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Introduction to the World of Children's Literature



This pen and ink illustration is an example of the surrealist style.

From *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, written by Lewis Carroll and illustrated by Sir John Tenniel.

One of my warmest childhood memories is of my mother reading *Miss Pickerell Goes to Mars* (MacGregor) to my older sister and me. We were in elementary school and quite capable of reading it ourselves, but we had grown accustomed to having our mother read to us each night before bedtime. Stories sounded so much better when she read them. Another happy memory is of my sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Conway, reading a chapter a day from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Twain). The books he read that year helped pass the afternoons in the hot portable classroom. Each day we begged him to read one more chapter or even just two more pages because we could not wait to find out what happened next.

Do you have similar memories of your parents' and teachers' reading to you? Because you are reading this book, you are most likely a teacher or a parent, or you intend to become a teacher or parent. This book will introduce you to the vast and wonderful world of children's literature, so you will be prepared to create such memories for the children in your classroom or your home. In this textbook, when I talk about *your children*, I am referring both to students and to your own children.

Within these pages I will acquaint you with numerous books appropriate for children from birth through age 13—the preschool and elementary school years. This textbook is intentionally brief; after all, most of your reading should be children's books—not a book *about* children's books. Therefore, I will not attempt to cover the many fabulous books available for middle school and high school students; several other good textbooks do focus on literature especially for adolescents and young adults (e.g., Donelson & Nilsen, 2008, and Brown & Stephens, 2007).

Defining Literature for Children

A few definitions will help outline the scope of this book. You might think *children's literature* could be easily defined as “books for kids.” However, there are many different definitions of children's literature and even varying definitions for *literature* and *children*!

What is literature? Are all books literature? Are only stories considered literature? One definition of literature requires that the work be of good quality (Hillman, 2002). Hillman describes some signs of poor quality—stodgy writing with plots that are too predictable, too illogical, or too didactic. However, there is little agreement on what constitutes good quality. For example, the first time I taught an undergraduate multicultural literature course, I assigned *Ishi, Last of His Tribe* (Kroeber) for the biography reading. I selected it because the book had affected me deeply, moving me to tears when the last members of Ishi's family died. However, my students were nearly unanimous in their reaction to the book: “It stinks!” I learned that quality is in the eyes of the beholder.

I consider all books written for children to be literature—excluding works such as joke books, cartoon books, and nonfiction works that are not intended to be read

from front to back, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference material. It is true that some books are of better quality than others are, but one person cannot dictate to another what he or she ought to perceive as high quality. It is an individual perception, which will develop as you read this textbook and some of the children's books that I believe are high quality. (I'm hoping you don't think any of them stink!) To assist you, I describe many of the elements of quality children's literature in the next chapter. Additionally, the beginning of each genre chapter contains a set of evaluative questions you may ask yourself as you read the books. The information in Chapter 2 and the evaluation questions will help you refine your ever-developing judgment of quality books.

Some people consider children's literature to span the age group of birth through 18. However, no junior high or high school students I know consider themselves children. Therefore, I define literature for youth ages 13 to 18 as adolescent or **young adult literature**, and literature for youth from birth through age 13 as **children's literature**. Traditional elementary schools enroll children through sixth grade, and typically children are 12 or 13 years old when they complete elementary school.

It is easy to distinguish between a kid in elementary school and one in middle or junior high school; it is even easy to distinguish between a 13-year-old and a 14-year-old, simply by asking them. But it is not so easy to distinguish between children's and adolescent literature. The definitions and dividing line are arbitrary at best, and sometimes children will surprise you when they cross over these lines with their reading selections.

When my adult students ask me how to determine what age or grade level a book would be suited for, I usually tell them that any book a reader likes is appropriate for that reader. When they do not accept that answer (which is most of the time), I tell them that one rule of thumb (also known as the "quick and dirty" rule) is that the author often makes the main character the age of the intended audience. Like most quick and dirty rules, this one is not always true. For example, the best-selling book *Shane* (Schaefer) is narrated by a young boy. However, the book's subject matter and readability are suited for young adults, and there was a great motion picture made about the book in the 1950s that appealed to all ages.

Some book publishers print an approximate reading level somewhere in their books. For example, Bantam indicates the level in the upper section of the copyright page, and Scholastic puts it on the lower portion of the back cover. In either case, look for the letters RL (Reading Level) followed by a numeral. For example, RL2 indicates a second-grade reading level. The level is written in this code so as not to turn away a child in an older grade who might wish to read the book.

Keep in mind that reading levels are approximations determined by readability formulas that take into account only average lengths of words and sentences. Because the formulas cannot measure readers' prior knowledge of the content or interest in the subject, they are often invalid. For example, after my graduate students read *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen), a book about the Holocaust, they engaged in a heated discussion about how early to introduce the book. Some

argued sixth grade, but others said definitely not before eighth grade. Then one of the students raised her hand and said, "I read it in third grade." That was the end of that discussion.

I used to think that although some children were not able to read on their grade level, their interest level would be the same as that of their peers. One summer I took a group of preservice teachers to an inner-city school to tutor children in summer school. For the first session, tutors were to read aloud to the children, so I told my students to take four books on different reading levels and let the children choose which book they wanted to hear. When we collected the children from their classrooms, one stood out from the rest. He was about 12, and taller than his tutor; he looked like he might soon be able to play halfback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. "I hope his tutor brought some sports books," I thought to myself. But I later discovered that the book he picked for his tutor to read was Arnold Lobel's *Days with Frog and Toad!*

Therefore, in this text I do not attempt to pigeonhole books by assigning them to grade levels. The elementary children I have encountered like a wide range of books, from picture books to young adult novels. Assigning grade levels to books actually discourages children from reading many fine books. As mentioned, children are reluctant to select a book that has been labeled for a lower grade level. Worse, if children learn they are able to read only books designated for lower grade levels, their self-esteem is damaged, especially when their classmates find out. Often these children choose not to read at all rather than read a book on the primary level. When given varied choices, such as they find in a school or public library, children will select books appropriate to their interests and reading abilities. Read to your children from books that you like and from books they request. You will soon find out if the topic is not interesting because it is too babyish (or too sophisticated), and you can make another selection.

The Birth of Modern Children's Literature

Some schools of library science offer graduate courses on the history of children's literature. In one such school, a sage professor told me, "I don't know why they offer that course. I don't think children's literature has any history!" I laughed, but I did wonder why she said it. After all, every children's literature textbook I had read contained a chapter on history. When I asked the professor, she replied that children's literature as we know it today began in 1865 when Charles Dodgson (under the pen name of Lewis Carroll) wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. It was the first novel written especially for children that was purely entertaining, with no instructional purpose. The book has a dreamlike quality: Alice follows a white rabbit down a rabbit hole and finds herself in a fantasyland where animals speak, objects come alive, and people change sizes.

What did children read before the publication of *Alice*? Children have always listened to and enjoyed folklore, and after the development of the printing press in

the late 1400s, they were able to read folk literature. Because traditional literature is presented in Chapter 5, I will reserve the discussion of its history for that chapter and briefly discuss the development of children's novels here.

Before 1865, children in the English-speaking world read and enjoyed adult novels, such as *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719), *Gulliver's Travels* (Swift, 1726), *The Swiss Family Robinson* (Wyss, 1812), *A Christmas Carol* (Dickens, 1843), and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (Verne, 1864). If you review the unabridged versions of these works, you will find them very advanced reading, so I think these books must have been read by older, more capable children who perhaps shared them with their younger siblings.

The earliest books written for children were entirely religious, instructional, or for the improvement of their morals and manners. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, however, an English publisher named John Newbery published books for children to enjoy. One such book, *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes* (Newbery, 1765), is considered the first novel written especially for children. Newbery's books were also highly moralistic, but at least someone had recognized that children needed to be entertained as well as indoctrinated. Young children read and enjoyed these books, of course, because there was little else for them to read. However, those early books would not entertain children today. When I reviewed some of them, I found them to contain all the flaws of "nonliterature" identified by Hillman: "stodgy writing, plots that are either too predictable or too illogical, and socially conscious themes that outweigh the slender story that supports them" (2002, p. 3).

Imagine the delight of children when they first read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. "What made this story absolutely unique for its time was that it contained not a trace of a lesson or a moral. It was really made purely for enjoyment" (Huck, Hepler, Hickman, & Kiefer, 1997, p. 96). Charles Dodgson was a mathematics lecturer and ordained deacon at Christ Church College of Oxford University in England. He often entertained the young daughter (Alice Liddell) of the dean of his college by telling stories about Wonderland. Later he published the stories under the pseudonym of Lewis Carroll in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the sequel *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871).

Alice was the **prototype**—the first of its kind—of modern children's literature. Other good books that were widely read by children also appeared during the remainder of the nineteenth century. Not all were specifically intended for children, and certainly not all were free from moralism. (Even today, a common criticism of children's literature is that too many books are moralistic, with implicit lessons built in.) However, these books were primarily entertaining, and most contained child characters. Box 1.1 presents a partial list of the books considered **children's classics**—not because they were all written for children, but because the children of the nineteenth century read and treasured them. These books are classics because they are still in print, and readers still enjoy them more than a century after their first publication.

Box 1.1

Children's Classics of the Nineteenth Century

1812	<i>The Swiss Family Robinson</i> by Johann Wyss
1843	<i>A Christmas Carol</i> by Charles Dickens
1864	<i>Journey to the Center of the Earth</i> by Jules Verne
1865	<i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> by Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson)
1865	<i>Hans Brinker or the Silver Skates</i> by Mary Mapes Dodge
1868	<i>Little Women</i> by Louisa May Alcott
1869	<i>Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea</i> by Jules Verne
1871	<i>Through the Looking-Glass</i> by Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson)
1872	<i>Around the World in Eighty Days</i> by Jules Verne
1876	<i>The Adventures of Tom Sawyer</i> by Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)
1877	<i>Black Beauty</i> by Anna Sewell
1883	<i>Treasure Island</i> by Robert Louis Stevenson
1883	<i>The Adventures of Pinocchio</i> by Carlo Collodi (Carlo Lorenzini)
1884	<i>Heidi</i> by Johanna Spyri
1886	<i>Kidnapped</i> by Robert Louis Stevenson
1886	<i>Little Lord Fauntleroy</i> by Frances H. Burnett
1894	<i>The Jungle Book</i> by Rudyard Kipling
1900	<i>The Wonderful Wizard of Oz</i> by L. Frank Baum



Responding to Literature

Comparing Book and Movie Versions of a Classic Read one of the children's classics and list the elements of the story that might have attracted children in the nineteenth century. Most of the classics have been made into movies (some several times). View a video of the story and compare it to the book. Make a Venn diagram (see Chapter 12, Figure 12.4) showing the similarities and differences. Determine whether the book or the movie would be most appealing to children today, and explain why.

Because of their age, all the classic books are in the **public domain**, meaning they are not protected by copyright laws. Therefore, be cautious when you check them out of the library or purchase them because there are many poorly adapted or condensed editions on the market. However, the full texts of these classics are accessible online for viewing or downloading at www.gutenberg.org.

Book Illustrations

The development of illustrated books for children is also an interesting story. Children's books were usually illustrated with crude woodcuts, if at all, until Sir John Tenniel delightfully illustrated *Alice* in pen and ink in 1865. That same year, a talented

English printer named Edmund Evans perfected the photographic engraving process and solicited gifted artists to create the first colored illustrations for children’s books. Among the artists he encouraged and supported were Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, and Kate Greenaway. The types of books they illustrated included traditional literature, verse, and alphabet books. As you can imagine, Evans’s beautiful books were tremendously popular, and they ushered in the modern era of color illustrations in children’s books, something we take for granted today.

