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Elvina Tong
Bank Street College of Education

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by

Elvina Tong

Mentor: Madeleine Ray

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I walk into my room

crawl into my bed

I take out my book

and start to open it

then I start to read

I feel like

I'm getting deeper

and deeper in my book

walking closer with ever word

then before I know it

I'm in

the book

I almost feel

like a lost character

then

poof

I look up

and I'm back

in my room

and I start all over

-- Second grade girl, 8 years old

Building Literacy through Literature
by Elvina Tong

Abstract:

This is a study of literacy and literature in the early and middle childhood years. I came to choose this study due to my curiosity about whether or not exposure and enjoyment of literature can foster children's literacy skills.

First, I will look at what contributes to children's literacy and attitudes toward books. Next, I will describe the models of teaching reading to beginning, emerging, early, and fluent readers with which I was taught and that I have seen others employ. I will include a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I will make recommendations for a system with which to teach early and fluent readers which I have used in second grade reading circles. My proposal will include the use of cooperative learning in place of ability grouping, introducing literary elements to all children and creating a literature-based classroom that will foster a life-long love for reading.

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Introduction

I can still remember Stephen sitting "criss-cross applesauce" on the rug in my kindergarten classroom, wearing his green argyle sweater. Without being called on to say or read anything, he was phonetically "sounding-out" a word in the morning message. It is peculiar that my memory of this moment is so vivid, because I now cannot remember what that pivotal word was. He made the sounds of the letters to himself, blended the sounds, and said the word quietly. He then said it again twice, but loudly. He looked at me with widened eyes and exclaimed, "Did I just read that?" When I nodded, he beamed, smiling from ear to ear, "I just read!" I felt so much joy. It was as though I had just witnessed a miracle.

I am still not quite sure of *how* children learn to read, but Stephen was one of the children in the class who learned how to read without much difficulty. However, I never really saw him develop a love for reading. He never picked up a book by choice but was happy to sit for story time. The next year, I moved up to a first grade classroom and the pleasure of teaching Stephen for a second time. During that year, the school invited a writer of a series of children's sports books for an author visit. One should know that Stephen's passion, first and foremost, was baseball. He lived to play baseball, watch baseball, collect baseball memorabilia, memorize facts and thrived on doing so.

This series of sports books not only got Stephen interested in reading, it gave him the motivation to do so. It was an extension of his love for baseball. He took ownership of those books because of his interest level and curiosity to learn more.

He read one after another. He progressed to read the author's books that were not sports-related and eventually moved on to books written by other authors who write in a similar style. Stephen developed a love for reading because he found a genre that he could connect with.

This experience and others like it have solidified for me the fact that although children learn to read at different stages of childhood, those who continue to read for pleasure do so because they are interested in the stories or content of particular books. Through books – fiction and non-fiction – children can enter worlds of knowledge and fantasy, further understanding, discover interests, and develop insights. This will help them to be more interesting and well-rounded people who can engage in discussions.

Schools today emphasize literacy skills – we quiz comprehension, vocabulary and decoding. Many use inventories such as the Gates-McGinitie Reading Test and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to assess these skills and thus, teach to the test. But I believe that if we can motivate children to read and encourage them to do so, their skills in these areas will flourish as a result. In this study, I will look at ways to help children understand story structure and develop an interest in finding books they will want to read.

For the past five years, I have been an assistant teacher in two independent schools. Both are prestigious K-12 schools that are considered college-preparatory and consist of an upper class demographic. I have worked in kindergarten, grades 1 and 2 – the age band in which children are beginning to read and expected to read.

My experience and viewpoints in literacy education may be biased because the two schools are similar in population and philosophy. In these schools, there are extremely high expectations for learning to read at an early age.

When I worked at the kindergarten level (ages 5-6) learning to read was a source of anxiety. Parents would be anxious about when their child would begin to read, and children felt the anxiety from their parents. Inevitably, some children were more advanced readers, and the ones who were not would become discouraged, feeling inferior to their peers. Parents of first graders (ages 6-7) saw it as the magical year when their child "should" be reading. If they weren't, intervention was necessary. Tutors were brought in when parents and/or teachers felt that the child's reading development was not up to par of classmates. By second grade (ages 7-8) there was a much clearer delineation between reading levels in the class. Some children read lengthy novels while some were still struggling with decoding. At this grade level, evaluations were recommended to parents for struggling readers.

For the purpose of my inquiry, I will discuss methods and books appropriate for eight year olds. First, I will examine the developmental stage of an eight year old. Second, I will look at factors contributing to children's attitudes towards books and reading. Next, I will describe the current models of teaching reading to beginning, emerging, early and fluent readers with a discussion of its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I will make recommendations for a program to teach early and fluent readers which I have used in second grade reading circles. My proposal will include the use

of cooperative learning in place of ability grouping, text discussions and creating a

literature-based classroom that will foster a life-love for reading.

Development Statement

According to Piaget's Developmental Theory, children who are eight years of age fall into the cognitive stage called 'concrete operations.' "The child abandons his perceptual judgments, and thought takes on certain logical properties." Children in this stage use logical operation, but the content of their thinking is concrete rather than abstract. (Lavatelli, Moore, & Kaltsounis, 1972, p. 44-45) In my experience, this theory holds true. I teach a reading group with several eight-year-old children – both boys and girls. One of the books we read was rich with metaphors and non-literal language. Though this book was written for their age level, it was extremely difficult for them to decipher the meanings behind these literary metaphors and even figures of speech that are used in everyday language. For example, *a pudding like a night on the sea* and *eyes like black lightning*. We also looked more closely at everyday idioms, such as *a barrel of laughs, a fish out of water,* and *caught red-handed.* One particular girl repeatedly exclaimed, "That makes no sense!" Many of them interpreted metaphors in literal, straightforward terms.

Children begin to grasp the idea of evidence and supporting theories and ideas with this evidence. This skill does not come with age, but with practice. Eight year olds are quick to give an opinion or make a conclusion but are challenged when asked to explain why they feel or think that way. As they progress through this period of concrete operational thinking, their ability to verbalize and identify the evidence that led them to their conclusions expands.

Children in the concrete operational stage "gradually develop a coordinated system of spatial relations and can reconstruct a model village with physical objects." However, the same children have difficulty mapping a 2-D drawing of a 3-D model. Although they may be capable of a true 2-D representation, the distances involved are approximated, the distances and sizes still lack coordination, and relationships can't be considered simultaneously. Children attempting to reduce a map may leave the sizes of objects unchanged while only placing them closer together. (Labinowicz, 1980, p. 76)

In addition, their thinking is becoming "sociocentric, increasingly aware of the views of others." (Labinowicz, 1980, p. 86) This is demonstrated by empathizing with others less fortunate than themselves, putting themselves in the shoes of a character in a book they are reading, or by yielding in an argument by conceding that the other person's feelings may have been hurt even if this was unintentional. Children who are eight years of age are grappling with the notion of fairness. As they are growing in independence, they are developing ways to negotiate friendships and all of the intricacies involved in maintaining these friendships on their own. As eight year olds work to develop language to deal with arguments and misunderstandings, adult intervention is often sought to make a final resolution.

Eight is an appropriate age to begin group work in class to foster teamwork and cooperation. As students are assigned to work on group projects, it is important to discuss and practice with students the skills of compromise, division of labor, and cooperation. When I have put children of this age into groups for work in math,

social studies or writing workshop, I have found that they can work together successfully, in comparison to children in younger grades. The younger children end up socializing or working independently, not understanding how to work effectively as a group.

