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ISSN 1758-9835

Write4Children

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of our second volume. It is hard to believe that has been a whole year since we first launched *Write4Children*. Happily, it continues to go from strength to strength. This is despite our education system being under seige, with continuing budget cuts being imposed on all over the world and hitting so many. Thus we are doubly delighted to make the announcement that during these austere times, the Winchester University Press is supporting us so we can ensure that the journal can remain as open access. The flexibility of being online also allows us to include in articles: illustrations, photos and even videos (linked to YouTube if needed), as we are not currently tied to the restrictions of hardcopy. Though we are aware that some readers like to read from a hard copy so there are links to plain text documents ready for printing available if required. Of course, this also means that all contributions are effectively published by Winchester University Press which adds a certain credibility to our reputation as a serious journal.

This edition starts off with an article entitled 'How I Write' from the acclaimed and prize winning author, Meg Rosoff, author of *How I Live Now*; *Just In Case*; *What I Was*; *The Bride's Farewell*; *Vamoose!* and the soon to be published, *There is No Dog*. The article is a delightful exploration of Meg's approach to the process of writing. This is followed by yet another eclectic mix of articles including Vivian Yenika-Agbaw's and Mary Napoli's article entitled 'Domestic and International Multiculturalism: Children's Literature about Africans and African Americans.' This article explores the importance of carefully selecting books for libraries and schools that reflect and support diverse cultures. Anne Jacobus aims to make us jump with her article 'Surprise Me! How The Unexpected Transforms Readers and Writing in Children's Literature'. She discusses how readers of all ages thrive on surprise whilst exploring how the brain is hard-wired to derive pleasure from the unexpected. Barbara Marinak encourages us to engage with struggling readers using authentic informational texts in her article 'Engaging Struggling Readers: Supporting Skill and Will Using Authentic Informational Text.' Something all of us involved in children's literature, whether from a practitioners' or teachers' perspective, should be interested in. Then Matthew Weait's article 'Liminality and the Figure of Pan in the Children's Literature of J M Barrie and Kenneth Graham,' explores the concept of liminality and its power and significance for both child and adult readers when used with the figure of Pan.

Peter Hunt has continued his dialogue with Katherine Langrish in the Discussion Piece. As editors, we feel this is a relevant and valid way to conduct such a conversation. It is important to open windows and opportunities for dialogue consequently we are happy to look at contributions from others on this issue.

We are delighted to announce a call for papers for our first special edition which is to be a special Australasian / Oceania Edition, to be published in the second half of 2011 which is being edited by Dr Tony Eaton of Canberra University. The special edition will seek to provide a range of perspectives from Australia, New Zealand, Oceania and Asia on 'Writing for Children', including the creative practice, the cultural, the theoretical, and the critical. (For more information see the News Section). We would also like to announce that in the April edition we are looking to open a debate on the state of children's poetry. This will be led by an article by Rachel Rooney (<http://www.rachelrooneypoet.co.uk/>) whose poem 'Nought to Nine' from her forthcoming publication, *The Language of Cat*, published by Frances Lincoln (May 2011) is included in this edition. Please send your articles relating to poetry to write4children@winchester.ac.uk by February 1st 2011.

Write4Children

There is another new initiative we would like to announce. Starting in the April edition it is our intention to invite post grad and MA students to submit reviews of books they have engaged with (creative and critical). We perceive that this is a good way for them to break into being published in an academic journal (again for further information please see the News section).

Once again we hope you enjoy this edition of *Write4Children* and we look forward to receiving your articles for the April edition - deadline is 1st February 2011.

Andrew Melrose and Vanessa Harbour
Editors

Write4Children: The International Journal for the Practice and Theories of Writing for Children and Children's Literature,

University of Winchester,

November 2010.

www.write4children.org

write4children

Vol 1 Issue 2

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Write4Children

How I Write

Meg Rosoff

I wake up every morning at 6:30 when the alarm goes off and then go straight back to sleep. Sometimes I stagger out of bed, make my daughter a cup of tea and try to appear responsible as she goes off to school, resigned to her onerous burden of books and adolescence.

I do not write between seven and noon. I do not stop when I hit five thousand words. I usually do not hit five thousand words.

Sometimes I walk the dogs. Sometimes I ride a horse. Sometimes I doodle about on the computer for hours doing not very much. Facebook, blog. E-mail, bills, junk. A trip to the post office can take a whole morning. So can lesser forms of procrastination. When things are going well, I can write and write and write. When they're not, I can iron clothes for hours and convert all the apples on the tree into tarts.