Kate Greenaway was perhaps the most popular of the three artists, judging by the sheer volume of books sold. Her scenes of happy children in peaceful landscapes charmed the public. (See her illustration at the beginning of Chapter 2.) Greenaway was so popular that dressmakers began styling children’s clothing to emulate the dress of the children in her pictures. However, Randolph Caldecott, with his unique way of depicting humor and lively characters in action, is often recognized as the most talented of the three artists.

The nineteenth century produced some lovely illustrated books; however, the pictures served only as decorations. The modern picture storybook did not emerge until the beginning of the twentieth century in England. Six publishers rejected Beatrix Potter’s manuscript of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, but she was determined to see her illustrated story made into “a little book for little hands.” In 1901 Potter withdrew her own savings of 11 pounds and printed 450 copies of the book, which became the prototype of modern picture storybooks. One of the unique qualities of this book was created when Potter matched her illustrations with the text, using the pictures to share in the storytelling process. You probably remember the main character, Peter, the errant young rabbit who—against his mother’s admonition—goes to eat in Mr. McGregor’s garden and is nearly caught and eaten himself.

The copies Potter had printed quickly sold and gained the attention of Frederick Warne and Company, who published the second and many subsequent printings. In *Peter Rabbit*, and in her twenty-two other books that followed, Potter used clear watercolors to illustrate woodland animals dressed as ordinary country folk. Her union of enchanting stories with expertly drawn pictures became models for the authors and illustrators of the numerous picture storybooks that followed.



Responding to Literature

Analyzing Potter’s Illustrations Compare photographs of real rabbits with Potter’s illustrations in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Read a biography of Potter, such as *At Home with Beatrix Potter* (Denyer), and discover why she was able to draw the animals with such anatomical accuracy.

The Genres of Literature

Many thousands of good children’s books are available from libraries, stores, and book clubs, so people often do not know how to begin learning about literature. Literature is best studied if it is organized into categories called *genres* (zhän’rədz). Genres are groupings of books with similar style, form, or content. The term *genres* also applies to other types of media, such as music, movies, plays, television shows, and artwork.

Although one can classify and study literature according to genres, not all books fit into one and only one category. Some books fit well in two categories, and some books fit into none! For example, I am never sure whether to shelve my copy of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle) with animal fantasy or counting books. And my copy of *Miss Nelson Is Missing* (Allard) has been moved several times because it has aspects of both realistic fiction and fantasy.

Not everyone organizes literature genres in exactly the same way, but a common organization is outlined in Box 1.2 along with the chapters in which the

Box 1.2

Literary Genres of Children's Literature

Early Childhood Books (Chapter 4): Books written for children birth through age 6

Concept—picture books that present numerous examples of a particular concept, such as the common colors

Alphabet—a concept book that presents letters of the alphabet

Counting—a concept book that presents the counting numbers

General—concept books that present other common concepts such as colors and opposites

Pattern books—predictable books that contain repetitive words, phrases, questions, or structure

Wordless books—books in which the story is revealed through a sequence of illustrations with no—or very few—words

Traditional Literature (Chapter 5): Stories, songs, and rhymes with unknown authorship that were passed down orally through generations

Myths—traditional religious stories that provide explanations for natural phenomena, usually containing deities as characters

Fables—very brief traditional stories that teach a lesson about behavior, usually with animal characters

Ballads—traditional stories that were sung as narrative poems

Legends—traditional stories that combine history and myth, based in part on real people or historical events (e.g., Joan of Arc)

Tall tales—exaggerated stories with gigantic, extravagant, and flamboyant characters (e.g., Paul Bunyan)

Fairy tales—traditional stories written for entertainment, usually with magic and fantastical characters

Traditional rhymes—traditional verses intended for very young children

Fiction (Chapters 6–10): Literary works designed to entertain; the content being produced by the imagination of an identifiable author(s)

Fantasy—fiction story with highly fanciful or supernatural elements that would be impossible in real life

Animal fantasy—fantasy in which the main characters are anthropomorphic animals that display human characteristics

Contemporary realistic fiction—fictional story set in modern times with events that could possibly occur

Historical fiction—realistic story in a real world setting in the historical past with events that are partly historical but largely imaginative

Biography and Autobiography (Chapter 11): Nonfiction works describing the life (or part of the life) of a real individual

Informational Books (Chapter 12): Trade books with the primary purpose of informing the reader by providing an in-depth explanation of factual material

Poetry and Verse (Chapter 13): Verse in which word images are selected and expressed to create strong, often beautiful, impressions

genres are presented in this textbook. I have categorized literature into six major genres: early childhood books, traditional literature, fiction, biography and autobiography, informational books, and poetry and verse. Notice that some of the genres have subcategories. Four chapters of this textbook are devoted to the subcategories of fiction, and the remaining five genres are covered in one chapter each.

The Dewey Decimal System

Libraries also use genres to organize books on shelves so people can easily find them. Although nearly all university and other large libraries use the Library of Congress classification system, most school and public libraries still use the **Dewey decimal system**, named after the Columbia University librarian Melvil Dewey, who in 1876 pioneered this practical system to facilitate classification of books.

Have you ever been frustrated because you made a thorough computerized search, only to find that the book you wanted was not on the shelf? By learning the simple Dewey decimal system, you can walk to the appropriate section and see what books are available. For example, if you need a children's biography of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., you can walk to the section of the library where the biographies for children are shelved—J920. Then you can quickly scan the books until you get to the Ks, where books about King are located.

A short overview of the Dewey decimal system follows, and more specific information is provided at the beginning of each genre chapter.

The Dewey decimal system gets its name because books are shelved by subjects that are grouped into ten main classes. See Box 1.3 for the Dewey decimal system of classification. Each class has ten subdivisions, and each subdivision may be broken down further by adding a decimal point and more numbers. This allows very specific subjects to be shelved together. The following example illustrates this very well:

973	United States History
973.7	Civil War
973.73	Battles of the Civil War
973.738	Appomattox

Dewey categorized fiction works in the 800 section; for example, American fiction was 813, and British fiction was 823. Today, the vast majority of school and public libraries have a separate section for fiction in which books are shelved alphabetically by authors' last names. Storybooks or juvenile novels are typically shelved in a section titled *J FIC*, and all the subcategories—fantasy, science fiction, animal fantasy, contemporary realistic fiction, and historical fiction—are intermingled.

Picture books are found in a special section. The **spine** of a picture book—the part you see when it is on the shelf—usually has an *E* with the first letters of the

Box 1.3

Dewey Decimal System of Classification

- 000–099 General Works**
Computers, encyclopedias, reference books, periodicals
- 100–199 Philosophy and Psychology**
Personal improvement
- 200–299 Religion and Mythology**
Mythology, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Bible stories
- 300–399 Social Sciences**
Traditional literature, family, government, community life, conservation, transportation, law, holidays, costumes, etiquette
- 400–499 Language**
Dictionaries, English language, other languages
- 500–599 Natural Sciences and Mathematics**
Mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, earth science, dinosaurs and prehistoric life, trees, flowers, animals
- 600–699 Applied Sciences, Useful Arts, and Technology**
Medicine, health, diseases, human body, safety, machines and inventions, space and aeronautics, gardening, manufacturing, building, pets, sewing
- 700–799 Fine Arts, Sports, and Recreations**
Architecture, coins, pottery, drawing, handicrafts, painting, photography, music, hobbies, games, sports, magic, “how to” books
- 800–899 Literature**
Fiction, poetry, plays
- 900–999 History, Geography, Biography, and Travel**
Biography, travel, atlases, United States history, world history, geography

author's last name underneath. (*E* is supposed to stand for *Easy*, but it should really stand for *Everyone* because everyone can enjoy picture books.) The books are typically arranged alphabetically by the author's last name. In busy public libraries, however, you may encounter the picture books in bins, one for each letter of the alphabet. Be aware that young children are sometimes quite fickle with picture books, pulling out one to inspect it and then tossing it back, not necessarily where they found it. Therefore, you may find books in the wrong bins. Even in the most meticulous school libraries, where books are lined up neatly on

the shelves, I have heard librarians groan about the hours they spend reshelving misplaced books.

Book Formats

Genre has to do with the content of a book—what it is about—but there are other ways to categorize and compare books. One example is **book format**—the way a book is put together or the way it looks. I have already used several terms that refer to format—for example, *picture book*. What is the difference between a picture book and a storybook? And is there such a thing as a picture storybook?

Picture Books

Norton (2010) explained that most children's books are illustrated, but not all illustrated children's books are picture books. What makes a picture book distinctive is that it conveys its message through a series of pictures with only a small amount of text (or none at all). The illustrations are as important as—or more important than—the text in conveying the message. Books that have no text at all are called *wordless* or *textless* books. Picture books for young children, including wordless books, are presented in Chapter 4, which deals with early childhood books such as concept books and pattern books.

Picture storybooks are picture books with a plot, with the text and illustrations equally conveying the story line. “In a picture storybook, pictures must help to tell the story, showing the action and expressions of the characters, the changing settings, and the development of the plot” (Huck et al., 1997, p. 198). Most people simply call these picture books as well, not drawing a distinction on whether the text conveys a story. In fact, the umbrella term *picture book* is commonly used to refer to any book that has more illustrations than text.

Picture books of all kinds are easy to recognize because of their size and length. They are usually larger than storybooks, and their shapes are varied. The number of pages is fairly uniform. The majority of picture books (excluding unusual formats such as board books or pop-up books) have thirty-two pages, counting both sides of the leaves and including all the pages that come before and after the story. Books of this length typically do not have page numbers. Longer picture books have forty-eight or sixty-four pages. The length of all books is usually a multiple of sixteen because of the way presses print the paper.

Some children's literature specialists combine all picture books in a separate genre and study them as one vast group. However, when people refer to a picture book, they are usually referring to its format. It looks so distinctively different that I could hold up a picture book and a juvenile novel across the room, and you could easily distinguish between the two without looking inside either one. Though all picture books have a distinctive format, they have varied content as well, and the content can be categorized by genre. To do justice to this vast and appealing group, I include picture books in each of the genre chapters.

Easy-to-Read Books

If you selected a hundred picture storybooks at random and reviewed each for the length and complexity of its sentences and the difficulty and number of syllables of its words, you would see that most of these books are intended to be read *to* rather than *by* young children (Chamberlain & Leal, 1999). However, a format specifically designed to give beginning readers successful independent reading experiences has the generic name **easy-to-read books**. Some publishers have their own trademarked names for their easy-to-read series—for example, “I Can Read” and “Ready to Read” books.

The uniqueness of easy-to-read books makes them simple to recognize. First, because they are read independently by children, the books are smaller than regular picture books. In addition, the pages look very different. The illustrations are designed to give clues to the meanings of the words, but the pictures are smaller and less profuse, allowing the text to take up a greater proportion of each page. A liberal amount of white space is achieved by larger print, more space between lines, and lines that end with the phrase rather than running flush to the right margin. Perhaps the most significant characteristic of easy-to-read books is the restricted vocabulary. Usually fewer than 250 different words appear in a book, and these are arranged in short simple sentences, often with word patterns, repeated text, and even rhyming lines to make decoding new words easier. The difficulty of the vocabulary is also controlled, with the majority of the words having only one syllable.