A characteristic of eight-year-olds is an enormous and growing curiosity. They have discovered how much there is to know about the world. They enjoy collecting things and mail-order catalogs are of interest because of the variety of items show in their pages. Beyond nature and objects, the eight-year-old is also curious about people. This is shown by attentiveness to adult discussions and an eagerness to participate in adult gatherings. They are also in interested in how children from other countries live. Further, they are interested in how people lived in earlier times. (Elkind, 1994, pg. 166) This curiosity allows for a world of possibility in building a classroom library.

An additional interest of students at this age is that of making it on their own. Erikson spoke of this stage in life when he discussed the crisis of industry versus inferiority, or in other words, the crisis of competence. As children gain increased amounts of responsibility, their confidence and independence grows. Eight year old children begin to insist "I can do it by myself" when adults offer assistance. This interest is reflected in the games that children play and the books that they read. Games often include pretend play that mimics the behavior of adults, reflecting a very sophisticated understanding of the operations in the real world. Book choices are likely to center on themes of children their age solving a mystery on their own or

taking care of their own needs and living alone. With this increased competence, children are given new challenges at home and school. This is typically the time around which homework becomes a part of life and children must be responsible for making sure that this is completed correctly and turned in on time.

Lawrence Kohlberg described the moral development of an eight-year-old child in his Moral Development Stages. He theorized that around age 7 or 8, a child enters into the second stage of pre-conventional development. This stage is called the Instrumental Morality stage. During this time, children are still centered on the idea of reward and punishment, which Kohlberg argued lasts until approximately age 10. A child in this stage will only follow rules when it leads to reward for them. They act to serve their own needs and self-interests, but assume others will act in the same way. They comprehend that other people also act out of self-interestedness (Cole, Cole, & Lightfoot, 2005). This plays into their understanding of fairness as well.

In their social development, I have observed eight-year-olds to continue to be close with their parents and siblings. The mother and/or father are most likely the first people the child will turn to with a problem. Parents are still a strong authoritarian figure in the child's life. At school, I have seen children of this age excited to see their parents but embarrassed when the parent shows affection with an embrace or kisses. However, children of this age still hug younger siblings. They also behave protectively toward younger siblings and take some responsibility for them. Children in this age group are still quite trusting of their teachers. With their peers, they have distinct opinions of whom they do and don't want to socialize with.

I have seen children of this age form strong, healthy friendships while I have also seen children act extremely unkindly and exclude or manipulate peers. Some children in this age group begin to form exclusive "clubs" and make it apparent whom they do and do not want in their circle. At this age, children are beginning to recognize the difference between boys and girls. Socially, gender delineations are becoming apparent.

In What is Study?, the authors suggest that "an important aspect of learning how to study is simply learning how to ask questions," rather than simply reading facts, while we as teachers should move away from simply measuring the degree to which students are familiar with those facts. In my experience, children who are eight are not yet ready to formulate those questions, but they *are* ready for the teacher to elicit those types of questions. I have created K/W/L charts with children of this age, in which we list what we Know, what we Want to know (in the form of a question) and what we have Learned (after we've done research.) I've been very impressed with the breadth and depth of questions asked. For example, before our field trip to a restored Native American village, we prepared questions to ask during the trip. Some of the things they wanted to know included, where did women go to have babies, what did people with poor vision do (since there weren't any glasses) and what did wedding ceremonies consist of?

The eight year olds that I have worked with are able to sit through longer lessons than children in their first few years of schooling. Eight year olds are more attentive to instruction, but they are not yet ready for 40-minute periods that are

typical for middle school and even in upper elementary school. After about 25-30

minutes, the children I teach in this age group can become restless. In my

experience, varying a lesson so that it is not entirely comprised of sitting works more

effectively.

Children's attitudes toward reading

Linda Gibson (1989) suggests that family culture may have an impact on a child's literacy. "Families differ significantly in the quantity and quality of their uses of print." (pg. 29) She cites Teale, whose 1986 study shows that some children have opportunities to "observe much more reading and writing going on around them" than others do; some have more experience "interacting with parents of older siblings in activities which involve literacy"; and finally, many youngsters spend more time in independent "reading" and "writing" activities. Thus, Gibson attributes the attitudes towards written language of a child to that which is modeled by important people in their lives. She writes, "different cultural practices among family groups significantly influence home uses of print. The use of magazines and newspapers as well as the reading of books differ significantly across households. For some, these print materials are used daily for entertainment and information gathering, while for others TV and radio are the main resources serving such goals." She concludes that "the effect on the preschooler of family differences in kind and quantity of uses of print is deep and long lasting." (pg. 29) When parents find time to read the newspaper or a book, children will grow up to develop such habits. Likewise, children whose parents read stories to them also develop an interest in print and literacy. In homes where reading for pleasure, information or education is not part of daily practice, children have little or no reason to view reading as pleasurable or useful.

Current Model for Reading Instruction

Traditionally, in kindergarten and first grade, children are exposed to print and begin receiving formal instruction in reading. Gibson (1989) writes about the historical approach of teaching reading through Dick and Jane readers. She describes this teaching system as "the look-say" method for identifying words. The procedure for beginning readers was for the teacher to write the words on the board, to repeat them slowly, and to have students repeat them. The strategy was to develop a sight vocabulary by having students memorize word configurations. The other popular, and more traditional approach for instructing beginning readers was the use of phonics, with its emphasis on teaching children to identify words by sound-to-letter relationships. In both approaches, the process of teaching beginning readers was understood as simply a task of helping them to identify words." (pg. 119) Regardless of the method for teaching word identification, the reading materials used conformed to the repertoire of words that students had been coached to read. This is where the simple "Dick and Jane" type stories were introduced.

After children are taught word identification and decoding, schools shift their emphasis to teaching fluency and comprehension. This normally occurs by second grade and in some schools, during the second half of first grade. Literacy instruction in both independent schools I have worked in have taken the form of a reading period, 40 minutes a day, four days a week. Children among the same grade level are split into ability groups of 6-8 children. They have consisted of enrichment groups, groups of children requiring additional support in decoding or comprehension, and a

few groups with children considered to be on grade-level. The children requiring additional support receive it in the areas of phonics, decoding and via guided reading methods and sometimes made use of leveled basal readers.

In the ability groups considered grade-level and above, the sequence has typically taken on the following: students read a teacher-chosen book either by round-robin or silent, independent reading. Teachers often stop students at the end of a page or after a few pages to ask questions. They also consider chapter delineations to be natural stopping points to teach mini-lessons and introduce activities and worksheets relating to the material they have previously read, which are intended to check students' recall of story facts, elicit personal observations and predictions of what will happen next in the story. Students are sometimes asked to look up dictionary definitions of teacher-chosen vocabulary words from the chapter.

Strengths and weaknesses

As with any system, there are pros and cons to this model. I will address two aspects of the reading instruction model described: first, ability grouping and second, the teaching method of stopping and quizzing.

