managed to incorporate rhyming with plot to convey a moral issue: don't say you don't like something until you have tried it.

A number of children's books for this age group combine simple plot with a subtle moral lesson. In *Come Along, Daisy* by Jane Simmons, a little duckling becomes so engrossed in her surroundings that she doesn't pay attention when her mother calls and she consequently gets lost. A similar theme is used in *Bunny My Honey*, by Anita Jeram. *Bunny My Honey* emphasizes Mommy Rabbit's reassuring love for her little bunny even when her baby is lost.

Books directed toward preschoolers and early elementary children show more complexity in their plots. The classic book, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, shows an adventuresome tot who draws himself out of his room into many adventures with his purple crayon. The character, although real, brings the reader into a plot that is imaginary as Harold draws with his crayon to find his way home. *Owl Moon* also shows a more sophisticated plot. A father and daughter go "owling" and the reader can feel the little girl's excitement when she and her father finally see an owl.

The depth of a book's plot is not always tied to strong character development. In Virginia Lee Burton's *The Little House,* 1969, the main character is a little country house with no speaking parts. The book is told entirely in the narrative. The plot, however, is actually profound and may be lost on the very young. The little house, originally built in the country, watches in shock as her countryside is turned into a huge, crowded city. Instead of rolling hills and flowers, the little house can only see skyscrapers and trains. Eventually the

little house is rescued by a great–granddaughter of the original builder and she is transported back to the country.

The Travels of Babar is an example of a book that combines both strong character development and a more complicated plot. This classic story by Jean DeBrunhoff, 1961, is a timeless tale of Babar, king of the elephants, and his wife, Celeste. Babar and Celeste are married and sail off on their honeymoon in a hot air balloon. One adventure after another occurs when they are stranded. Eventually they get back home, only to find their kingdom in disarray. While preschoolers will enjoy the action, early elementary children will comprehend the plot.

Section III — Illustrations

Illustrations in children's picture books vary from plain or abstract to artistic or intricately realistic. Simple pictures are often used when illustrations are not needed to carry the story. In *Harold and the Purple Crayon* for instance, Crockett Johnson uses simple purple line drawings to illustrate his story. This artistic style is very appropriate because the book is about a toddler drawing adventures from his imagination. The book is clever and fanciful; likewise, intricate drawings are not necessary for the reader to relate to Harold.

In *Dandelion*, the author uses simply gold and black sketch–like drawings that cleverly match the story. The illustrations are detailed enough not to be abstract, but simple enough not to overpower the story. *Madeline*, the classic book by Ludwig Bemelmans, also has very plain line drawings, most of which are yellow and black. Ironically, the main character, Madeline, looks different in every illustration. *Madeline*, however, is a book that can be read aloud without the listener even seeing the pictures.

Many children's stories depend on the illustrations either to aid in telling the story or to clarify the theme. *One Windy Wednesday*, by Phyllis Root, uses the illustrations to complement the story. The only character, Bonnie Bumble, works to help the animals on her farm after a strong wind comes and mixes up the animals voices. The illustrator, Helen Craig, shows Bonnie attaching the correct voice to the correct animal. While this book doesn't necessarily need the pictures to carry the story, the pictures certainly enhance the reader's enjoyment.

Window Music, by Anastasia Suen, is a book that depends completely on the illustrations. The lack of plot and character development is compensated for by Wade Zahares' artwork. A girl and her mother board a train for home after visiting grandparents. The whole book is the travelers' views of the countryside as the train winds its way home. Despite the colorful artwork, the book's minimal storyline with approximately only 200 words does not make a strong impression on the reader.

Previously mentioned, *The Monster at the End of this Book*, depends on the illustrations by Mike Smollin. The illustrations, however, also rely on the story. Both the pictures and the story are cleverly matched to convey an adventure to the young reader. As Grover, the lovable Sesame Street character, tries to keep the reader from turning pages, he does everything from tying the pages together to building brick walls. These antics would not be as funny without the humorous illustrations. Likewise, the crazy pictures would make no sense without the story.

Sometimes authors will combine elaborate artwork with their story for no other reason than aesthetics. *On the Day You Were Born*, a new age book that shows the earth celebrating the spiritual birth of a baby, uses elaborate yet abstract artwork to illustrate a story that could stand alone. *McDuff Moves In* is another example of a story that does not need elaborate pictures; however, artist Susan Jeffers depicts the story in bright colors and intricate detail.