Beginning readers tire easily, and their comprehension is taxed when they have to remember the plot of a book that they are not reading straight through. Authors of many easy-to-read books take this into consideration and break their books into separate stories or short episodic chapters. These books have a table of contents with the title of each story or chapter. Young children gain experience in using a table of contents, and they feel accomplishment in reading a book with “chapters.” Young readers often call these “chapter books,” though they are more aptly called transitional books because they are a bridge between picture books and storybooks.

The history of this format is interesting. After twenty years of publishing picture storybooks for children, Theodore Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss) published the first easy-to-read book, *The Cat in the Hat*, in 1957. Else Holmelund Minarik’s *Little Bear* immediately followed. Both authors wrote several sequels to those early books. Other authors who have enjoyed great success with this format include Arnold Lobel with *Frog and Toad Are Friends* and Cynthia Rylant with *Henry and Mudge: The First Book of Their Adventures*. Both of these books were also followed by popular sequels.

The majority of the early easy-to-read books were animal fantasy, but they are now available in all genres. Good stories, simple text, and well-matched illustrations make these books appealing to beginning readers of all ages. Remember the 12-year-old halfback from earlier in this chapter? At the beginning of the summer, he read at the primer level; by the end of the summer, he could independently read the *Frog and Toad* book he picked out the first day.

Illustrated Books

As children grow from infancy to adolescence, they will notice that the books targeted for them have increasingly fewer illustrations. Books for very young children are primarily illustrations with little or no text (picture books). As children develop, books made for them have illustrations that convey part of the message, but the text is needed for the complete story line (picture storybooks). As they begin to read independently, their books have illustrations that add to the story, but there are fewer of them, and the text itself could stand alone. These books are called **illustrated books**. Though the illustrations depict what is happening in the story, they do not provide new information. The text is clearly more important than the illustrations.

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels are not new, especially for adults. However, in recent years, they have become enormously popular with children and adolescents. The definition of graphic novels is still evolving, but as a literature format, I define them as novels whose stories are told through a combination of illustrations and text. They are longer than picture books (about 64 to 128 pages), and instead of full-page illustrations, the story is most often presented in illustrated panels similar to comic books. Most graphic novels are illustrated with the same artistic quality of modern picture books, and some fans of this format even consider them a unique art form. Though many graphic novels are fantasy, they can be found in all genres of literature, and the tone can be humorous or serious.

The text of graphic novels presents a complete story line with a distinct plot, whereas comic books and the Japanese version of graphic novels called *manga* usually contain episodic stories. A single comic book or *manga* might start a story, begin in the middle of things, or end a story. Readers cannot read just one to gain the whole story. Conversely, graphic novels may have sequels, but each contains a new, complete plot. Unlike comic books, graphic novels are typically bound in more durable formats and are available in bookstores and libraries. Like other novels, graphic novels are given an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), which further differentiates them from periodicals, such as magazines and comic books.

Some graphic novels, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: A Novel in Cartoons* (Kinney), have appeared on coveted best-seller lists. Additionally, some graphic novels are based on traditional (text only) best-selling novels. A visual learner or a reluctant reader may be more likely to pick up the graphic version of a book than the original version that consists of several hundred pages of text. Following is a list of recommended graphic novels:

Graphic Novels

Adventures of Tintin by Hergé

Babymouse: Heartbreaker by Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm

Big Nate by Lincoln Peirce

Billions of Bats: A Buzz Breaker Brainstorm by Scott Nickel

Bone: Out from Boneville by Jeff Smith
Cloud Searchers by Kazu Kibuishi
Diary of a Wimpy Kid by Jeff Kinney
Dork Diaries: Tales from a Not-So-Popular Life by Rachel Renee Russell
Dying to Meet You: 43 Old Cemetery Road by Kate Klise and M. Sarah Klise
Lost and Found by Shaun Tan
Smile by Raina Telgemeier
The Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick



Issues in Literature

Are Graphic Novels Real Literature? Read one of the books in the preceding section and tell whether you think it is more like a comic book or more like a novel.

Make an argument for or against graphic novels being considered true literature.

Chapter Books

As children approach adolescence, the books targeted for them become longer and have even fewer illustrations. Sometimes the only illustration is the picture on the book jacket or cover. This format is commonly referred to as the **juvenile novel** or junior novel. Of course, children do not restrict their reading to fiction novels. They also read nonfiction works such as biography and informational books; I call nonfiction books in this category **chapter books**. This term connotes that they are lengthy enough for the author to divide into chapters. Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1999) describe the nonfiction chapter book as a format that features a large amount of text organized into chapters. In nonfiction chapter books, graphics and illustrations are common but are still less important than the text. Almost all biographies, with the exception of picture book biographies, appear in this format.

Hardcover Books

So far, I have primarily discussed the format of books in terms of size, shape, ratio of illustrations to text, and difficulty of text. Format also refers to aspects of the physical makeup of a book such as the quality of binding and paper. The publishers' hardcover editions are the highest-quality books. Covers are usually constructed of heavy-duty cardboard covered with quality glossy paper. The pages of the book are sewn together, and they are held inside the cover by sturdy **endpapers** that are glued to the inside of the front and back covers. Designs that pertain to the book's subject or theme colorfully decorate the endpapers of many hardcover picture books.

Hardcover books are durable, and the high-quality paper ensures the best color reproduction of illustrations. This is the best format for books that are going to be

read repeatedly, such as picture books. However, hardcover books are expensive, and a major loss occurs if classroom copies become misplaced or “permanently borrowed.” Also, from a teacher’s practical point of view, they are heavy to carry and take up a lot of shelf space.

Paperback Books

Most books are first issued in hardcover and later are issued in paperback to reach a new market of buyers looking for less costly books. Usually the pages of softcover books are made of somewhat lower-quality paper. Instead of being sewn, the pages are glued together and then glued to a stiff paper cover. Quality paperback books can be identified because they have a spine. That is, when you place them on the shelf, you can see the back edge of the book where the title and names of author, illustrator, and publisher are printed. Paperback editions can have their shelf life extended with Mylar book tape that holds the binding together. Paperback is probably the best format for juvenile novels and chapter books that children may read only once.

Several popular book clubs, such as Carnival, Scholastic, Troll, and Trumpet, are marketed in schools nationwide. Teachers distribute order forms to their pupils and then collect and tally the orders. The ordering process can be time-consuming, but the companies are liberal with free books for the teachers. Because of this, many teachers have built large classroom libraries without ever purchasing a book. Book club editions are the least costly because they are mass-produced. Quality of paper diminishes with the price, and the colors in illustrations are not always true to the originals. Picture books are usually stapled in the center, rather than being glued with a spine; juvenile novels and chapter books are often smaller in size, which results in smaller print. However, book clubs have made great literature available and affordable for all children. An added bonus is that some new books appear in a book club edition long before the bookstores get them in the paperback edition, because authors sell hardcover rights, paperback rights, and book club rights separately to publishers.

Merchandise Books

One year I taught in a paraprofessional training program at a community college. All the students were in their 20s or 30s, and most had children. One of their early assignments was to select a children’s book, read it to the class, and ask appropriate questions. One by one the students stood up and read books that were about cartoon, comic book, TV, and movie characters. Not one student had selected a quality children’s book—what kids often call “library books.” I realized they would need guidance in selecting appropriate children’s books to use in classrooms.

These future paraprofessionals had selected merchandise books, which are found in drugstores and large discount chain stores. They are much less likely to be found in libraries or bookstores. These books are called **merchandise books** in the publishing trade because their primary purpose is to sell something—movie tickets, dolls and toys, backpacks, admission to theme parks, and countless other things. Merchandise

books are so ubiquitous that a majority of parents surveyed in twenty-two states said these were the types of books they read to their preschool children on a regular basis (Warren, Prater, & Griswold, 1990). Books about Care Bears, Smurfs, and Star Wars were often named in the survey.

There is no doubt these books are popular. Golden Press (publisher of Little Golden Books) published five of the top eight books on the list of all-time best-selling children's hardcover books (Roback, 2001). These best-sellers are *The Poky Little Puppy* (Lowrey), *Tootle* (Crampton), *Pat the Bunny* (Kunhardt), *Saggy Baggy Elephant* (Jackson & Jackson), and *Scuffy the Tugboat* (Crampton). Perhaps you remember reading these books as a child. They represent some of the better stories published by Golden Press. They do not have cartoon characters, and their purpose is to entertain rather than to sell something (other than books, of course). When I was a child, my mother bought these books at the grocery store for 25 cents. They cost much more now, but when you compare their format to that of a regular hardcover book, you can see the differences in quality. The edges of the cardboard cover are exposed, and the cover is stapled to the pages, rather than being sewn and attached by endpapers. More importantly, I hope you will notice the differences in the quality of story and illustrations as you begin to read the books introduced in this textbook.

Why do these merchandise books sell so well? Perhaps it is because they are readily accessible; most families include someone who goes shopping each week. In addition, these books are relatively inexpensive—partly because of the way they are constructed, but also because of the mediocre quality of the content. There is no doubt they appeal to young children, especially when their characters are familiar faces from Saturday morning cartoon shows or the latest Disney movie.

May (1980) provides a harsh criticism of Disney books. She believes that

Disney's greatest contributions to American popular culture lie in his use of total merchandising techniques to promote cute, stereotyped characters, his use of familiar children's literature titles, and his misuse of those books' plots, themes, and characterization in order to create a product. (p. 213)

My adult students often complain when I tell them they cannot use merchandise books for their assignments in my literature or reading courses. To help them understand my reasoning, I use the following analogy.

Imagine that when you were a young child, every evening after supper (or dinner, if you lived in the South), your parents gave you a chocolate cupcake with white frosting that they bought at the grocery store. It was delicious! Each evening you could hardly wait to finish your peas and carrots so you could get your cupcake. It was something you could count on 365 days a year, and you loved those chocolate cupcakes with white frosting.

Now imagine that when you started school, you went to the cafeteria to get your lunch on the first day, and when you got your tray, you found spice cake for dessert. Every day there was something different. One day it was banana pudding and another day cherry pie. Once, when your class went on a field trip to the mall, you

visited a bakery. This bakery sold carrot cake with cream cheese frosting, German chocolate cake with pecan and coconut frosting, beautifully decorated white cakes, cheesecake, key lime pie, apple pie, and little pastries with a variety of fillings and toppings. The teacher let you buy whatever you wanted.

That grocery store cupcake satisfied you before you knew there were other desserts to be had. After you found out about the abundance and variety of freshly baked cakes and pies and pastries, the grocery store cupcake was never quite as satisfying.

By the same token, I believe that after you indulge yourself in quality literature, you will never be satisfied with merchandise books again. I must add one disclaimer. In recent years I have seen some grocery stores, drugstores, and large discount chain stores carry regular books along with merchandise books that tie in to cartoons, comic books, TV shows, and movies. As your knowledge of quality literature grows, you will be able to distinguish the good from the mediocre or poor, and you might pick up some great bargains in the discount stores.

Series Books

Have you ever read a book that was so good you felt disappointed when you were finished because you wanted to know what would happen next to the characters? That is why authors write **sequels**. When a sequel to a sequel is written, it makes a **trilogy**. If the author writes a fourth related book, it becomes a **series**. All the books in a series will have some unifying element, such as characters or theme. Series also exist among nonfiction books, such as the biographies published by Crowell. Some series are delightful and of high literary quality, among them J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Barbara Park's Junie B. Jones series. Some series, however, are written according to a formula, and they vary only slightly from one book to the next.