In regard to ability grouping, the teacher needs only to plan lessons and activities for readers at the same level, rather than be burdened with differentiation tactics. Students receive more individualized and intensified instruction in a small group. The drawback of this method is that students are limited to learning literal and simple recall of factual details. In addition, they lack the experience and lose the

benefit of working with peers of different abilities. Students working hard on understanding basal readers lack the opportunity to be exposed to literature. They spend most of their reading period receiving additional work learning decoding strategies. Gibson (1989) writes that the rationale of "grouping for reading instruction is meant to meet the individual needs of students. Those who can move ahead with ease should be able to read further ahead in the book than their less able peers who will cover the same material at a later date. Pace, then is the major criterion upon which group divisions are made. Such an approach, though, in no way meets the needs of youngsters with less book experience, who require shared-book sessions and predictable materials to help them to approach new texts. Also, as noted this approach eliminates true challenges for the more able readers by not providing a variety of text materials or time for independent reading." (pg. 122)

Stopping a child's reading to ask questions hinders the unfolding of the narrative. "Further, these regular interruptions intrude upon the pleasure in reading and understanding the story." (Gibson, 1989, pg. 121) Personally, as a child and currently as an adult, I am the type of reader who, when interested in a book, will read it all the way through as quickly as possible. I sometimes go back and re-read particularly well written, insightful sections, or passages that contributed to the development of the story that I may have initially overlooked. I would never purposefully stop at the end of a chapter, reflect on it and then continue the next day. It would be presumptuous to think that children operate any differently as developing readers. In her children's literature course, Madeleine Ray likens this method to being

in a car. She asks her students to imagine riding in a car whose driver continually slams on the brakes, and then speeds up again. Young readers must feel this way when teachers force unnatural interruptions in their reading. Further, many children's books are designed with a story arc so it would follow that not much comprehension assessment can be made in increments of reading.

Methodological Discussion

Teaching reading to a classroom of mixed ability readers in the early and middle childhood grades is a challenge not to be dismissed. Nevertheless, there are benefits to keeping mixed ability readers together for instruction. Due to setbacks inherent to the model of ability grouping, I examined the possibility and benefits to teaching reading to a whole class.

In mathematics instruction, the issue of equity is a subject of discussion among educators. In fact, there is an NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) standard, which states that, "educational experiences in the classroom support equal achievement and future participation in mathematics for all students regardless of their gender, ethnicity and race, or socioeconomic background." (Campbell & Langrell, pg. 110, 1993) Campbell and Langrell (1993) write that within classrooms, there are often different expectations. "For example, students deemed as being less capable are taught less mathematics or are presented with skill-oriented, direct instruction and practice as opposed to conceptually focused instruction [...] The premise is that the students are deficient and therefore need remediation directed at the root of their problem, their lack of basic or prerequisite skills." The suggested alternative to this model "is to change the environment of the student's instruction, to focus on the character of the instruction as opposed to the perceived deficiencies of the student." (pg. 110) These statements apply to reading instruction and make a case to not separate young readers by ability level.

Cooperative learning is one of the solutions to building an equity-based classroom. Vesta Mickel (1993) describes cooperative learning as "instructional methods in which students work in small mixed-ability learning groups. Each group operates as a team and the teammates are responsible for their own learning as well as that of their teammates. Usually, there is a team goal and a team reward may be given. Everyone has a task and is actively involved. The fear of failure decreases as the level of support and the students' ownership of the task increases." She suggests an example of a cooperative learning experience for reading new content specific material. First, she divides the class into small groups, with four students in each group, consisting of a below-average student, an above-average student and two average students. Next, she assigns a number (1, 2, 3, or 4) to each student without regard to ability. She assigns a learning task to each number. Student #1 is responsible for teaching the new vocabulary words in this lesson. In her example, the group generates new words, when a student may ask another student the meaning of a word he or she does not know. Student #1 is also responsible for listing the words discussed and bringing them up at a later time. Student #2 reads the new material aloud to the group while the other members follow along. All can assist with unfamiliar words as needed. (pg. 659)

The other tasks that Mickel goes on to describe are more content specific, but this cooperative learning method she describes can be modified for reading instruction. Children who are less capable readers can learn from children who are

more capable readers. Likewise, those advanced readers benefit from slowing down their reading and explaining things to their peers.

Daniel D. Hade (1991) writes "Being truly literary in the classroom must involve more than kits of activities. Methods of teaching with literature must involve not only what teachers do but also the perspectives teachers have toward literature and how literature can be read, of ways of viewing children as readers of books, and of ways of looking at classrooms as places where children and teachers read and share books." (pg. 1) As cited earlier, a child's attitude as a reader, and notions about reading can be based on what they see from their parents. Teachers, also influential adults in a child's life, can model reading habits by developing a literature-based classroom. In fact, when there is a lack of literature in the home, teachers are obliged when possible, to fill that void for their students.

Program Recommendation

If schools emphasize literature in reading instruction, this may boost children's literacy skills. My recommendation for enhancing a reading program with literature includes several components. These include: creating a literature-based classroom through teacher read-aloud and cross-curricular integration. This method is appropriate for second grade or above, although some aspects can be modified for use with younger children. This program can most likely only be implemented in a school setting where teacher creativity is encouraged and there is some degree of curricular latitude allowed. The definition of a literature-based classroom can vary, but my recommendation consists of two key ideas: exposure to literature and discussion-based response. I will elaborate on methods to accomplish these goals.

Cross-curricular Integration

John Dewey (1916) wrote that literacy becomes more powerful and takes on additional importance when it is integrated with other subjects, rather than being taught separately as a content area unto itself. In my experience, there are many picture books that not only lend themselves to rich literary conversations, but also discussions in other subject areas. For example: The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins and One Grain of Rice by Demi have segued nicely into math activities in my second grade classroom. Lastly, teachers need to offer children time to independently explore, select and read books of their choice.

Experience and Learning

James Britton (1970) writes of George Kelly, a psychologist who suggests that the way a scientist behaves is essentially typical of human behavior in general. "The scientist's method of inquiry is to formulate hypotheses, or make predictions about the way things are, and then to put these to the test of what actually happens, and reframe his hypotheses in the light of what does happen." This theory "stresses the *active* nature of man's approach to experience."

Kelly writes, "man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always very good. Yet without such patterns the world appears to be such an undifferentiated homogeneity that man is unable to make any sense out of it. Even a poor fit is more helpful to him than nothing at all." (pg. 16-17) Dewey (1938) also emphasizes that in order "for education to accomplish its ends for the individual learner and for society, [it] must be based upon experience – which is always the actual life-experience of some individual." (pg. 89)

Literature-based Classroom

To apply these theories to teaching reading, we should enrich children's understanding of story through experience with literature. Literature is not taught, but experienced. It is through experience, or exposure to a wide variety of stories, that children are able to form the patterns or templates that Kelly writes about. They will use these patterns in their future understanding of literature. Through oral story-

telling, reading aloud, and allowing them to share stories with one another, we can introduce children to a wide variety of literature. Providing experiences, in itself, is not sufficient to offering students an understanding of the story form or initiating motivation to read. Opportunities for experiences need to be designed so "they do not repel the student, but rather engage his activities." These experiences are "more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences. (Dewey, 1938, pg. 27) Dewey (1938) writes, "Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in future experiences. Hence, the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences."

Hade's (1991) definition of a "literary" literature-based classroom, involves several aspects. One is to offer variety. "Picture books, folk tales, chapter books, poetry, information books, and plays belong in every classroom, and children in literary classrooms have opportunities to read and respond to each genre." Just as my student Stephen found a genre of interest, every child should have an equal opportunity to find a genre of interest, and find his or her own motivation to read.

Picture books, which are accessible to a wide range of readers, should be made available in the classroom. Fluent readers often feel they have grown out of picture books and consider them to be too childish. However, these stories can be enjoyed in one sitting and invite children to focus on the structure and literary elements. "By reading and responding to a variety of examples of finely crafted works, students can

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better understand the unique role of literary elements that are skillfully woven together in quality literature. As a literary form, picture books use illustration to help tell a story, define a concept of illuminate poetry." (Mathis, 2002, pg. 127) Providing experiences with literature is a much more valuable means than "teaching" them what stories are and what they are made of.