Most days, after about four hours of procrastination, I start to work. I ease into it cautiously, rereading what I did yesterday in order to get a running start for another jump in the pond. If I'm revising, I'll look back at the new chapter and cut a third of it (I often edit other people's books as I read, cutting out the unnecessary - to my eyes -- third). My goal is to communicate information in as few words as is gracefully possible.

Sometimes I write in bed. Sometimes I write at my desk. The lurchers always like to be nearby, in case of....in case of....lack of lurchers.

When I'm starting a book, I usually start with something small. An idea. A character. A situation. If I'm very lucky, I can see a vague arc reaching through and across something-something-something-blah-blah-blah-swish-swish-swish to a satisfying ending of sorts. I usually have an idea of the end, even if it turns out not to be the end after all. In *How I Live Now*, I imagined that the phone would ring, indicating that normal services had returned. Or we'd hear Big Ben on Radio 4, bonging out the time.

Once I have a teensy launching pad of some sort, I pack my mental baggage and set off on the journey.

Along the way I get hopelessly lost. I get blisters. I sit down under a tree and cry and wish I'd never started in the first place. Occasionally everything goes beautifully and the sun shines and the road is clear and straight. But more frequently I come to horrible dead ends or realise I've taken the wrong road, or all into a deep pit with sharp sticks at the bottom, or just look around and see nothing at all familiar and wonder if I've stumbled into someone else's book. I often think of the poor 19th century American settlers, heading for California and arriving at the brink of the Grand Canyon. (Talk about having to retrace your steps and go the long way round....) The brink of the Grand Canyon is a place that is very close to my heart. Damn it.

I'm terrible at plot, so when I'm lost in a dark wood, I'm not much fun to talk to. My husband and daughter know this. My sense of direction is very bad, and when I can't find the god damned path, it puts me in a bad mood. Occasionally I ask for directions - my friend and fellow-writer, Sally Gardner, who produces plots the way magicians pull rabbits out of hats, is my secret weapon. I save her for when I'm utterly desperate, and then I describe my problem in two or three sentences, after which she thinks for about twelve seconds, and then says, "well, of course, you must do THIS." And much of the time, she's exactly right. Other times, when I threaten to give up altogether, my husband wanders along with a cup of tea and whispers that the path is actually just over there, behind that hedge. Much of the time, he is exactly right too.

It's not all bad. Sometimes, a character will surprise me, and those are the best days of all. One character in a recent book surprised me so much that I leapt up and stumbled around the house in a state of shock. Eventually, I sat down again and reread what I'd written with utter disbelief. Lord, I thought, I wasn't expecting *that!*

There's quite a lot of writerly talk about The Zone, but I never quite understood what the so-called Zone was all about. Now that I've written five books, I think I'm beginning to get it. I always described the process of writing *How I Live Now* as feeling as if I were taking dictation - despite it being my first novel, the book seemed to come direct from my narrator's mouth in a gushing stream of consciousness story. It was an amazing feeling, and made writing feel remarkably simple. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened on anywhere near the same scale since, though I've had pieces of books emerge from a kind of trance, bubbling up from a deep place where the ideas live. They're the paragraphs or chapters or sections that I never rewrite. And they're also the paragraphs and sentences that appear in reviews. I'm not the only one who benefits from that deep place - the reader feels it too.

Unfortunately, you can't really force yourself into the zone. You have to relax and breathe and untether your brain, and wait for it to happen. It's a bit like luring a wild animal out of the wood with a peanut. Hold yourself very still. Look at it sideways. Hum.

Think of it this way - you go to bed at night, you close your eyes and surrender your conscious mind entirely. And what happens? Your brain begins to make up stories. The stories I dream are sometimes gorgeous, full of odd characters, people, and places from a past I haven't thought about in years, with conversations and images and symbols that (if I remember them when I wake up) sometimes seem ineffably lovely, or dramatic, or disturbing. I once spent three years with a wonderful Jungian therapist, and found that once you begin talking about dreams, your subconscious allows you greater and greater access to them. Maybe it doesn't like being ignored. Or is like a muscle that needs flexing. I often think of the holy men who meditate for hour after hour and consider the free passage between conscious and subconscious mind a necessary route to enlightenment, liberation and wisdom.

What follows is not a change of subject.