Author and artist, Jan Brett, includes artwork in her books that is so elaborate the pages could be framed. In *Town Mouse, Country Mouse*, Brett uses double–spread illustrations to depict the story. She also includes a side picture at either edge of the book to preview what will be seen on the next page. Brett's cunning and creativity are evident in all of her books. In her book *The Mitten*, an old Ukranian folktale, the side pictures show what two different characters are doing while the main action takes place in the center.

Section IV — Technical Aspects

The length of children's books, as well as the word count, is most often dependent on the reader's age. Typically today's picture books have page counts in multiples of 8, conforming to standard specifications used by printers. Many exceptions, however, do occur. In *Harold and the Purple Crayon* there are 64 pages but only 400-500 words. This book is an exception to the average because the book size is smaller than traditional picture books and the story is unique. Further, most of the book consists of Harold's drawing escapades.

Picture books for older children tend to be longer, as well. *The Travels of Babar,* 1961, is 48 pages in length and approximately 2,000 – 2,500 words. The word count is exceptionally high; consequently, the book is not intended for children under four. This story would not hold a younger child's attention, even if the reader paraphrased the book. Although not quite as long, *Stone Soup: An Old Tale,* 1975, is still windy with 800 – 1,000 words. Again, this book would not generally be read to children under four.

Maurice Sendak tends to have longer books. His *Little Bear* series resembles beginner chapter books, while *Where the Wild Things Are* is lengthier due to elaborate illustrations on double spread pages. H.A. Rey's *Curious George* runs long with 56 pages and approximately 800 words. Dr. Seuss' books also run long, averaging 55-70 pages; however, this is also due to more illustrations with

low word counts of approximately 500 words.

Most picture books directed at children ages 2 – 4 have 36 pages with anywhere from 100 – 1,000 words. Likewise, lower word counts generally target the youngest readers. *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* for instance, only has 150 words and *Time for Bed* only 200. *Goodnight Moon* only has about 100 words and *Come Along, Daisy* approximately 175. Picture books for the very young appear to rely more on illustrating the message than conveying the story through words.

Many picture books for this age group do contain more words. *Blueberries for Sal* has approximately 600 – 700 words and *White Snow, Bright Snow* about 1,000. Again, older books such as these, tend to be longer in word count than today's books.

Section V — Marketability

The majority of books reviewed were high quality and have endured the test of time. Stories like *The Little Engine that Could* and *The Little House* have entertained three or more generations of children. A book's longevity is one solid test of marketability. Even though many of the older stories use words that aren't used today or words that have taken on new meanings, children still delight in the tale itself. Beatrix Potter's tales of the naughty *Peter Rabbit* contain many words that are foreign to the twenty–first century readers, but are still very popular books.

Modern picture books are more colorful and vibrant, but also shorter. This is a reflection of today's society that is more fast–paced and impatient than previous eras. People, conditioned by jobs, television and computers are direct and to–the–point; picture books evidence this. *Bunny my Honey*, 1999, makes a moral statement in only 200 words; *Dandelion*, 1977, takes 1,000. This change in the foundation of children's picture books is not necessarily a decline in quality, but a mirror of our fast–growing technological society.

With the exception of a few, most books reviewed were very endearing. *Window Music* and *On the Day You Were Born* were both bland and uneventful. Most children prefer action or rhyming. *Window Music* has no characters, plot or action but merely page after page of illustrations that are a bit too abstract. *On the Day You Were Born* combines prose with plain drawings that are non–descriptive and not relative to the story. A second test for a quality book is the amount of action, plot or character development. A marketable book should contain at least one of these characteristics to become popular. Even *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* with no plot or character has enough action and vibrancy to encourage children to pick the book up over and over again.

Another test for marketability is to examine the number of copies sold. Although this type of analysis is not covered in this review, shelf life of a book is certainly a good indicator of popularity. Reprints are another factor. Many of the books mentioned in this review have been reprinted frequently throughout the years.

Marketability is strongly related to an author's reputation. Picture books by well–known authors such as Eric Carle, Jan Brett or Max Lucado will sell faster because more money is spent on advertising. Books authored by celebrities like Maria Shriver or Jamie Lee Curtis are more marketable because the average consumer recognizes their names. New authors have a harder time breaking into the market because their works are not as heavily advertised and the initial copies bought by store buyers are limited.

Marketability, however, is not necessarily a sign of literary quality. The *Goosebumps* series by R.L. Stein does not merit any awards in literary circles; however, children love the books and marketability is high. Likewise, many children's authors who have written quality literature are turning to self–publishing as a means of getting their work on the bookshelves. As publishers today are more concerned about a book's marketability rather than the quality, self–publishing has become a growing industry. With a little investment and a lot of self–promotion, a new author can get a book distributed without the hassle of finding an agent or publisher. Self–publishing, although seemingly lucrative, can be troublesome for the writer who lacks strong business and marketing skills. Distribution of books for the self–publisher is often an insurmountable hurdle. In addition to having excellent writing skills, the author must also be well–versed in the business and legal aspects of the industry.