Formula books are often found for sale with the merchandise books. Perhaps that can partially explain their enormous success—they are readily accessible to parents and children. Formula series include Nancy Drew (Stratemeyer), Hardy Boys (Stratemeyer), American Girl (Pleasant), Magic Tree House (Random), and Mary-Kate and Ashley (HarperEntertainment). Despite their mediocre quality, formula books tend to have uplifting themes, and these books may help reluctant readers discover pleasure in reading—if the books are actually read. There is indication that some children merely collect series books as they would Barbie dolls or “any other childhood collectible—amassed for the sheer joy of having the latest one, counting them up, or trading them” (Mesmer, 1998, p. 108). Another genuine criticism is that even “‘modern’ serial books continue to exude a Dick and Jane white bread aura” in which the theme, tone, language, culture, and recurring heroes are not identifiable to any minority group (Oldrieve, 2003, p. 18).

eBooks

Newest on the scene are **ebooks** (electronic books). They can be downloaded from a variety of sources such as Project Gutenberg and an Internet bookstore. Reading an

ebook on a computer screen might be hard on the eyes, and a computer limits portability—even a laptop. Printing a book out would take time and money for ink and paper, and it would be bulky compared to a paperback edition. However, a number of lightweight reading devices can hold hundreds of books and permit thousands of page views before the batteries run out. The best ebook readers provide sharp text, readable from nearly any angle and in dim light (just like the printed page). Most ebooks can be purchased and downloaded in less than a minute, anywhere there is cell phone reception!

Common brands of readers are Amazon's Kindle, Apple's iPad, Barnes & Noble's Nook, Kobo, and Sony's Reader. They range in price from \$140 to \$830. (Better ones come in full color and are backlit.) Google offers a free reader "app," which can be used on almost any device with an Internet connection—smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers. On your device, download the Google ebooks app; then the icon will take you to Google's Internet store. You can also visit www.books.google.com/ebooks if you just want to look at Google's list of more than 3 million titles, many of which are free.

eBook readers have several advantages: they are small and light weight, font size is changeable, and they have search functions. For example, if a character appears and you do not remember who he or she is, just search from the front of the book for the name, and you will be taken to the place where the character was first introduced.

Some ebooks are available for download free and others cost \$1 at Amazon and other online booksellers. The classics at Project Gutenberg are all free. Online booksellers, of course, sell downloads of newer books for somewhat less than the cost of a paper book. Often, the ebook edition of a new book is available before the paperback is.

One potential disadvantage of ebooks was described in *Reading Today* (2010): There is some indication that children read about 10 percent slower on electronic readers than they do when reading printed books. However, most children say they prefer the electronic readers.

A Florida high school is starting what will surely become a trend: It is issuing Kindles to each of its 2,100 students! Each reader is loaded with the students' math and English textbooks. Think how much lighter backpacks will be! (I remember lugging all those heavy books from class to class with nary a boyfriend in sight to help!)



Integrating Literature and Technology

TeachingBooks.net sponsors a Series Books Curriculum Resource Center online. Many resources (for both fiction and nonfiction) are available, such as audio clips of authors discussing why they started writing series books. Nearly fifty series are spotlighted, such as American Girl, Goosebumps, Magic Tree House, and Time Warp Trio. Go to www.teachingbooks.net and type "series" in the search box.

The Value of Children's Literature

You now have a basic understanding of children's literature. As you begin to read the children's books that are discussed in this textbook, I believe you will find most of them enjoyable for children and adults alike. Children are never too young to be read to. In fact, some mothers start reading to their children before they are born. What is remarkable is that research indicates unborn babies hear their mothers and react to their voices (see DeCasper, Lecanuet, Busnel, & Granier-Deferre, 1994). In addition to building a bond between parent and child, daily reading to preschool children may be the single most important thing parents can do to improve their children's chances for success in school. Children's book editor Janet Schulman (1998) described the educational and emotional benefits of reading to children with her metaphor that "books help give children a leg up on the ladder of life" (p. vi). Of course, nurturing parents should continue to read to their children after they start school and for as long as they will listen—which, if all goes well, will be throughout the elementary school years.

Children are never too old to be read to either. I remember working with a talented student teacher who was placed in a challenging classroom of sixth graders, all of whom had been identified as being at risk of failing or dropping out of school. The student teacher did an excellent job with them, even though they were often rowdy. One day when the classroom teacher was out, I walked into the classroom, and the first thing I noticed was that I could hear only *one* voice and the kids were all awake! In fact, they had their eyes glued on the student teacher, who was reading them *Stone Soup* (Brown), a picture book fairy tale.

Unfortunately, not all parents read to their children on a regular basis. First, not all parents read. Also, some parents must work more than one job, leaving little time to read to their children. Others have the time and ability to read aloud, yet do not see the advantages—both affective and cognitive—of reading to children. Some parents are eager to read to their children but do not know where to start, so they resort to merchandise books. I recommend reviewing *Best Books for Beginning Readers* (Gunning, 1998) and *Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read* (Cullinan, 1992). These books and others at your library or bookstore will not only provide descriptions of many quality children's books but also tell you how to maximize your reading time.

Following are a few of the specific benefits children derive from reading and listening to books:

- Strengthening a bond between the child and adult reader
- Experiencing the pleasure of escaping into a fantasy world or an exciting adventure
- Developing a favorable attitude toward books as an enrichment to their lives
- Stimulating cognitive development
- Gaining new vocabulary and syntax
- Becoming familiar with story and text structures
- Stimulating and expanding their imaginations

- Stretching attention spans
- Empathizing with other people's feelings and problems
- Learning ways to cope with their own feelings and problems
- Widening horizons as they vicariously learn about the world
- Developing an interest in new subjects and hobbies
- Understanding the heritage of their own and other cultures
- Acquiring new knowledge about nature
- Bringing history to life
- Stimulating aesthetic development through illustrations
- Exploring artistic media used in illustrations

Some educators teach reading through trade books—children's literature—in- stead of using the reading textbooks known as **basal readers** (see Chapter 14). In such classrooms, all the children may read the same book, or they may select their own literature to read. Some teachers provide a list of books from which children can choose. Children's literature is surely more interesting to read than basal readers, which typically contain only excerpts of books or picture book stories minus most of the pictures. Children's literature is definitely more interesting than the basal reading programs' workbooks, worksheets, and board work (read "bored work"). Children learn to read by reading, and what better for children to read than the literature cre- ated just for them?

Prereading Schema Building

In this last section, I introduce you to a strategy that will help readers better com- prehend and enjoy the books they read. The strategy is grounded in reader response theory, which posits that in order to interact with text, the reader must bring some- thing to the reading process. This something is called **schema**, "a system of cognitive structures stored in memory that are abstract representations of events, objects, and relationships in the world" (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 227). **Schemata** (the plural of *schema*) are more generally referred to as background experience or prior knowl- edge. In order to comprehend (and therefore fully enjoy) a book, readers must be able to integrate or connect new information in the text with their networks of prior knowledge. Reading then becomes an active process of constructing meaning.

If children have little or no prior knowledge of the subject of a book, compre- hension and enjoyment are seriously impaired. Perhaps you can relate to the fol- lowing story.

My eighth-grade English teacher assigned the class to read *Ivanhoe* (Scott), a book with a medieval setting first published in 1820. My library copy had no illus- trations—not even on the cover! While slowly reading the first page, I asked myself, "What the heck are they talking about?" I reread the first page. I knew the meanings of nearly all the words, but I could not decipher the sentences. I looked at the back and saw the book was 352 pages! In tears, I went to my older (and smarter) sister and said, "I can't understand this!" She gave me a brief description of the plot and

told me to reread the first page once more. This time, when I started reading, I knew where and when the story took place and who the main characters were, and things began to make sense. When I finally finished the book, I actually liked it!

The Process of Schema Building

I had been overwhelmed because my English teacher had failed to help her students build a schema to enable them to comprehend *Ivanhoe*. Fortunately, I had an older sister to collaborate with, but not all the kids in my class had someone to help them. Teaching readers to construct their own schema before reading is quick and easy, and I suggest you use it for all the books you read to your children. Most importantly, I hope you will teach this process to your children and encourage them to use it each time they read a new book. It is probably the single most important thing you can do to enhance children's understanding and appreciation of a fiction book. I call it the **prereading schema-building process**, and it can be used with either picture books or juvenile novels. The purpose is to activate the reader's prior knowledge as well as to build a scaffold for new knowledge such as vocabulary and historical or cultural setting.

I. Begin at the End. Please, do not read the end of the book first! However, starting with the last text page, look at each page until you reach the back cover. These last pages often contain critical information for understanding the book, such as glossaries, maps, or afterwords that will provide helpful information you can refer to while reading. You also may find information about the author. Usually books do not mention that these aids are provided at the end. I have had students who struggled to read a work of historical fiction that contained many foreign words, such as *Ishi, Last of His Tribe* (Kroeber), only to discover the glossary after finishing the book.

II. Cover the Cover. Sometimes information such as a brief biographical sketch of the author is printed on the inside back cover of a paperback book, so always look. If nothing is there, turn the book over and look at the back cover. Most paperbacks will have a short synopsis of the story there. The ending is not revealed, but information such as the name and age of the main character and where and when the story takes place is usually provided. Sometimes there are excerpts from reviews, and these may add a bit of additional information, such as the theme. (On hardcover books, the synopsis and reviews are on the inside flaps of the book jacket. Information about the author and illustrator is also provided there.)

Next, look at the front cover. On a paperback book, or on the jacket of a hardcover book, you should find an illustration. If the book jacket is missing, turn to the first illustration in the book. Think like a detective and look for clues as to what the story might be about. Here are some questions that will help you make predictions:

- What clues can you find that tell about the setting of this story—where and when it happened?
- What do you think the characters might be doing?

- What does the title tell you about the story? Predict what kind of story it might be (fantasy, realistic, humorous).
- What do you think might happen in this story? Why do you think so?
- What do you think the illustrations or designs on the colored endpapers or title page mean? What additional information about the story can be found in these illustrations?
- Do these clues remind you of events in your own life or events in other books you have read?

III. Finish at the Front. The final stage of building a story schema is reviewing all the front matter—the pages that precede the first text page. Locate the title page that shows the title, author, and publisher. The back of this page lists publication information, including the copyright date. (In a few picture books, the copyright page is at the end.) There may be more than one edition of the book, so look for the year of original publication. This gives you an idea of when the author wrote the story. It is sometimes important to know the decade in which a book was written—particularly in the case of contemporary fiction, which may not seem contemporary to readers who are younger than the book. Look for a dedication or acknowledgment that might contain clues about the author. Some authors include a foreword that provides information to help readers understand and enjoy the book. Reading titles of chapters may provide an overview.

The information you gain by previewing the end pages, the back and front covers, and the front matter should give you enough background to allow full enjoyment of the book. After reading the first few pages, stop and confirm or disprove your earlier predictions.

Modeling the Process

The following is an example of a think-aloud activity in which you can teach the process of previewing a book for comprehension. Using the paperback edition of *The Voyage of the Frog* (Paulsen), I describe here my thoughts as I preview the book.

The name of this book is *The Voyage of the Frog*. It sounds like an animal fantasy story where a frog takes a trip. Following the last page of text is a map. This is probably where the story takes place. The map shows the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Lower California and Mexico, and it outlines the route of the voyage. That's a long way for a frog to swim! There's a lot of detail and notes on the map, but I'll skip it now and look back at it while I read the book to follow where all the events happen.

On the inside of the back cover is a photograph, probably of the author. He looks a little like my father with his beard and jacket and baseball cap (except he is holding a dog, and my father doesn't like dogs). The author must really like dogs to have one in his picture. Underneath the photograph I see the author's name—Gary Paulsen. The paragraph under the picture says he has won lots of awards. It also lists the names of some of his other books. I've read *Hatchet!* It was great. I hope this book is just as good. The paragraph says he has homes in New Mexico and on

the Pacific. The map showed the Pacific area, so he must be writing about one of the places where he lives.