I took up horse riding at the age of 50. I hadn't ridden in more than 35 years, and even then, not properly. For anyone who thinks horse riding involves sitting on a horse, kicking it to go fast, and pulling on the reins to slow down, may I begin by saying that it is fantastically more complex than that.

It involves great strength, balance, lightness, decisiveness, and humility. It requires a willingness to partner, to communicate, to trust -- but never to relinquish responsibility or trust too much. Two of the most important concepts associated with riding are 'throughness' and 'connection.'

The United States Dressage Federation defines *throughness* as ‘The supple, elastic, unblocked, connected state that permits an unrestricted flow of energy from back to front and front to back. Synonymous with the German term "Durchlaessigkeit," or "throughlettingness.” ’ *Connection* is defined as a state “in which there is no blockage, break, or slack in the circuit that joins horse and rider into a single harmonious unit; the unrestricted flow of energy and influence from and through the rider to and throughout the horse, and back to the rider.”

Now think, for a minute, of the subconscious mind as the horse and the conscious mind as the rider. If the rider is too strong, too stiff or unsympathetic, the horse becomes inaccessible and difficult to control, or dull and resistant. The object of dressage is to create a fluid exchange of understanding and energy between horse and rider; an advanced dressage rider is often described as asking questions that the horse answers.

In writing, this powerful flow of energy cannot be faked, any more than it can in riding. A book written from the conscious, controlled mind will feel as stiff and lifeless as an insensitive rider on a resentful horse. Or a singer’s voice coming from the head rather than the chest and diaphragm. Or a ball thrown from the elbow. Writing (like riding, or singing or playing a musical instrument, or painting or playing cricket or thinking about the universe) requires the deep psychological resonance of the subconscious mind. It requires connection and throughness, and only then will the reader feel the surge of power that a clever borrowed voice never achieves.

Last words? Beyond throughness, beyond connection, beyond hard graft, there is one other detail worth mentioning. Or as Hollywood director Alexander Korda so deftly put it, “it is not enough to be Hungarian. One must also have talent.”

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Write4Children

Surprise Me! How the Unexpected Transforms Readers and Writing in Children's Literature

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Abstract

In fiction, readers of all ages thrive on surprise. The brain is hard-wired to derive pleasure from the unexpected because we learn as it shakes loose our assumptions. Using examples from children's literature ranging from Dav Pilkey to Russell Hoban, we explore how the unexpected works in almost all elements of fiction writing: in language via metaphor and word play; on a broader level in humor and the unreal; and on the macro level in character and plot. If a plot proceeds as expected, there is no story. And to be delighted or even transformed is why we read.

Keywords

Surprise, Unexpected, Children's literature, Humor, Unreal, Plot

*

Many people say they like surprises. They mean pleasant ones such as a marriage proposal, or a tax refund. No one looks forward to unpleasant surprises - strep throat, a flat tire, a hunting accident.

Over the course of human history, surprises were generally not pleasant. The unexpected came in the form of crop failure, a new plague, or an invading army, and usually brought disruption and loss—even death.

In reality, humans crave order and predictability in life. Our brains are hard-wired to observe patterns, recognize them, and then formulate models that attempt to predict the future. This is in the effort to control our universe and to survive. People spend a great deal of time ordering their lives precisely to *avoid* surprises.

However, it's different within the safety of fiction. In a story humans thrive on surprise, and in fact, have a part of the brain that is hard-wired to derive pleasure from it.

Surprise works in conjunction with almost all other elements of good fiction writing. The unexpected happens on a micro level in language via a startling metaphor, pun, turn of phrase, or play on words. It is the dominant ingredient in humor and the unreal. It is an integral part of character and works in plot the same way across genres.

Employed well, surprise engages the reader, gives pleasure, shapes and then transforms the reader's perceptions. It is one of the most fundamental elements of story and is the glue that holds narratives together.

At its most powerful, the gasp of astonishment at a well-orchestrated surprise can shake loose our assumptions and open up the world in an almost mystical way to deeper meaning.

The Human “Need” for Stories and Surprise

Humans have been telling stories for at least the last 35,000 years (Vialou,16). All cultures developed myths that attempted to explain the same universal phenomena, such as death, birth or the creation of the world. “A myth contains human conundrums raised by unbridgeable contradictions – creation versus destruction, life versus death, gods versus humans, and attempts to reconcile these opposite poles, to allay our fears” (Manhart, 59).