Children's picture books reflect a multitude of styles, themes and ideas. Some, like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?* and *Green Eggs and Ham*, are silly and fun. Others like *Owl Moon* and *The Little House*, are more serious. Parents and educators have the task of determining which books are age–appropriate for their children or students and which books will keep the children entertained. There are many books to choose from, but hopefully this review has outlined several parameters to aid in this endeavor.

The information obtained in reviewing various children's picture books was invaluable and perhaps the most beneficial aspect of the entire project. In many industries, success is dependent upon the upper management knowing what is happening in the trenches. The same is true of the writing industry. Authors must be aware of what the children are reading to write a story that they will enjoy.

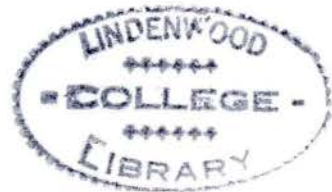
Chapter IV

RESULTS

Snowflakes for Supper is a story written as research for this project. Based on the reviews of various types of literature in chapters one and two, as well as the picture books reviewed in chapter three, this story is the culminating result of that research.

Snowflakes for Supper is a story, intended for publishing as a children's picture book, about a young child who finds herself lost in the woods. Scared and hungry, young Emma realizes that snow is all she has to eat while she prays that she will find her way home. Targeted toward the 2–6 year old age group, *Snowflakes for Supper* shows characteristics of many of the books reviewed in chapter three. The intent of the story is to encompass these characteristics so that the story will be marketable in the publishing industry.

Following *Snowflakes for Supper*, Chapter V will discuss how the story compares with notable children's books of the same type. This conclusion will discuss, in detail, the qualities and technicalities of the completed work.



SNOWFLAKES FOR SUPPER©

by Gina McAndrew

2000

The wet, lacy snowflakes silently floated down. Emma thought about the fun she could have with her dogs, Niki and Tasha. They were Siberian Huskies who loved to play in fresh snow.

Emma jumped up and down, as four–year–olds like to do, and said "Mommy, may I please go play in the snow with Niki and Tasha? Please?"

Mommy put baby Sarah back in her highchair and returned to the fried chicken she was cooking for supper. "Well, maybe for a little while, but remember that the sun will go down soon. Stay close to the house and don't wander past the barn."

"Oh thank you, thank you!" shouted Emma as she ran to get her coat and mittens. She couldn't quite stand still while Daddy helped her get dressed.

Emma and her dogs bolted outside as fast as they could. They ran so fast that Emma fell in the deep snow. Lying on her back and laughing, she flapped her arms and legs back and forth. When she stood up, Emma saw a delicate snow angel with crinkled wings.

As Emma turned to make another snow angel, she heard Niki and Tasha barking. The dogs were running in big circles around Emma, inviting her to join in their fun. The three friends scampered through the snow, scattering crumpled

footprints everywhere.

When she was tired of running, Emma stopped to make snowballs. She grabbed handfuls of firm snow and shaped them into icy balls, but her thumbs kept squishing them before she could get the balls in the air. One by one, the snowballs melted and tumbled to the ground.

Suddenly, Niki and Tasha stopped running. At the edge of the farm by the woods, Emma saw a very large, white–tailed jack rabbit. The dogs sprinted after the rabbit and soon all three of the animals disappeared.

Emma tried to catch Niki and Tasha but she couldn't run as quickly. Instead, she went deeper and deeper into the woods. "Niki, Tasha . . . Niki, Tasha . . . " called Emma. Emma couldn't find her dogs anywhere.

Emma stopped to look around. Strange shadows covered the snow and the long, willowy tree branches crowded her paths. The forest seemed so quiet, like the way the farm sounded after a loud thunderstorm had calmed the barnyard.

"Now what will I do?" cried Emma. She sat on a wet, snow-covered log and started to cry. She was scared and she knew her family would miss her.

Emma looked up between the trees and saw that the sun was setting over the snow–capped mountains. The sky would be dark soon. Her tummy rumbled. Emma remembered how good the frying chicken smelled at home. "Where will I find food?" she wondered to herself. "All I have to eat are snowflakes!"

As the sky started turning beautiful shades of blue, purple and pink, Emma thought about home. Mommy and Daddy and Sarah would be eating supper by now. While thinking about supper, Emma remembered that God always takes care of his children, so she thanked God and started eating handfuls of snow.