All children can take pleasure in being read to – those who are still developing reading skills and those who are fluent readers can all relax and enjoy a story. I have found that children in a wide range of ages enjoy teacher read-aloud. Without the pressure of reading, they have the liberty of getting immersed in a story.

Another aspect of Hade's literature-based classroom is playing with the language of story. He writes, "if nothing else, literature is language, and it is with these literary forms of language that children play. [...] Poetry is also literary language which invites passionate adventures." He recommends reading poetry to and with children because they can delight in the sounds and rhythms of language, just as they would with rhymes and chants. (pg. 2) He also recommends shared readings, opportunities to read and respond, personal choices for children and a variety of opportunities. These aspects will be elaborated on further.

Fairy Tale, Folklore and Myth

Northrop Frye (1964) writes, "literature can derive its forms only from itself" and that "all themes and characters and stories that you encounter in literature belong to one big interlocking family." Thus, it would be appropriate to return to fairy tales,

folklore and myths, the earliest and most basic story form. These tales are the backbone of any story we know of today – whether it is in a novel, a movie or at the theater. Although some children may not know the traditional versions, they are familiar with the tales, having experienced them in visual media.

With a group of second graders, we collectively read a traditional picture book version of Cinderella. When discussing this familiar tale, comments included the children's concept of fairness as it related to the main character Cinderella, as well as affinity or disdain towards certain characters. Dividing the children into smaller groups, I asked each group to choose a different version of Cinderella to read. The books I displayed included modernized Cinderella tales and versions from cultures at home as well as around the world. When we reconvened, I asked each group for a brief re-telling of the version they read. We then compared and contrasted the different versions of Cinderella. The children became engaged in a discussion among themselves about how the versions were different, but why they all worked.

Another year, I began by studying Cinderella with the entire group as previously described. This time, when I divided them into small groups, they were asked to choose from different fairy tales, such as Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood and Rumpelstiltskin. When we gathered as a group to compare and contrast the tales, the children discovered many similarities. They were able to independently extrapolate the fact that fairy tales fall into a formula. Without my direction, they concluded that there is always a main character who is the hero or heroine, a villain, a conflict, an element of magic and a solution. In both situations,

the children came to their own observations about the literary elements of plot, setting, and character. This discussion grew organically because of the children's experience with story.

Whole Book Approach

Many teachers stop students at the end of certain chapters so they can ask comprehension questions or initiate activities about what has been read so far. Moreover, most consider doing so good practice. As mentioned earlier, unnatural pauses in reading interfere with a child's enjoyment and understanding of a story. With that said, it would seem a disservice to prevent a child from continuing to read at his or her own pace. Whether my students are reading independently or round-robin style, I allow for the book to be read completely without interrupting them. Reading the whole book and considering how each piece relates to another is important in developing critical reading skills.

Also, when I read aloud to students, I do not stop reading to ask questions unless the children themselves have questions. At the end of reading, I set aside time for discussion. With several novels that I've used with my reading group, the first comment students made during the discussion is that the ending didn't work. This shows that they understand and are thinking about the story as a whole entity.

The whole class discussion is when areas of confusion, specific insights and opinions are brought to light. This is an appropriate time to introduce reading

response activities. Response activities should be designed based on the questions and ideas raised by students.

Whole Class Discussion

With texts independently read or read-aloud by a teacher, I engage children in a discussion after the reading. I invite the class to share any comments, questions or observations they have formulated during or after reading. Hade (1991) suggests that children "need to consider and reconsider their readings by sharing [...] The heart of reading lies in sharing one's readings with others. When members of a classroom are actively working with their books, they are sharing their readings with others. There develops then a reading culture, a body of shared knowledge of responses to literature." He goes on to cite Frank Smith, who says that we learn to read from the demonstrations of reading of the important people around us. These important people can be adults, but they can also be other children. (pg. 7)

Charting their comments during the course of the discussion leads children to develop further insights. In my experience, these conversations have led to opportunity for students to help peers clarify confusion, delve deeper into the author's meaning and explore areas of interest. By beginning dialogue, I often find that even children who initially claim they have nothing to say eventually contribute to the discussion because their classmates' comments spark ideas. Afterwards, I have typed up all the comments and returned them in the form of a handout. Students

enjoy seeing their own comments in print and sometimes find new insights in seeing the ideas listed once again.

In my experience, the topics that children raise are more insightful than those I would have presented to them. In a discussion of <u>Mr. Popper's Penguins</u>, about a penguin that became ill due to being out of his element, eight year olds broached the idea of loneliness. One student commented that some people die of loneliness. When I asked whether or not it is possible to feel lonely when you are not alone, they collectively answered yes. A few suggested that even while spending time with close friends, you could feel lonely if they are not interacting with you.

Reading Response Activities

Reading response activities can reinforce the reading of stories and books. Madeleine Ray advises, however, "that these exercises are like games and not really the substance of what reading a novel is about. We use them to help us understand what the student reader is understanding about the text." She reminds teachers, "don't substitute these games for the conversations about response to the work itself. These activities should be used to expand understanding of points of confusion, or to examine the author's method, or to compare opinions or views of the text." These activities, appropriate for students aged eight and up, are meant to extend the reading and discussion. Moreover, I have learned that the activities are more powerful when they emanate from issues raised by children. On several occasions, I have chosen activities based on interests and questions uncovered during the discussion.

To allow a student to express his or her understanding of a story's plot, setting, characters, and main idea, a variety of reading response activities can be implemented. With mapping activities, children are asked to represent a specific part of the story – whether it is the sequence of events that occurred during the story, the passage of time, or the physical locales described in the story. This activity shows what children understand about the setting and plot.

Beyond identifying main and minor characters, I have used a few different activities to find out about students' understanding of character in a story. I have asked students to draw portraits of characters surrounded by descriptive words. While doing this after reading George's Marvelous Medicine, one student who was drawing Grandma, asked whether he should draw her before or after she has gone through changes. In the story, George concocts a potion for his grandmother to drink causing her to grow taller than the house and ultimately shrink to smaller than a speck of dust. Similarly, a student drawing the character of Henry Green in Chocolate Fever asked at what point of the story he should represent him. Henry loves chocolate and eats so much of it that he develops brown spots all over his body, a symptom of chocolate fever. These questions are a true assessment, showing the student's attentiveness to reading, specifically about the characters involved. In contrast to the standard teacher question, *"What change happened to the main character?"* this is a more inventive and satisfying activity, which offers students the opportunity to show his or her interpretation of a character.

As a creative writing activity, I have asked students to create an imagined dialogue between two characters in the story or between characters in two different texts we have read. In a dramatic re-telling of the story, children can be divided into small groups to design skits for specific scenes of a story. The groups can play the same scene repeatedly to garner different interpretations of the text, or they can be assigned different scenes in tandem. Recently, I asked second graders in teams of three to design a brief skit of their favorite chapter of Mr. Popper's Penguins. This activity was assigned in response to a comment raised during the discussion, "I hope they make a movie out of it." Two groups chose the same chapter but included different details from the text. As prop, one group drew a song sheet with the names of the songs that were mentioned in the book. The children recited the main idea of the dialogue from memory with expression and personal nuances. To me, this activity assessed the children's comprehension of character and showed me what they considered crucial events in the story. Their recall of details showed their attentiveness in reading.

At times, I have offered a "menu" of response activities, and given children the option to choose which one they would like to work on. Children are more likely and more motivated to respond freely when they have variety and choices.