On the back cover of the book, I see an excerpt from the story, a short summary, and some excerpts of reviews. Reading the back cover gives me a lot of information. The main character is named David Alspeth, and he is 14 years old. The *Frog* is the name of a sailboat—not a character. There is a storm at sea, and David is stranded with little food and water and no radio. (He should have taken a cell phone with him.) One of the reviewers said this is a survival story. *Hatchet* was a survival story also, so I think I’m really going to like this book.

On the front cover is a picture of a small sailboat in a stormy sea. The size of those waves makes me remember when my family went on a cruise and I got so sick. I feel sorry for the boy inside the boat because the sky looks dark, and the storm might last a long time. In the picture I can’t see the boy, but the boat looks modern, so it looks like this is a realistic story that takes place in modern times.

On the title page, I see the book was published in 1989. That explains why the boy didn’t take a cell phone. Everybody didn’t carry them around back then. The table of contents doesn’t tell me much, but after it is a diagram of the sailboat with all the parts labeled. I don’t know much about boats, so I’ll look back at this while I’m reading when I don’t know what a term means. The next page contains only a quote from someone named Joseph Conrad: “Only the young have such moments.” I don’t know what that means, but I’ll look at it again after I read the book to see if I understand it then.

And now, I’m ready to read.

Box 1.4 lists the information I gained by using the prereading schema-building process before reading *The Voyage of the Frog*. In Box 1.5, I have provided the steps for the process. (By the way, if you apply the strategy to this textbook, you will discover a glossary of all the key terms that appear in boldface type in the textbook.)

Box 1.4

What Did I Find Out about This Story?

Theme

- Survival story

Main Character

- David Alspeth, a 14-year-old boy

Setting

- On the sailboat *Frog*
- The Pacific Ocean off the coast of Lower California and Mexico
- 1980s

Problem

- Because of a storm, David is stranded with little food and water and no radio

Activation of Prior Knowledge

- Enjoyment of another survival story by this author
- How it feels to be at sea during a storm

Comprehension Resources

- Diagram of the parts of a sailboat (vocabulary)
- Map of the voyage (geography)

Box 1.5

Steps in the Prereading Schema-Building Process**I. Begin at the End**

- Starting with last text page, look at each page before the back cover.
- Look for critical information such as glossary, map, or afterword.

II. Cover the Cover

- Look on inside back cover for biographical sketch of author.
- Turn book over to back cover and look for story synopsis.
- Search for clues about characters, setting, problem, and theme.

- Turn to front cover and search for clues on what story might be about.
- Make predictions: What does the title mean? What are the people doing? What might happen?

III. Finish at the Front

- Open book and review all front material.
- Look for copyright date to approximate setting in contemporary stories.
- Look for dedication, acknowledgment, foreword, or chapter titles for clues to the story.

Extending Learning through the Internet

- *The Background and History of Alice in Wonderland*
<http://the-office.com/bedtime-story/alice-background.htm>
- *The World of Beatrix Potter*
www.peterrabbit.com/us/potters-world-life.asp
- *A History of the Dewey Decimal System and Its Creator, Melville Dewey*
www.slais.ubc.ca/courses/libr517/02-03-wt2/projects/dewey/P1Section1.htm
- *A Brief History of the Graphic Novel*
www.diamondbookshelf.com/public/default.asp?t=1&m=1&c=20&s=164&ai=64513&ssd=
- *Activating and Building Schema*
www.readinglady.com/mosaic/tools/Schema%20handout%20by%20Deb%20Smith.pdf

**Literature Activity: Building Schema**

Select a popular picture book or juvenile novel and use the prereading schema-building process to deduce as many clues as you can about the story before reading it. After you finish reading, check your list of clues to see if they were all accurate. If not, determine what led you to form a misconception.

Summary

Children's literature is broadly defined as all books written for children, excluding reference books (such as dictionaries) that are not meant to be read in their entirety. The history of modern children's literature is relatively short, dating back to 1865 when Lewis Carroll published *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—the first novel written specifically for children that was purely entertaining. The prototype of the modern children's picture storybook is *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, published by Beatrix Potter in 1901.

Literature is most easily studied in genres or categories with similar characteristics. The literary genres are early childhood books, traditional literature, fiction, biography, informational books, and poetry. These categories are typically used to determine where books are shelved in libraries. Children's books are available in a variety of formats: picture books, easy-to-read books, illustrated books, graphic novels, chapter books, hardcover books, paperback books, merchandise books, series books, and ebooks.

The prereading schema-building process can be used with all genres of books to build background knowledge so that readers can comprehend and enjoy reading new books on their own.

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* The star icon used throughout this book designates the author's favorites.

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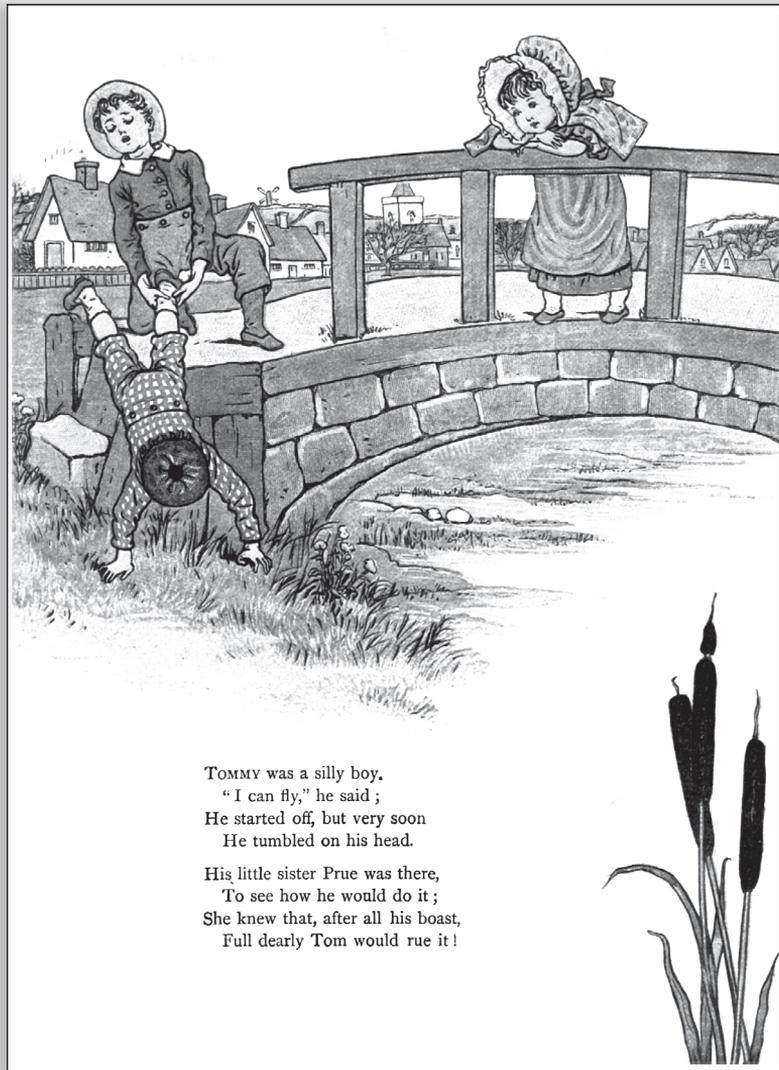
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Be sure to visit the MyEducationKit (www.myeducationkit.com) for this text where you can:

- Search the Children's and Young Adult Literature Database, which houses more than 22,000 titles that are searchable by author, illustrator, awards, publication year, topic, and descriptors.
- Explore genre-related Assignments and Activities, which show concepts in action through database use, video, teaching cases, and artifacts from both students and teachers.
- Listen to podcasts and read interviews from some of the best-loved and most enduring authors and illustrators in the Conversations section.
- Discover Web Links that take you to sites devoted to exemplary authors and illustrators, classrooms with powerful children's literature connections, and literature awards.

2

Elements of Quality Children's Literature



The original of this illustration was engraved with four-color plates, which accounts for the bold outlines of the shapes.

From *Under the Window*, written and illustrated by Kate Greenaway.

TOMMY was a silly boy,
"I can fly," he said ;
He started off, but very soon
He tumbled on his head.

His little sister Prue was there,
To see how he would do it ;
She knew that, after all his boast,
Full dearly Tom would rue it !

There are literally thousands of good children's books in print. Some are obviously better than others, but how do you find the best? This chapter will explore different ways to identify and appreciate excellent children's literature. For example, one way is to choose an outstanding author or illustrator and read some of her or his books. Another way is to review the books that some knowledgeable people believe to be superior—so superior that they deserve an award.

Book Awards

Award-winning authors and books are a good place to start, so let me introduce you to the most prestigious awards. Some are given for a specific book, and others are awarded to authors and illustrators for their complete works.

Newbery Medal

In 1921 Frederick G. Melcher, editor of *Publishers Weekly*, proposed a way to honor distinguished contributions to children's literature. The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) of the American Library Association agreed to judge and award a medal named after John Newbery, the English publisher who first made books that were both instructional and entertaining available to young people. The Newbery Medal is the oldest of many book awards given today and therefore is the best known and most prestigious in the United States. This award is given to the author of the most distinguished contribution to literature for children published in the United States during the preceding year. Additional guidelines stipulate that the author must be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States.

In 1922 the first Newbery Medal was awarded to Hendrik Willem van Loon for *The Story of Mankind*, an informational book. Additionally, five noteworthy books were given a Newbery Honor, which is much like a runner-up award. Each year since, one author has been awarded a gold Newbery Medal, and usually several silver honor medals have also been awarded. (There is no set number.) Often you can distinguish Newbery books by the foil or printed medallion on the book jacket or cover. Remember that the gold medallion is for the Newbery winner, and the silver is for an honor book. However, not all copies of Newbery-winning books will be so designated. None of the books printed and sold in the first year will have the medallions because the award is not bestowed until the year following publication. In addition, book jackets—where the foil medallions are usually placed—may be missing from books.

Caldecott Medal

Sixteen years after the first Newbery Medal was awarded, Frederick G. Melcher established the first award for book illustration. It was named after Randolph Caldecott, an English artist who was one of the first to create color illustrations in children's

books. Like the Newbery, the Caldecott Medal is awarded by the ALSC. The first gold Caldecott Medal was awarded in 1938 to Dorothy Lathrop for her illustrations in *Animals of the Bible* (Fish). Two honor books were also named the first year, and one or more honor books have been recognized each year since. The guidelines for the Caldecott winner also require that the book be published in the United States in the preceding year and that the illustrator be a citizen or permanent resident of the United States. However, the illustrator need not be the author of the book. Gold foil or printed medallions also adorn the book jackets or covers of Caldecott winners, and silver medallions indicate honor books. Look for the words “Caldecott Medal” to distinguish this award from the Newbery Medal because the medallions are similar.

To date, several hundred books have won Newbery, Caldecott, and honor book awards—too many to name in this textbook. Many of the early winners would not appeal to children today. Additionally, some recent Newbery winners are geared more for adolescents than for children. Therefore, I have included the names of award-winning books that would appeal to elementary school children in the appropriate genre chapters.



Integrating Literature and Technology

Association for Library Services to Children: www.ala.org/ala/alsc

This website provides comprehensive, up-to-date lists of award-winning books. Type the award name in the “Search” textbox and click “Search.” This site also has a link to the ALSC “Great Web Sites for Kids,” which has the following categories: animals, the arts, history and biography, literature and languages, reference desk, mathematics and computers, sciences, and social sciences. All main categories have subcategories to refine your search further. The next time your children need to write a report, have them start by looking for information at this site.

Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal

In 1954 Laura Ingalls Wilder was the first recipient of the award that bears her name. Wilder authored the series of books based on her life in the American frontier known as the *Little House* books. This award is given to an author or illustrator who, like Wilder, has made a lasting contribution to children’s literature through her or his body of work. The ALSC also sponsors this award. The winners of the Wilder Medal, now given every two years, are shown in the following list.

- Laura Ingalls Wilder (1954)
- Clara Ingram Judson (1960)
- Ruth Sawyer (1965)
- E. B. White (1970)
- Beverly Cleary (1975)

- Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss) (1980)
- Maurice Sendak (1983)
- Jean Fritz (1986)
- Elizabeth George Speare (1989)
- Marcia Brown (1992)
- Virginia Hamilton (1995)
- Russell Freedman (1998)
- Milton Meltzer (2001)
- Eric Carle (2003)
- Laurence Yep (2005)
- James Marshall (2007)
- Ashley Bryan (2009)
- Tomie dePaola (2011)

Hans Christian Andersen Award

Perhaps the most prestigious award is the one international prize, the Hans Christian Andersen Award, named after the Danish storyteller and author who is lauded as the father of modern fantasy. (More is said about Andersen's accomplishments in Chapter 6.) Like the Wilder Award, the Andersen Award is given in recognition of individuals whose complete bodies of works have made an outstanding and lasting contribution to children's literature. Since 1956 the Hans Christian Andersen Award has been given to a living author every two years by the International Board on Books for Young People. Since 1966 an award has also been given to a living illustrator. Queen Margrethe II of Denmark is the patron of these biennial awards, but the panel of five judges is composed of individuals from five different countries.

Since the first awards were given in 1956, only the following five authors and one illustrator from the United States have won this highest international distinction:

- Meindert DeJong (1962)
- Maurice Sendak (1970)
- Scott O'Dell (1972)
- Paula Fox (1978)
- Virginia Hamilton (1992)
- Katherine Paterson (1998)

Sendak, the only U.S. illustrator to win this award, and Hamilton were also honored with the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award, which—like the Hans Christian Andersen Award—is given for a person's life work.

Adults select the recipients of all the awards named thus far. There is no doubt that these selections are outstanding books produced by talented authors and illustrators, but do children like the same books that adults do? Do they read and enjoy the books that adults believe are the best? Educators are speaking out to say, "No!" (See Strauss, 2008.) Children's Choices more closely represent children's tastes.

Children's Choices and Teachers' Choices

Some lists of outstanding books are selected by children. In 1975 the Children's Choices list became the first such recognition. The International Reading Association (IRA) and the Children's Book Council (CBC) cosponsor this project. Each year, publishers select the books to be evaluated from their titles published in the previous year. The number of books selected can be as many as 700. The books are grouped into five reading levels, and then all are sent to five review teams of educators located in different regions of the United States. Each team is responsible for getting the books to 2,000 children in elementary school classrooms; therefore, throughout the school year, the books are read to or by approximately 10,000 children. These children vote for their favorites, and the top 100 titles are announced at the IRA's annual conference. The list is also published each year in the October issue of *The Reading Teacher*.

Since 1989 the IRA's Teachers' Choices list has spotlighted outstanding books that teachers find to be exceptionally useful in the curriculum. Approximately 30 titles are selected from more than 300 recently published books. Books are field-tested throughout the United States, with each book read by at least six teachers or librarians in each of seven regions. The educators then vote for the books they believe have the highest literary quality plus potential for use across the curriculum. The list of top books is published each year in the November issue of *The Reading Teacher*.

In addition to general awards given to authors and illustrators, there are several awards that are genre specific, such as the Orbis Pictus Award for nonfiction. Genre-specific awards are described in the appropriate genre chapters of this text.



Issues in Book Awards

Adults select all the award-winning children's books and lifetime awards given to authors and illustrators. Even the Children's Choices Awards are given to books that adults have preselected. (Children simply narrow down the search.)

After reading "Plot Twist" (www.tc.columbia.edu/news.htm?articleId=6791), make a case for whether you do or do not think Newbery and Caldecott award-winning books have greater appeal for children than other quality books that have not won an award.

Literary Elements

Reading books by award-winning authors and illustrators is one way of discovering some of the best books available. However, there is a multitude of children's books in print, and more new ones are published each year. The list of award-winning books is minuscule compared to what is available. How can you select the best from this mountain of possibilities? One way to assess the literary merit of fiction books is to analyze and evaluate the **literary elements** or various parts of a fiction story: characters, point of view, setting, plot, theme, style, and tone.

Characters

Characters are *who the story is about*, and the action revolves around them. Brown and Stephens (2007) believe that “the effective development of the main character may be the single most important element of the work” (p. 170). Authors develop characters primarily from three sources: (1) from the narrator’s description of physical appearance and personality; (2) from other characters—what others think of characters and what others’ actions are toward them; and (3) from the characters themselves—what they think, what they say, and what they do. Expect the latter to be the most revealing. Through actions, the most convincing evidence about character is revealed.

Main characters, especially the central character or **protagonist**, must be fully developed; that is, readers should learn of the characters’ many traits—their strengths as well as their weaknesses. These complex characters are called **round characters**. It is essential that readers relate to them; and when an author has created a well-developed character, the reader can imagine what might happen to her or him if the book continued. “The main characters in an excellent work of fiction for children are rounded, fully developed characters who undergo change in response to life-altering events” (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1999, p. 29). This capacity for change defines such characters as **dynamic**.

Supporting characters are less well developed than the main characters; only a few of their traits may be revealed. Sometimes they are **flat characters** who exhibit only one side of their personality. Flat characters are often **stereotypes** who possess only the traits considered typical of their particular group. Flat characters are usually **static**, undergoing no change in personality throughout the book.

Rothlein and Meinbach (1996) provide a dozen excellent activities for learning about characterization. One of these, the *character continuum*, appears in Box 2.1. To help children gain a deeper understanding of a particular character, encourage them to analyze the inner qualities of the character as they determine where on the character continuum he or she would fall. With the exception of stereotyped characters (often found in traditional literature), most characters should fall somewhere between the continuum’s extremes. This activity encourages readers to use higher-order thinking skills to view characters as neither all good nor all bad, but as having some desirable traits and some not so desirable—just as real people have.

Point of View

A book’s **point of view** is the perspective from which an author presents a story—a perspective shaped by *who is telling the story* and how much this narrator knows. Although the author writes the book, the story is not typically told from the author’s point of view. Before the author begins writing, he or she must determine what point of view to use, because it will permeate the entire book. In a good book, the point of view can usually be determined in the first page or two, and the author is consistent in using this point of view throughout.

Box 2.1

Character Continuum

Title of Book: _____

Name of Character: _____

friendly _____ unfriendly
 happy _____ sad
 wise _____ foolish
 adventurous _____ cautious
 outgoing _____ shy
 unselfish _____ selfish
 honest _____ dishonest
 brave _____ fearful
 leader _____ follower
 mature _____ childish

Instructions: Analyze the inner qualities of this character using the pairs of opposite words. Place an **X** on the line where you think the character falls on each dimension. Most characters will fall somewhere between the two extremes.

Source: Adapted from Liz Rothlein and Anita Meyer Meinbach, *Legacies: Using Children's Literature in the Classroom*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

First Person. When the narrator is one of the characters in the story and refers to himself or herself as *I* and *me*, the author is employing the **first-person point of view**. With this point of view, the reader will see events unfold through the eyes and thoughts of the narrator, and only the narrator. Therefore, the reader cannot learn what other characters are doing or saying if they are not in sight of the narrator. Because the reader can never learn what is in the minds of other characters, an author using the first-person point of view might contrive for the narrator to do a bit of eavesdropping. With this kind of device, the author can reveal essential information through other characters as well. For example, a child might be able to hear the adults in her family talking when she climbs out her bedroom window to the porch and listens outside the living room window. In this way, the author can move the story line along without changing narrators.

Readers of realistic fiction will find first person the primary point of view for that genre. However, when a story is told only through events the narrator has experienced, the reader should expect the narration to be quite subjective. A good example of a book using this point of view is Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. This story is told through the eyes of a young girl. An interesting

way for the first-person narrator to reveal a realistic story is through letters and diaries. Some good examples are *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (Cleary) and *Absolutely Normal Chaos* (Creech).

Alternating Point of View. Sometimes an author will write a story that is told in first person accounts by two or more characters, called **alternating point of view**. Often, the author shifts narrators each chapter, and a single incident is sometimes told from two or more points of view. Katherine Applegate used this style in *Ani-morphs: The Andalite's Gift*. The main characters are five children—one of whom has permanently “morphed” (become transformed) into a falcon—who are fighting evil aliens, and each chapter is the first-person account of one of these main characters. Avi with Rachel Vail authored *Never Mind! A Twin Novel*, which consists of chapters with alternating points of view between a male and female twin. In a most unique writing collaboration, Avi wrote the chapters narrated by the male twin and Vail wrote those narrated by the female.

Omniscient. The omniscient and all other points of view are told in third-person narrative, in which the narrator refers to all characters as *he, she, it, or they*. The narrator with an **omniscient point of view** is not a book character but rather an all-knowing and all-seeing voice that can relate events that are occurring simultaneously. In this point of view, readers are able to learn what all the characters are doing and thinking, what has happened in the past, and even what will occur in the future. A classic example of a book using an omniscient point of view is *Charlotte's Web* (White).

Limited Omniscient. When a story is narrated through a **limited omniscient point of view**, the story unfolds through the viewpoint of only one of the characters. However, the story is told not *by* the character but by the omniscient narrator, who enters the mind of this character and reveals her or his experiences, actions, speech, thoughts, and history. The reader knows only what that particular character can see and understand. An example is *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder).

Objective. In the **objective point of view**, the reader learns about characters only through their actions and speech. The narrator does not enter the minds of any of the characters, but rather takes a reporter's view, presenting only the facts. The narrator tells but does not comment on or interpret what is happening in the story. The reader learns nothing about characters when they are not in the author's narrative or dialogue. Their actions must speak for themselves as they unfold in the story. *Frog and Toad All Year* (Lobel) is an example of a book using the objective point of view.

First person and omniscient are the two points of view used most often in children's fiction. One way to help distinguish them is to think about which characters are being described. When a story is told by an omniscient narrator, *all* the characters are described through the perspective of the narrator. However, when a story is told in the first person by one of the characters, he or she fully describes the other

characters but is not likely to describe himself or herself. Rather, the reader begins gradually to understand the narrator by what he or she says and does.

Some nuances of point of view can even be revealed through illustration. In *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* (Aardema), artists Leo and Diane Dillon show the frightened monkey leaping through trees to warn the other animals. A dead limb breaks and falls, killing an owlet. However, four pages later, when Mother Owl (who did not witness the accident) gives her account, the illustrations depict a vicious killer monkey standing on the nest, clutching the baby owl, and beating it with a stick! This book is a great vehicle for showing children how the retelling of a real-life experience changes when it is told by more than one person.



Responding to Literature

Changing Point of View Read your children a book with several characters. Have the children select a particularly interesting or exciting incident. Ask them to write a letter or journal entry describing the incident from the viewpoints of at least two characters. You might first want to read them *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* (Scieszka) and *The Pain and the Great One* (Blume) to show how different points of view can change stories dramatically.