After a couple of cold, slippery mouthfuls, Emma heard a rustling from behind a tree. Frightened, she jumped off her log to run. What was making that terrible, crackling sound? Could it be a wolf? Could it be a monster? She darted and hid behind another tree.

The noise was getting closer and closer, but Emma's blood was racing so fast that the only sound she heard was the loud beating of her heart. Emma peeked through her mittens. All of a sudden she started to laugh, "Why you're not monsters after all!" Niki and Tasha licked her face and Emma grabbed their collars. "Let's go home!"

Soon Emma could see lights. The three companions walked a little farther. Emma realized the lights were coming from Daddy's lantern. She ran as fast as she could and flung herself into Daddy's arms.

"Oh, Daddy! I'm so glad you found me!" cried Emma.

Daddy scooped Emma up in his strong arms and held her close. "We didn't know what happened to you! Supper was ready and you were gone," said Daddy.

As soon as they got to the house, Emma ran to Mommy and hugged her. "I'm so sorry, Mommy. I was scared and so hungry that I even ate snowflakes!"

Mommy hugged her daughter. "You know, I had snowflakes for supper once when I was a little girl. I am so happy that God brought you safely home! Now how about some fried chicken?"

As they sat eating, Emma glanced out of the frosted kitchen window. She thought she saw Niki and Tasha dancing around her snow angels. Smiling, she bowed her head in prayer.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes the story of *Snowflakes for Supper* relative to the literature previously reviewed. The chapter will also discuss the marketability, as well as limitations, of *Snowflakes for Supper*. Feedback from experts in early childhood education is included for support. The chapter concludes with plans for future consideration.

Targeted toward the 2–6 year old age group, *Snowflakes for Supper* is based on a popular plot: a child strays despite warnings and becomes lost. As in other picture books reviewed, such as *Come Along Daisy*, the lesson of the story is not stated. Rather, the child concludes the moral of the story on his or her own. Picture books that have endured the test of time, rarely state a moral message. By drawing their own conclusions, children learn critical thinking and social skills.

The main character in *Snowflakes for Supper*, Emma, is a typical four year old. She likes to jump and play, enjoying action and adventure. Most of Emma's personality is implied through her actions. Physical descriptions are not generally needed in picture books. The character's actions and the illustrator's drawings will satisfy a young child's curiosity. To embellish too much, would bore the reader.

The book has a word count of approximately 600 words. This word count appeared typical in the picture books reviewed for this age group. Because the illustrator will be chosen by the publisher, the actual number of pages has not been determined. This will depend on how the illustrator and publisher format the book. Technicalities such as single versus double page spreads will not be determined by the writer.

The story was written as an adventure with a moral lesson. As the main character is very young, little time is spent in the woods. Had this been a book written for an older age group, the main character would have spent the majority of the story in the woods. Understandably, when a young child is lost, he or she wants to be found immediately. An older child may not have gotten lost, and likewise might have viewed the little side trip as an opportunity to explore.

Snowflakes for Supper was intentionally written so that the story would stand alone without illustrations. Preschool children enjoy hearing stories in conjunction with puppets or felt boards. The story could also be dramatized by older preschoolers. In keeping with the research on oral storytelling relayed in chapter 1, *Snowflakes for Supper* encourages the listeners to draw their own conclusions as to how the characters look and feel.

Snowflakes for Supper should also connect well with illustrations. Pictures lend support to most stories and entice children to read. As inferred in chapter 2, reading is fundamentally important to a child's intellectual growth. No matter the reason for a child choosing a particular book, the resulting benefits are the same.

If pictures help to encourage a child's choice, then they become important to the story.

Many revisions have been made to *Snowflakes for Supper* based on input from experts in early childhood reading. Mary Jo Henning, preschool teacher at Immanuel Lutheran School in St. Charles, Missouri, has reviewed *Snowflakes for Supper*. Most of Henning's criticisms dealt with concerns that the vocabulary of the reader be matched with that used in the story. As the wife of one of Immanuel Lutheran's pastors, Henning also noted that the references to God were effectively incorporated into the story.

Georgia Glidden, Branch Manager and Librarian of Deer Run Library in O'Fallon, Missouri, also reviewed *Snowflakes for Supper*. Glidden addressed issues in the story that related to setting and descriptive embellishment. For example, in the original story Emma simply sees a jack–rabbit. In the final version, Emma sees a white–tailed jack rabbit. Because these types of rabbits are seen only in certain terrains, white–capped mountains were added into the story.