Lesson Plans

In my recommendation of whole class discussion, there is no "lesson plan," as introducing literature cannot be done with a script. Doing so would limit how children respond and imply that there is a correct and precise answer. A reader should feel welcomed to express his or opinion and respond however appropriate. The following few lesson plans are suggestions for areas in the program that a teacher can highlight for students. They can be modified as necessary for student needs, and alternate book title selections can be made.

Lesson 1: Discussion of literary elements

Time allotment: 20 minutes

Aim/Objective:

To define and discuss literary elements.

Materials:

- Chart paper
- Markers

Procedure:

- Class will be asked if they know what the important parts of a story are.
- Record ideas on chart paper. This chart will be displayed in classroom.
- Ask students what they think is the importance of each element.
- Some students will know the terms and teacher will fill in what is not mentioned – plot, setting, character, time, point of view, and theme.

Lesson 2: Examination of literary elements

Time allotment: 1 hour

Aim/Objective:

To allow students the opportunity to apply previously defined story elements to a familiar picture book.

Skills:

- Team-work, cooperation
- Identify literary elements
- Organize thoughts and represent graphically
- Share findings with class

Materials:

- Previously created chart with definitions of story elements
- Poster sized paper
- Markers, pencils

Procedure:

- Teacher reads to the class, <u>Where the Wild Things Are</u> by Maurice Sendak.
- Class is invited to share any comments, questions or thoughts they had about the story. Record ideas on chart paper. Allow natural flow of discussion.
- Teacher will introduce activity. We will be creating a poster that represents all of the important parts of the story we just heard. You can use words and drawings.
- The whole class will be asked to consider the following within their groups:
    - o What was the plot of the story?
    - o Who are the characters? From whose point of view was the story told?
    - o Where was the setting of the story?
    - o When do they think it takes place? Over how much time?
    - o How can we represent these elements visually as a poster?
- Teacher will divide class into pairs or small groups (dependent on the size of the class) of heterogeneous reading ability.
- Teacher explains that each group should choose a member to retrieve materials from the shelf for the group.
- Each group will be assigned a work area and given poster-sized paper.
- The students will disseminate to their work areas and begin working.
- Class will reconvene to look at peer work and discuss their observations.

Summarizing:

- Ten minutes before the end of the period, teacher will signal everyone to clean up and convene at the rug.
- Ask students:
    - What was their experience working together?
    - Were there any conflicts?
    - If so, how did they resolve it?
    - Invite each group to share their poster.

Lesson 3: Time and sequencing

Time allotment: 40 minutes

Aim/Objective:

To understand and represent the passage of time in a story.

Skills:

- Team-work, cooperation
- Organize thoughts and represent graphically
- Share findings with class

Materials:

- Poster sized paper
- Markers, pencils

Procedure:

- Children participate in round-robin reading of <u>Sylvester and the Magic Pebble</u> by William Steig.
- Class is invited to share any comments, questions or thoughts they had about the story. Record ideas on chart paper.
- Students will be divided into pairs or small groups, dependent on the size of the class. Each group will be given poster-sized paper. The whole class will be asked to consider the following within their groups:
    - When do you think this story takes place?
    - Over how much time is the story told?
    - What changes and stays the same?
    - How can we represent this visually?
- Class will reconvene to look at peer work and discuss their observations.

Extension/Adaptation:

- Can be used with another story with a passage of time, such as <u>The Little House</u>, by Virginia Lee Burton

Lesson 4: Story sequencing

Time allotment: 40 minutes

Aim/Objective: To understand sequencing in a story and represent it visually.

Skills:

- Listening skills
- Mental recall of facts
- Identify and sequence crucial events
- Justify explanations using evidence gathered while listening to story
- Physical mapping skills
- Social skills include turn-taking and cooperation in group work

Materials:

Abbreviated version of Little Red Riding Hood
Large drawing paper
Small pieces of paper, approximately 4" X 5"
Pencils
Colored pencils, crayons or markers
Tape or glue

Procedure:

- Investigate children's familiarity with the tale of Little Red Riding Hood.
- If children are familiar, discuss what Little Red Riding Hood did that caused the problem. (Took too many detours, etc.)
- Discuss what a map is. Introduce activity.
- Read story with children. Have children keep a mental map.
- Introduce large drawing paper.
- Place a house in one corner of the paper.
- Place a different house in the opposite corner.
- Go back to the story to look at Little Red Riding Hood's path. Stop in increments for important text.
- Take suggestions of details to be added map.
- Note each detail on the map by writing it in.
- After all details that are suggested are written down, distribute small pieces of paper. Each child will be responsible for sketching a detail.
- Allow children to affix their drawings to the map.
- Have children reconvene around the map.
- Review path. Is it correct? Any changes?

- Give the map a title.
- Summarize.

Extension/Adaptation:

- Create a legend or key for the map
- Add more detail to elements
- With more time allotted, students can generate individual maps instead of collaborate.
- Can be used with another tale, story, or a novel for older children (suggestions: Hansel & Gretel, Owl Moon by Jane Yolen; My Father's Dragon by Ruth Stiles Gannett; The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum)

Conclusion

My recommendation of developing literacy skills through literature can be summarized by the following:

- Allow class time for teacher read-aloud

- Integrate literature across subject areas

- Allow children to choose books and have time for independent reading

- Use cooperative learning in reading instruction rather than ability grouping

- Encourage student-directed, text-based discussions

- Develop engaging reading response activities

These may seem too numerous and unfeasible, when in fact each of these program components are dependent on one another. They are less overwhelming when working as a system. For example, when literature is integrated across subject areas, it becomes likely for teacher read-aloud to occur at least once, or possibly even twice during the school day. When children are taught in one group rather than in small groups, student discussions are more viable due to the simple fact that there are more ideas in the room. Conversations become rich with differing thought processes and types of learners in the class.

In the past two years of leading a second grade small reading group, I have not had the liberty of extending these ideas to an entire class. Children in my group are excited to read the texts – at times I offer a few titles so that they can make a group choice. I have been pleased with the work that children produce, which exhibits their understanding of the story in a far more profound way than if I had listed

chronological questions for them to answer in their notebooks. There is still a time and place for asking questions, when they are appropriate and thought provoking.

I feel successful when I see members of my reading group fill spaces of waiting time by reading a book or perusing the bookshelves during free time. I firmly believe that the more they read, not only do the build the necessary literacy skills but they will develop a broader and deeper understanding of the world around them.

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Appendix A:

Textual Resources

Picture books referenced in the lessons:

1. **Where the Wild Things Are**
   Maurice Sendak
   Harper Collins Publishers, 1963

   Max puts on his wolf suit in pursuit of some mischief but is sent to bed without supper. Sendak's classic is used to quantify the elements of a story and structure. Additionally, children familiar with the book have comments on previous readings as well as new observations and conclusions.

2. **Sylvester and the Magic Pebble**
   William Steig
   Viking, 1936

   Sylvester finds a pebble one day and discovers he can make wishes with it. He accidentally wishes he were a rock. His parents worry and look for him while the seasons change. This story was used to have children express the sequence and passing of time.

3. **The Little House**
   Virginia Lee Burton
   Houghton Mifflin, 1942

   The title house in The Little House is a house in the country with the bright lights of the city twinkling in the distance. The house is personified so the reader begins to think of it as someone with emotions whom we can care about. As the story progresses, stores, homes and roads were built all around her. This picture book can also be used to show sequence and passing of time but also setting and character.

Novels that I have used with second grade:

1. **Chocolate Fever**
   Robert Kimmel Smith
   Puffin, 2006

   Henry Green loves chocolate and eats it day and night until he develops freckles and is diagnosed with chocolate fever. Running away from home leads him upon a journey of meeting new people and quest to cure himself.