Setting

Setting is *where and when the story takes place*. Every story occurs in some time period at some geographical location(s). Setting can include topography, climate, and weather when these are integral to the story. Setting “may play a significant role that has an impact on every other aspect of the book, it may be inconsequential and barely mentioned, or it may not be mentioned at all” (Brown & Stephens, 2007, p. 175). Setting can be a realistic time and place that the reader recognizes, such as the New Jersey suburb in Blume’s *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*. Settings can also be quite abstract, perhaps in an imaginary world with a time period that does not correspond to earth time, as in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis). The story could cover a time span of only one day, as in *Finding Buck McHenry* (Slote), or it could span decades, as in *The Rifle* (Paulsen). When the title of a book includes its setting, expect the setting to be a major element of the story, as in *Little House on the Prairie* (Wilder). In addition, the setting serves a major function in survival stories, in which the conflict is person against nature, as in *Hatchet* (Paulsen).

Setting is more important in some stories than others; therefore, there are two types of settings—backdrop and integral. The **backdrop setting** is relatively unimportant to the story. The name is derived from traditional theater where flat, non-descript painted scenery was dropped from the ceiling at the back of the stage. This is the type of setting often found in traditional literature that begins with a literal or implied “once upon a time.” Traditional literature is nearly always set in an indeterminate past time and in an unspecified place, such as a queen’s castle, a peasant’s hut, a dark forest, or a barnyard. It is not surprising that fantasy, which has its origins

in traditional literature, also employs the backdrop setting frequently, as in *Frog and Toad Together* (Lobel). Some authors deliberately leave time and place vague in order to emphasize the universality of their stories, as in *Sounder* (Armstrong).

The **integral setting** is essential to the story, meaning that the story could not have taken place anywhere but in the setting specified by the author. According to Lukens (1999), “We say a story has an *integral setting* when action, character, or theme are influenced by the time and place” (p. 155). The integral setting is most often used in realistic fiction, especially historical fiction, as in *Johnny Tremain* (Forbes). Perhaps the most difficult setting for authors to write about is a time before they were born. Both the author and the illustrator of historical fiction must undertake painstaking research to present an authentic setting. However, authors can go overboard in developing the setting. Settings should be introduced to the reader subtly, through things the characters see, say, and do within the story. Authors should not resort to multiple pages of tedious description.



Responding to Literature

Finding Picture and Text Clues Select a historical fiction picture book such as *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* (Mitchell) or *The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree* (Houston). Tell your children to look in the illustrations for clues that show the events took place in the past. Read the book aloud and ask the children to tell you the clues they saw in the illustrations. Next, tell them to listen for clues in the story, and read the book again. Make a chart of all the visual and verbal clues that were found.

Plot

“Plot is the sequence of events showing characters in action” (Lukens, 1999, p. 103). In other words, it is *what happens in a story*. To keep readers involved, the plot must tell a good story; the lives of the characters in a book should be more exciting or more interesting than the readers' lives. There are four primary types of plots: cumulative, linear, episodic, and circular.

Cumulative. **Cumulative plots** are most often found in traditional literature and pattern books. In cumulative plots there is repetition of phrases, sentences, or events with one new aspect added with each repetition. “The Gingerbread Man” is a good example of a story with a cumulative plot. Young children love to join in on its refrain.

Linear. **Linear plots** are popular in realistic fiction and fantasy, as in *Swimmy* (Lionni). The plot should be constructed logically; that is, events should happen logically and not by coincidence. There are three major parts to a progressive linear plot:

1. In the *beginning*, the characters and setting are introduced, and the central problem of the story is revealed. Usually the main character sets a goal to overcome a problem.

2. In the *middle*, the main character attempts to overcome the problem and usually meets with obstacles, or the main character participates in a series of events that lead to a solution of the problem.
3. In the *end*, either the problem is resolved or the main character learns to cope with it.

Episodic. Episodic plots are most often used in easy-to-read books or transitional books, such as *Frog and Toad All Year* (Lobel). Although the characters and setting are usually the same throughout, there is no central problem that permeates the book. Rather, each chapter has a miniplot complete with introduction, problem, events, and resolution. Books with episodic plots are good for children with short attention spans or for children with limited reading ability. In either case, if children listen to or read only one chapter a day, they do not have to remember what was read the day before to enjoy the book.

Circular. Circular plots have the same components as linear plots, but the resolution or end of the story shows that the characters are in the same situation as when the story started. For example, in *Once a Mouse . . .* (Brown), a hermit's pet mouse is successively changed from a mouse to a cat to a dog to a tiger—and then, because of his vanity, back to a mouse. In *Ox-Cart Man* (Hall), the pioneer family works hard all year to grow and make goods for the father to take to a distant market in the ox-cart he built. Once at the market, the man sells everything, including the cart and the ox. He returns home with the necessities and gifts he has purchased with the money earned, and the family begins to make and grow the goods to be sold at next year's market.

Naming the components of plot, or **story mapping**, is an activity that will help children follow and understand the structure of a story, either while children are reading a book or, with shorter books, after they finish. Figure 2.1 is an example of a story map of the chapter titled “Cookies” from the episodic book *Frog and Toad Together* (Lobel).

Two elements that can be used to move a plot along are flashback and exposition. In a **flashback** the narrator recounts an earlier event to “give the reader background information that adds clarity or perspective to the plot, but does not fit into the chronological flow of the plotline” (Brown & Stephens, 2007, p. 173). Flashbacks that explain important relationships or the past history of a character will keep the reader from getting bogged down in detailed descriptions or history at the beginning of the book. A device similar to flashback is **exposition**—passages in which the narrator briefly tells (rather than recreates in scenes) what has happened before the story opens. The opposite of flashback is **foreshadowing**—passages which hint at a forthcoming event. The author gives clues to the readers to prepare them for a coming event in the story and to build anticipation.

Conflict is the interaction of plot and character or the opposition of two forces. Tension is a necessary result of conflict. Without sufficient conflict and tension, a book is dull; but with well-developed conflict, the story will create **suspense**, a sense

FIGURE 2.1 Story MapTitle: “Cookies” from *Frog and Toad Together*

Author: Arnold Lobel

Beginning

Main characters:	Toad and his friend Frog
Setting—Place:	Frog’s house in a garden
— Time:	Summertime in the present day
Problem:	Frog and Toad cannot stop eating the cookies Toad baked.
Goal:	They want to have willpower to stop eating cookies.

Middle**Events/attempts to reach the goal:**

1. They put the cookies in a box.
2. They tie the box with string.
3. They put the box up on a high shelf.

End

Resolution: Frog takes the cookies off the shelf and gives them to the birds.

of anxiety, because the reader is uncertain of the outcome. There are four primary types of conflict:

- Character against self (e.g., *Wrinker* by Jerry Spinelli)
- Character against another character (e.g., *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J. K. Rowling)
- Character against society (e.g., *The Giver* by Lois Lowry)
- Character against nature (e.g., *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen)

One outcome of a good plot is that children are better able to understand their own problems and conflicts by reading about the conflicts of the characters.

Theme

The **theme** of a book is its central idea, the underlying message the author is conveying to the reader. Other definitions include a significant truth, a value-laden statement, a broad and powerful idea that has universal application, or more simply, the moral of the story. Sometimes the theme is explicit or stated directly by the narrator or a story character. For example, in *Knee-Knock Rise*, Uncle Anson says that “if your mind is made up, all the facts in the world won’t make the slightest difference” (Babbitt, p. 111). More often, the theme is implicit. Readers have to infer the meaning

from what happens in the story. I find theme to be the most obscure and elusive of the literary elements. To complicate this, some books have a secondary theme or even multiple themes, and others have themes that are so vague they are difficult to express in words.

A theme is more easily understood if it is stated in a complete sentence. For example, “remember” is a word. “Important to remember” is a phrase that adds a little more meaning. However, “It is important to remember the history of your culture” is a sentence and thus a complete thought. It is also the theme of *The Devil's Arithmetic* (Yolen).

To determine the theme of a book, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the underlying meaning or significance of this story?
- What was the author's purpose in writing the story?
- What did the author say to me through the story?
- What are the comments the author makes about beliefs, fundamental truths, human nature, life, society, human conditions, or values?
- What is the common idea that ties the story together?



Responding to Literature

Determining the Themes of Lionni's Books To gain a better understanding of theme and how to determine it, read picture books by Leo Lionni, such as *Frederick*. Lionni's themes are usually morals and are easy to detect. Write the theme of each book in a complete sentence.

Writing Style

Style cannot be isolated from the words of the story, and often style is challenging to detect. It is the manner in which a writer expresses his or her ideas to convey a story. It permeates every sentence of the work and sets the mood of the story. Style has to do with the *writing* as opposed to the *content* of a book. It is *how* an author says something as opposed to *what* she or he says. Authors have many ways to use words to express their ideas. Some of these are tone (discussed next), use of imagery, figurative language, allusion, irony, selection of vocabulary, grammatical structure, symbolism, and dialect—as well as the devices of comparison, sound, and rhythm. Style is what makes one author's work distinctive from works of others writers.

Children often select multiple books by the same author because they like the author's distinctive style, such as the styles of Judy Blume and Gary Paulsen. However, most authors will vary their style when writing for different age groups or when they feel a certain story warrants it. Style is truly the author's personal choice, depending on the characters, setting, and plot of the story.

To determine the style an author used in a book, ask yourself these questions:

- What kinds of words and sentences did the author choose to tell the story?
- Was there any distinctive language, choice of words, or sentence construction? What mood did this create?
- What effect might the author be trying to achieve?

Tone

Tone involves the author's attitude toward the book's subject, characters, and readers. Tone is often quite subtle and may not be easy to pinpoint. In addition, an author may change the tone as the main character or the supporting characters change. Some examples of appropriate tones used in books for children include serious, humorous, moralistic, hopeful, sympathetic, wondrous, longing, loving, satirical, and nostalgic.

Children's literature is particularly likely to have a didactic tone. The literary elements truly suffer when the story has been created around a message instead of having a message flow naturally from the story.

Like style, tone is developed through the author's choice of words and through the way all the elements of the story work together. Because tone influences the meaning of a story, it is important for children to grasp it in order to comprehend the story. For example, consider the misconceptions that would arise if a child read a tall tale such as the story of Paul Bunyan and believed the author's tone was serious rather than humorous.

Responding to Literature

Not all children love books. I remember Carla, a fifth grader who transferred to my classroom at midsemester. When she first made the weekly trip to the library with my class, I noticed she was the only one who did not check out a book. I inquired why and she exclaimed, "Because I *hate* book reports!" Apparently, the only time Carla had read a library book was to do an assignment, so she associated books with work.

There are so many ways to respond to and extend literature that I hope teachers are not still requiring their pupils to do written book reports. One alternative is to have a child show some of the illustrations and briefly describe the book to children in the class or in a small group. This is called a **book talk**, and it is a superior way to get children interested in reading a variety of books. (Book talks are explained in more detail in Chapter 14.) A great resource for teachers is *Book Talk and Beyond: Children and Teachers Respond to Literature* (Roser & Martinez, 1995). This book contains information on a variety of activities, such as focus units, language charts, webbing, grand conversations, literature circles, dramatizing, and literature journals. These and other activities are introduced throughout this text. If you would like to look ahead at these, you may find the list and page numbers in the Subject Index under "Literature responses and activities."

Gloria Houston, the author of several historical fiction books, has studied reader response theory for many years. Her explanation and application of reader response follows.