Criticisms, such as those expressed by Henning and Glidden, are helpful to new authors seeking publication. Teachers and librarians are on the front–lines. Daily, they see what books delight the children that come to their classrooms or libraries. Fortunately, both women used different angles in critiquing the story, resulting in very sound advice. Review by experts of a new writer's work is imperative. Fresh insights and perspectives can only strengthen a story's quality.

The main limitation of *Snowflakes for Supper* is the amateur status of the author. As mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, a vast majority of stories sell because the author is well–known. A strong and effective cover letter sent with the manuscript is vital to the success of new authors (Appendix A). For longer stories a query letter would be used in lieu of submitting the entire manuscript. Because most of the large publishing houses do not accept unsolicited manuscripts, the author must research the market thoroughly to determine which literary agents would be the most receptive to unsolicited work (Appendix B).

Another limiting factor is the subtle inclusion of Christian beliefs in a book targeted at the secular market. Many Christian picture books are published; however, they are generally sold in Christian bookstores. The *Veggie Tales* series of Christian video tapes and books for children is an exception. While many books in mainstream bookstores include beliefs from various faiths, such as Witchcraft and Buddhism, Christianity is still often seen as taboo. A book such as *Snowflakes for Supper* would not be allowed in public schools, limiting the market even further.

This limitation of *Snowflakes for Supper* is also the story's strength. Not many authors have attempted to market Christian books in the secular industry. With the exception of holiday books, such as those for Christmas or Easter, and children's Bibles, most Christian books are still only purchased by Christian bookstores and public libraries. Perhaps editors will see *Snowflakes for Supper* as a fresh perspective in the children's publishing industry.

Appendix A

COVER LETTER

June 2, 2000

Sunshine Literary Agency
Attn.: Gail Grimard
P.O. Box 1060
Mims, Florida 32754-1060

Dear Ms. Grimard:

Your agency is actively seeking children stories and I am submitting my children's picture book, *Snowflakes for Supper* for your review.

While playing in the freshly fallen snow, young Emma chases her two Siberian Huskies into the forest. Upon realizing she is lost, Emma relies on God to take care of her. The story shows how a young child's faith brings her home.

Thank you for your time, and also for your consideration of my manuscript.

Sincerely,

Gina M. McAndrew

SASE enclosed

Appendix B

PROPOSED LITERARY AGENTS

Literary Agents:

- **Alive Communications, Inc.**
  1465 Kelly Johnson Blvd., Suite 320
  Colorado Springs, CO 80920
  (719)260-7080

  Strengths:
  This agency specializes in Christian literature, both fiction and non–fiction. Well–known Christian authors such as Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins (*Left Behind* series) and Bodie and Brock Thoene are clients who have had recent sales through the agency.

  Weaknesses:

  Alive Communications is fairly new, established in 1989. Further, only a small percentage of their clients are new authors. Although somewhat receptive to unpublished writers, most of them have been referrals.

- **Amber Literary**
  1956 Homestead Duquesne Road
  W. Mifflin, PA 15122
  (412)469-8293

  Strengths:

  Amber Literary is actively seeking not only established authors, but new authors as well. 75% of their clients are new authors. Although the agency does not specialize in Christian works, it excludes erotica and pornography.

  Weaknesses:

  This agency is brand new, established in 1999, and currently handles only three clients. Likewise, there have not been any reported sales.

- **Books & Such**
  3093 Maiden Lane
  Altadena, CA 91001
  (626)797-1716

  Strengths:

  The owner, Janet Kobobel Grant, was previously an editor for Zondervan, a large Christian publishing house. A newer agency, established in 1996, Books & Such already has 20 clients. The agency's strongest attribute for the purpose of *Snowflakes for Supper* is that it specializes in Christian publishing, but is also expanding into the ABA and children's market.

  Weaknesses:

  The agency is only somewhat receptive to new authors, preferring to obtain new clients through referrals and writer's conferences.

- **John Hawkins & Associates, Inc.**
  71 West 23rd Street, Suite 1600
  New York, NY 10010
  (212)807-7040

  Strengths:

  This agency is older, established in 1893, and has more than 100 clients. Between five and ten percent of the agency's clients are new authors.

  Weaknesses:

  New authors are generally only obtained through referrals.

- **Sunshine Literary Agency**
  P.O. Box 1060
  Mims, FL 32754-1060
  (407)383-4799

  Strengths:

  90% of this agency's clients are new or unpublished authors and they have obtained 40 clients in only 2 years, having been established in 1998. Also, they are actively seeking children's stories.

Weaknesses:

The agency only sold one title in 1999. This is perhaps due to the fact that this is a new agency with a majority of new authors as clients.

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