2. **The Chocolate Touch**
   Patrick Skene Catling
   HarperTrophy, 2006

John Midas loves to eat chocolate. One day after visiting a mysterious candy shop owner, everything John touches turns to chocolate. I have used this story to compare and contrast with <u>King Midas and the Golden Touch</u>.

3. **<u>Frindle</u>**
Andrew Clements
Aladdin, 1998

Nick, a fifth grade troublemaker invents a new word for pen to challenge his teacher. The word catches on at school and ultimately attracts the attention of the media and spreads across the country.

4. **<u>George's Marvelous Medicine</u>**
Roald Dahl
Scholastic, 1997

In Dahl's trademark fantasy style, George concocts a medicine for his grumpy grandmother. Children enjoyed the humorous changes to her appearance.

5. **<u>Mr. Popper's Penguins</u>**
Richard Atwater and Florence Atwater
Little, Brown Young Readers, 1992

Looking to know more about the world, Mr. Popper writes a letter to Admiral Drake at the North Pole. In response he sends Mr. Popper a penguin. From one penguin living in the icebox, the Popper family grows to include 12 penguins, all of whom must be fed. Thus, a traveling tour of the penguins is born and we follow the Popper family adventures.

6. **<u>Stuart Little</u>**
E.B. White
HarperTrophy, 1974

Stuart Little is a mouse born to a family of humans in New York City. Stuart goes on a journey across the American countryside, introducing us to a myriad of characters while getting involved in one adventure after another.

Appendix B:

Examples of group discussion comments

Our comments after reading Where the Wild Things Are
November 12, 2007

- It was a dream.
- After I read it, I wanted to read it again.
- I remember reading in the kindergarten loft.
- Maybe the wild things are in costume because they have human feet.
- The wild things look weird.
- It's sort of like magic because no one made the boat.
- If he wasn't dreaming, then when he walked to the edge of the forest, he would have bumped into a wall in his room.
- His supper was still hot after two years – that doesn't make sense, so it must be a dream.
- One of the animals looks like a bird (a chicken)
- Max controlled the animals when he met them.
- One of them is bowing like he's saying, "Your majesty."
- They are hypnotized by Max.
- They are following Max where ever he goes.
- I would be terrified to be there.
- Not scary to read because Max has control.
- Max must not be scared because he knows it's a dream.
- The animals look harmless.
- One has people teeth
- One has a big nose
- One has a claw on his nose.
- Max leaves without them knowing.
- Mixture of different animals
- Humans are animals
- One of the wild things looks like he is wearing a shirt (stripes) and his legs look like they are made from palm trees.
- The forest is like a playground. The vines are like monkey bars.

Chocolate Fever, by Robert Kimmel Smith

- Can you really get chocolate spots?
- Sometimes Mac looks like a construction worker. (his cap in the illustration)
- Boys were being mean to Henry.
- Everything froze when he came in.
- He likes cinnamon in the end.
- Can you get cinnamon fever?
- Why did Lefty and Louie try to hijack them?
- What does hijack mean?
- Pg. 42-43 – in the illustration, why is Henry in his underwear?
- There is something in the car they want.
- What does climaxed mean? (blurb on back of book)

Stuart Little, by E.B. White

- It had a weird ending. Could have said more.
- Ending didn't bring him to a new adventure. It just ended.
- Harriet was shorter than him. *(this comment caused classmates to challenge the student and sent everyone looking in the book for references in the text and/or illustrations)*
- Was she a real girl or a figurine?
- Stuart's last name reminds us he is little. I think the author did that on purpose.
- His canoe broke.
- Harriet was pretty.
- How did Stuart get his money?
- Maybe from the boat race.
- Maybe he took some before he left. *(this comment caused classmates to look back in the text and reference a line that said he packed some money in his bag before he left home)*
- It was interesting when the car turned invisible when Stuart pressed the button.
- I liked the last few words.

The Chocolate Touch, by Patrick Skene Catling

- Not a good ending. Could have had more.
- Good ending.
- Weird that his mom turned to chocolate but not all of her (on the cover illustration)
- Interesting when everything he touched turned to chocolate.
- Enjoyed book. Chocolate is the main character.
- What about Susan?
- Interesting how he used coin.
- Interesting how storekeeper tricked him.
- How did Susan know that John turned the water into chocolate?
- Dr. Cranium didn't discover chocolatitis, since shopkeeper already knew about it.
- He was lucky for a while.
- It was odd when everything turned to chocolate.
- At the end, he learned to think about other people, not just himself.

Mr. Popper's Penguins, by Richard and Florence Atwater

- I would be sad if my dad left for a few years.
- I like how the penguins did their dance.
- I would be scared and sad if my dad went to jail.
- The penguins were cute.
- The penguins were funny and cool
- I liked how the penguins looked in the drawing the sound they made (Ork!)
- I liked the idea of putting them in the basement and freezing plant.
- I hope they make a movie out of it
- It was funny how Mr. Popper painted on the penguin's backs.
- I would like having a penguin as a pet.
- Strange that he painted three walls green and one wall yellow.
- It could happen.
- I think it could be a real story.

Appendix C:

Samples of student reading response activities

Where the Wild Things Are activity
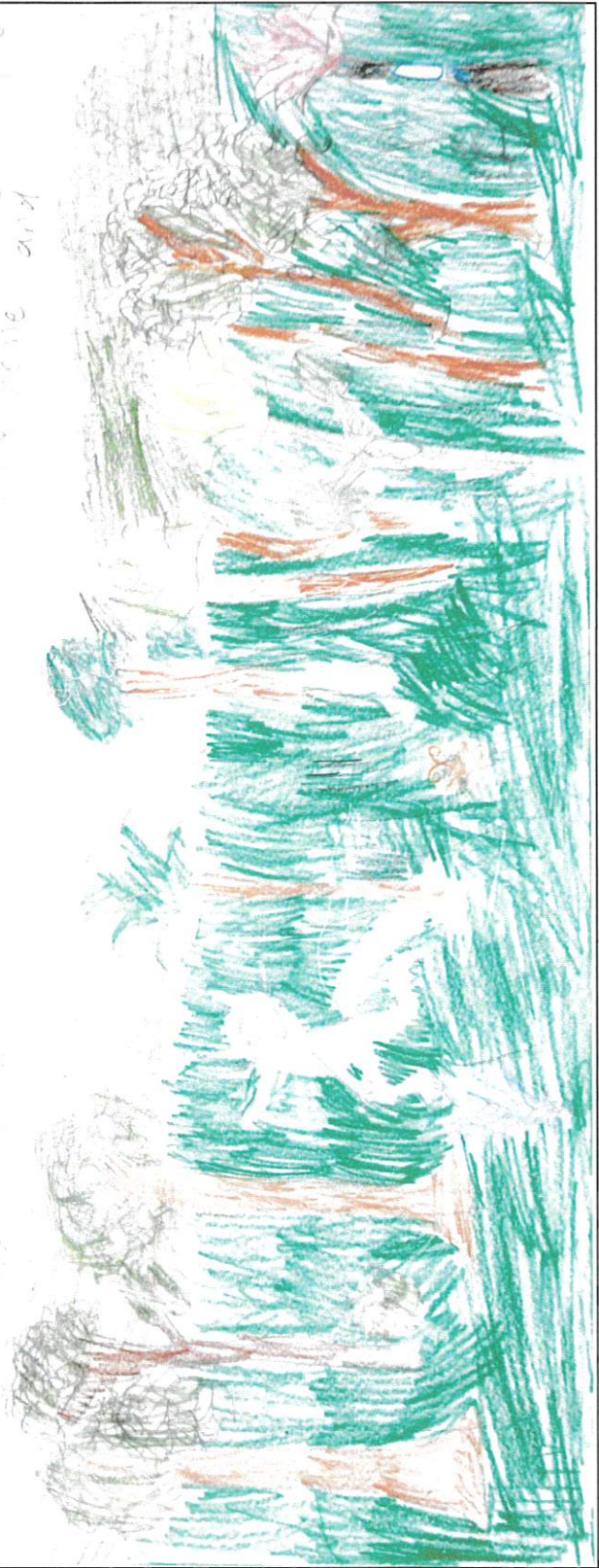
Where the wild things are