Reader Response Theory

by Gloria Houston

Louise Rosenblatt (1995) is arguably the best-known theorist of **reader response**, and she is certainly the most influential in the contemporary field of teaching children's literature. Her transactional theory is grounded in the belief that meaning is not inherent in the text; rather, the reader/listener creates meaning in an active mental process when the reader and text converge.

In this constructivist theory, a response to literature is a private inner reaction that is not observable by an outsider. The reader's response begins during the act of reading and may continue well after the reading is finished, because reading is an active creative experience.

Rosenblatt named two categories of reader response—**efferent** and **aesthetic**. An **efferent** (from the Latin *efferre*—to carry away) **stance** is appropriate when a reader's attention is focused on information, facts, or instructions that will be retained after the reading. Therefore, it is the stance of choice for reading nonfiction, such as textbooks, reference books, informational books, and biographies.

An **aesthetic stance** is the appropriate stance for reading fiction. It is more difficult to define because the most important goal of the aesthetic stance is to have a lived-through experience, which Rosenblatt calls an **evocation**. The aesthetic stance may be extended across an entire continuum of responses, including reliving the reading experience and imagining or picturing characters, settings, or events from the story. With aesthetic responses, the reader cognitively and emotionally interacts with the characters, the setting, and the images created by descriptions within the text to create an individual experience. In essence, the reader is living through the experience through the story or narrative—an evocation, or as one student defined it: a film in which the reader may play all the characters and be in the audience at the same time!

The adoption of the appropriate stance for any text by inexperienced readers, especially for fiction, is not automatic. Teachers and parents should not assume that young readers would know which stance is appropriate when reading. Because everything else in the curriculum requires an efferent stance, readers often assume that stance is appropriate when reading fiction as well, even when they are *not* faced with end-of-chapter questions! Students have been taught the efferent stance so thoroughly (both by implication and through experience) that if we do not introduce the aesthetic stance and the concept of reading for pleasure, many readers will never be aware of it. In a way, we must *unteach* the efferent stance to unsophisticated readers if they are ever to understand the aesthetic stance.

Rosenblatt suggests that, beyond the socially agreed-upon meanings of words (e.g., a *cow* is not an *airplane*), *there is no one right way to know what a text means*. Because responses are personal, a wide range of responses should be both accepted and encouraged. This theory, according to Rosenblatt, suggests that all interpretations of the meaning of a work are valid meanings. *Meaning* is not in text, and meaning is certainly not in teachers. Meaning is *an interactive creation that occurs between the text and the reader's mind*. The meaning of any text will not be the same

experience for any two readers. In addition, the meaning of a particular text may change even for the same reader when the work is reread at a later time, because the experience and the knowledge base of the reader has changed—even by the experience of having read the text.

Responses do not necessarily need to be active or overt, such as discussing, writing, dramatizing, or drawing. With literature, the most fundamental response is the reader's cognitive and emotional interaction with the characters and events of the book. One way to enhance this interaction is to engage children with questions during and after reading. (Some sample questions are presented in Box 2.2.)

Although it is acceptable to discuss the story while it is being read, it will be far more productive for the reader to save any serious analysis until after he or she has had time to *live through the experience*—involving himself or herself in an evocation. Evocation and analysis cannot occur at the same time. Therefore, it is essential for adults to wait for children to internalize the story before formally analyzing it or its elements with them, thereby avoiding the risk of imposing their own or someone else's analysis. During this time for internalizing, I suggest the teacher do something other than analysis with the story; for example, read something that relates to the story or connect the story to another subject area such as social studies by talking about the setting. After a minimum of one day, teachers can return to the story. At that time, children should be able to analyze the story informally and spontaneously.

One way for the teacher to initiate analysis is to ask children to draw a scene as they visualize it while hearing a passage. This is a most productive activity for all ages, because much will be revealed that the teacher could learn in no other

Box 2.2

Story Questions

Questions to Ask While You Read

1. What do you think this character might be thinking? What clues help you to know?
2. How do you think this character feels? What clues help you?
3. Why did _____ finally decide to _____ ?
4. What was the reason for _____ ?
5. What do you think might happen next? Why do you think so?

Questions to Ask After You Read

1. What does the title of the story mean to you now?

2. What caused the problem faced by the main character?
3. What words describe the personalities of the characters?
4. What did the main character learn at the end? What did the other characters learn?
5. What do you think is the most important idea the author might want you to remember about this story?

way. Asking children to tell you about their drawings will help them verbalize their personal meanings. Once the drawings and verbalizations have occurred, form small or large groups for readers to discuss their various meanings. Sharing this way allows readers to learn to respect the opinions of others, to ask questions for clarification, and to extend their individual meanings if they so choose. Usually the teacher needs to model for children how to show respect for the interpretations and opinions of others, but the teacher can do this only if he or she genuinely accepts diverse opinions.

Literature Circles

A great way to turn kids on to books, allowing them to respond to what they read by sharing their thoughts with others, is **literature circles**. These are small, temporary discussion groups that have chosen to read the same book. More is said about literature circles in Chapter 14, but here I offer a brief outline based on *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* (Daniels, 1994):

- Students choose their own reading materials.
- Small, temporary groups are formed, based on book choices.
- Different groups read different books.
- Groups meet on a regular schedule to discuss their reading.
- Students use notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
- Discussion topics come from the students.
- Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations generated through personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions about books.
- In newly formed groups, students play a rotating assortment of task roles.
- The teacher serves as a *facilitator*, not as a group member or instructor.

Developing a Classroom Library

by Susan E. Knell

Imagine wanting to be an excellent basketball player, chef, or musician and not having the tools around that you need to succeed. To become accomplished at anything, you must have practice tools at hand, such as a basketball hoop in the driveway, cookbooks in the kitchen, or music books at the piano. The same is true with children learning to read. They need the tools nearby that will help them practice to become proficient readers.

Good classroom libraries are not a luxury; they are vital to children's success in becoming lifelong readers. In many schools, classes make only one thirty-minute visit to the school library weekly, and children are typically limited to checking out two books. What happens if they finish their books before the next weekly trip, discover their books are too difficult or easy, or simply find they do not like them well enough

to finish? Individual trips back to the library may cause children to miss part of their free reading period.

So, what does a good classroom library include? It should contain books from all genres, including nonfiction. In fact, I suggest that at least 40 percent of your collection consist of nonfiction because it can increase children's world knowledge base while expanding their curiosity. Be sure to include picture books, quality series books, magazines, newspapers, and reference books (such as atlases, dictionaries, and a space-saving encyclopedia on CD-ROM). Books the children have written and bound should also be included.

The most inviting and attractive rooms are those where books are displayed prominently throughout. Your classroom library should look more like a bookstore where books are displayed everywhere, arranged in interesting ways to encourage children to pick them up and start reading. Wherever possible, display book covers facing the children. A great way to do this is by installing inexpensive rain gutters made of enameled reinforced plastic found at home improvement stores. They are easily cut to any size, and the plastic support brackets can be screwed into almost any wall, including concrete blocks. (See Jim Trelease's website at www.trelease-on-reading.com and click on "Rain gutter book shelves.")

Here are more ideas for effective book displays:

- Bookshelves on wheels that can be moved to create various learning environments and centers
- Colorful plastic cartons that are labeled for easy identification by titles, authors, themes, genres, or topics
- Baskets of various sizes and shapes
- Empty desks
- Chalkboard trays
- Small tables underneath author or genre bulletin board displays
- Clothes-drying racks for big books, magazines, and newspapers

I suggest starting with about 300 trade books, depending on the children's ages and diversity of reading levels. You may certainly begin with fewer books—just set a goal to add at least two more books per child each year. Building your classroom library takes time, but it need not take a lot of money. You can borrow books from your school or public library. Although these will not be a permanent part of your collection, they add many choices for children. Most school libraries do not have a checkout limit for teachers, so periodic trips can keep your collection new.

School book clubs give free books to teachers, according to the dollar amount ordered. Prices are reasonable and titles include both classic books and new bestsellers, so encourage your children and their families to order books.

At the beginning of the school year, send a letter home to parents suggesting they donate books in honor of children's birthdays and in lieu of holiday or end-of-year presents for you. If parent groups conduct school book fairs, ask them to donate proceeds for classroom libraries or purchase books directly. Paste a bookplate or

label in each, acknowledging the person who donated it. (You can print them with any art software program, such as Print Artist.)

Buy used books at garage sales, flea markets, and library sales. You may find books in good condition at a very inexpensive price. Also, look for bargains in the large discount chain stores, where good titles can often be found among the merchandise books. And if you are lucky enough to live in an area that has a Book Warehouse outlet, you can find new books for half price! Some may be a bit shopworn, but most are publisher overruns or bookstore leftovers that are in new condition.

Alma Flor Ada tells a wonderful story of her son's third-grade teacher who implemented a yearlong program called "The One Thousand Book Classroom" (see *A Magical Encounter*, 2003, pp. 18–25). The children in this classroom wrote letters requesting books from publishers, authors, school board members, legislators, and community leaders. They later extended the letters to state, national, and international levels. By the end of the school year, they far exceeded their goal of 1,000 books!

To identify new titles for your collection, keep current in the field of children's literature. Frequent the children's section of local bookstores to see what is newly published. Most will allow you to read books without buying them. Read book reviews in professional journals and online (Amazon Internet bookstore at www.amazon.com has reviews of nearly every book in print). Attend professional conferences such as International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English to hear authors speak, browse the book exhibits, and attend sessions on children's literature. Communicate frequently with your school and public librarians to discover new books, to find out which books the children are reading, and to learn new trends in children's literature.

Make building your classroom library a priority that continues throughout your teaching career. Being excited about your library will be contagious: Children will revel in the reading choices they have right in their own classroom—the enjoyable tools they need to learn.

Extending Learning through the Internet

- International Reading Association Reader's Choices
www.reading.org/resources/booklists.aspx
- Literature Circles, Getting Started
www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=19
- Plot Twist: The Newbery May Dampen Kids' Reading
www.tc.columbia.edu/news.htm?articleId=6791
- Point of View Examples
<http://home.mchsi.com/~webclass/POV%20samples.htm>
- Louise Rosenblatt Interview
www.education.miami.edu/ep/rosenblatt/

Summary

Numerous awards are given to quality children's books; many are genre specific and will be discussed within the genre chapters. Some coveted awards that are not genre specific include (1) the Newbery Medal for the year's most distinguished contribution to literature for children, (2) the Caldecott Medal for the year's most distinguished book illustrations, (3) the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal for an author or illustrator who has made a lasting contribution through his or her body of work, (4) the international Hans Christian Andersen Award for authors and illustrators whose complete bodies of work have made a lasting contribution, and (5) Children's Choices (voted on by students) and Teachers' Choices (for being exceptionally useful in the curriculum).

Readers can analyze seven major literary elements in fiction stories. (1) Characters are who the story is about. (2) Point of view is determined by who is telling the story. (3) Setting is where and when the story takes place. (4) Plot is what happens in the story. (5) Theme is the author's underlying message or central idea of the story. (6) Writing style is the manner in which a writer expresses himself or herself. (7) Tone reflects the author's attitude toward the book's subject and the readers.

In her reader response theory, Louise Rosenblatt contends that the meaning of a book is not inherent in the text; rather, the reader creates the meaning in an active mental process based on his or her background experiences. Therefore, reading a particular book will not evoke the same response in any two readers; all interpretations of the meaning of a book are valid in this theory.

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- Listen to podcasts and read interviews from some of the best-loved and most enduring authors and illustrators in the Conversations section.
- Discover Web Links that take you to sites devoted to exemplary authors and illustrators, classrooms with powerful children's literature connections, and literature awards.