11/13/07

Setting

forest

Sea

Plot

Max was being wild so he
went to where the wild things
are.
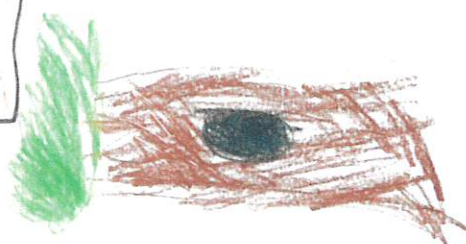
Characters
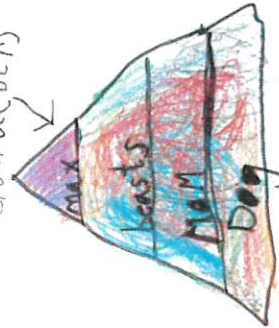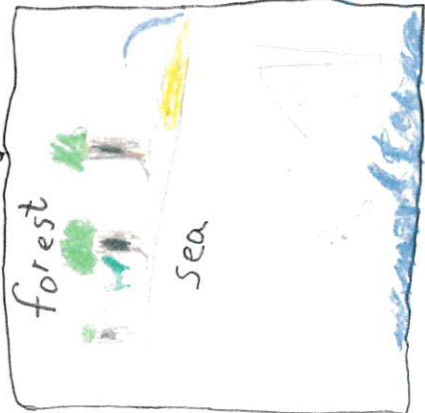
Max
Karl's
Mom
Dog

Nicholas and Mahir

48

Where The Wild Things Are

11/19/07

Philip

Max went all the way here on a dream.

Julian

The monsters are 10:00 pm hanging on vines. It is a like a Playground and of
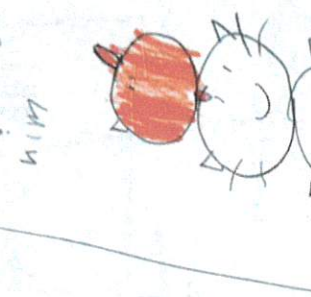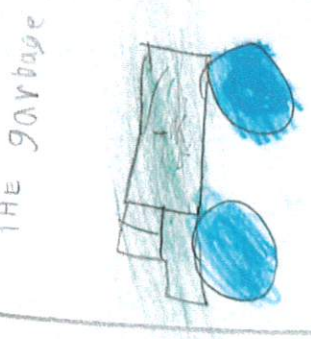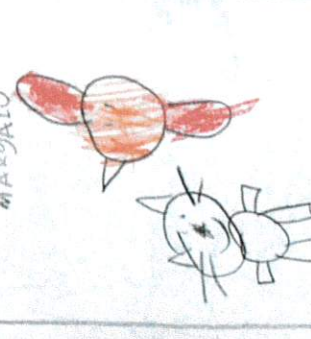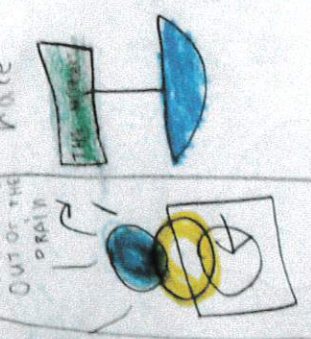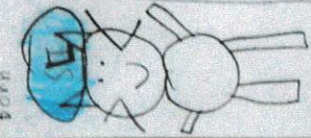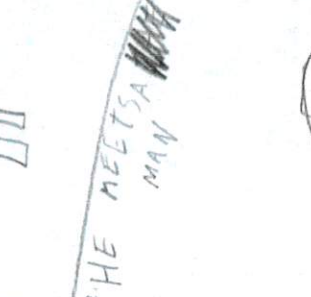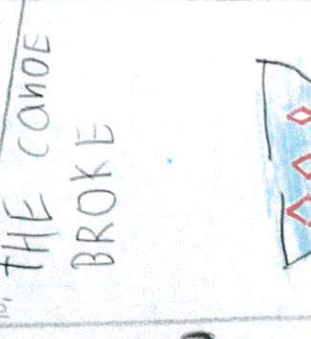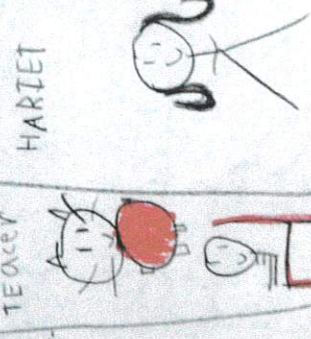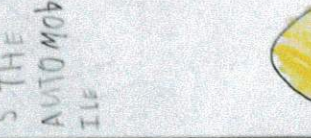
Max Cythian chasing at all

Frindle

3
4
5
6
7
8
9

He gets
the letter

he sends
a Present
and his friend...

He gets
rich

3

nicks
friend
sign the
paper

He makes
the
school signs

Nick
asks
for the
friend
at the
...
after
school

P/P 2

3rd grade
nich makes
the class...

In 5th
grade
the ...

makes
a Pen...

James...
finds a frindle

4

2

Stuart is born

2. The pills the ring out of the drain

3. The boat race

4. He meets Margalo

5. He gets stuck in the garbage

6. Margalo saves him

7. He finds the automobile

8. He is a teacher

9. The canoe broke

10. He meets Hariet

11. He goes North

12. He meets a man

Julian

Character Portrait
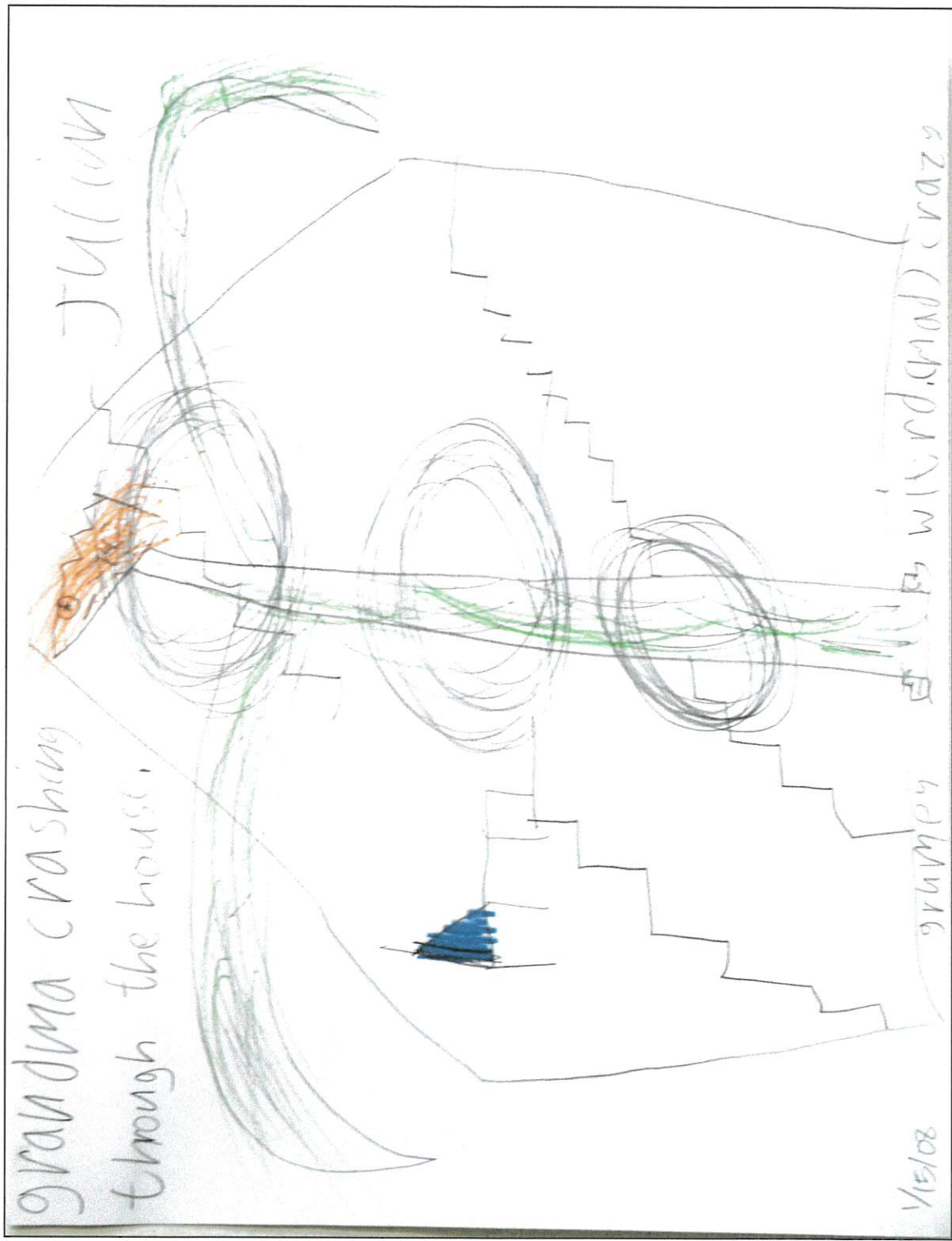
Margolo

Pretty, cute, kind, helpful, fair, happy, wonderful

grandma crashing
through the house.

Julian

grandma wierd (wizard) crazy

grandma

1/5/08

54
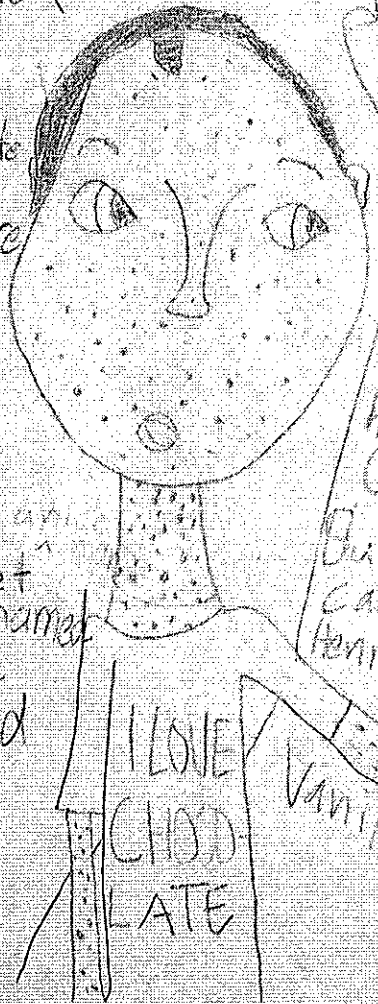
Journey Map
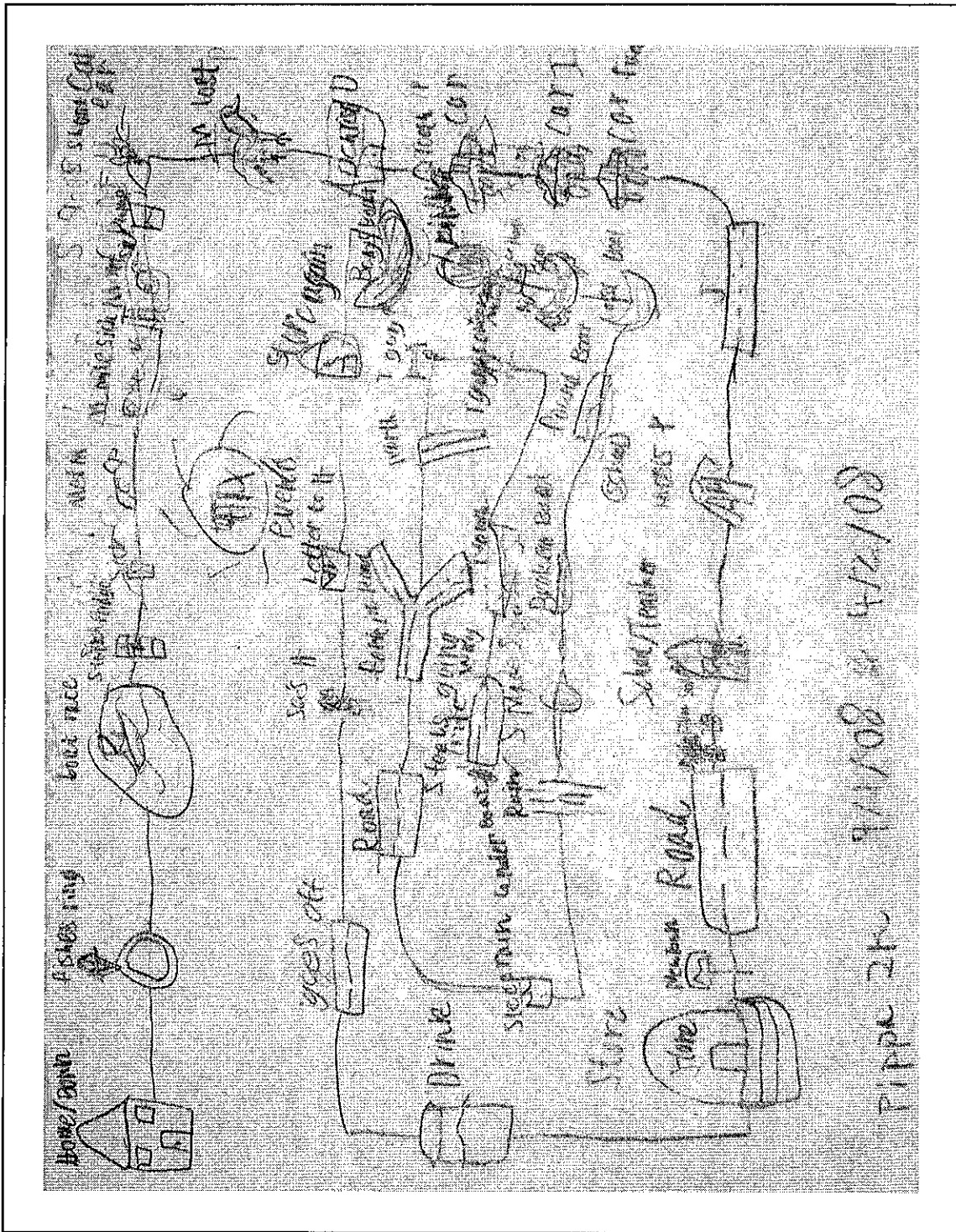
Addendum

Pseudonyms have been used to mask all children and institutions mentioned in this thesis.

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