There are three parts of the brain that shape our taste for myths and stories. First of all, we have a capacity for abstraction, which allows us to imagine threats in advance...(59) The term “cognitive imperative” is used to describe this sense-making and purpose-ascribing function of the brain.

The second part of the brain is located in the lower parietal lobe and called the binary operator. It allows humans to separate complicated concepts and situations into opposites.

“The binary operator supplies us with a quick and simple heuristic for orienting ourselves, by constructing the central elements of myth: good and evil, birth and death, heaven and earth, isolation and integration. (61)

Last but not least, the nucleus accumbens is the part of the brain that responds pleurably to surprising stimuli. Anyone who has ever played “peek-a-boo” or “gotcha” with a nine-month-old can confirm that we evidence a taste for surprise pre-verbally.

Humans have a *biological* drive, not only to make sense of the world, but to probe *beyond* the patterns we formulate. Surprising stories are the way we test limits, learn and experiment with new patterns, and gain fresh insight into how other humans and the world at-large operate. The taste for surprise is hard-wired in the human brain because it helps us survive.

The Power of Surprise

Since the human brain responds so favorably to surprise, it can be a powerful tool when used skillfully. Researchers in marketing and advertising studies have repeatedly found the strength that surprise can play in attitudes toward an advertisement and the brand being advertised. While watching, listening to, or reading an ad is not the same as reading fiction, the fact that scientists can identify and measure both the amount of surprise in the mini-plot of an advertisement and its strong effect on the viewer is of interest to this discussion

Encountering the unexpected, most often, “content incongruity” (i.e. a grown man skipping), produces first a neutral physiological response (gasp!). It then elicits either humor or fear in the reader, depending on whether the atmosphere created around the surprise is safe or threatening (Alden et al, 9).

Overall, research shows that surprise in advertising, most often resulting in humor, engages the consumer by increasing positive attitudes to the brand, just as surprise in fiction can engage the reader.

SURPRISE IN FICTION

Surprise works in almost all elements of fiction, from the micro in language and word choice to the macro in character, plot and irrealism. Humor is powered by surprise at both the micro and macro levels. The unexpected works on the grandest level when an author has orchestrated an entire story to a surprise ending or plot twist that leaves characters and readers alike astonished.

Where Surprise in Fiction Comes From

In the screenwriting craft book, *Story*, author Robert McKee claims that all readers or film viewers come to their experiences with a prayer for a new way of seeing the world that provides laughs, insight and “fresh truth.” “In other words, the audience prays for surprise, the reversal of expectation” (355).

McKee defines the essence of story as a *gap*. Gaps are the essence of surprise and surprise is the essence of story-telling. “In story, we concentrate on that moment, and only that moment, in which a character takes an action expecting a useful reaction from his world, but instead the effect of his action is to provoke forces of antagonism. The world of the character reacts differently than expected, more powerfully than expected, or both” (144-45). McKee goes on to say, “Story is born in that place where the subjective and objective realms touch” (147).

Creating a “gap” between what is expected and what an author serves up, whether in a plot development or a turn of phrase, is exactly where and what powers the feeling of surprise, astonishment, and even shock, in the reader.

SURPRISE IN FICTION: THE MICRO LEVEL

The unexpected works at the micro-level of fiction to provide tickles of surprise via turns of phrase, cliché twists, metaphor and language choice. An author can also surprise a reader by taking him on a brief flight of imagination via the use of a riff.

Language & Metaphor

In Bobbi Katz’s *Pocket Poems*, the children’s nursery rhyme, “Mary Had a Little Lamb” is rewritten with a word twist that produces a surprise ending. It takes advantage of most children’s familiarity with this poem, but counts on the sophistication of an older child who will appreciate the reinterpretation of the words “a little lamb.”

“Mary had a little lamb/You’ve heard this tale before;/But did you know/She passed her plate/And had a little more?” (18).

Surprise can always be elicited by an unexpected metaphor. In Ron Koertge's *Stoner & Spaz*, main character Ben has cerebral palsy. He says, "Getting out of a car isn't easy for me. I have to handle my bad leg like it's a big, dead python" (15). This creates a vivid, surprising mental image that also increases our understanding of and perhaps sympathy for the main character.

Micro Riffs

One way that an author can surprise a reader is with a "riff." Musically, a riff is defined as a short, repeated phrase (in jazz), but one that is improvised and can go off in any direction. In prose, a riff comes closer to the lyric, as in poetry, defined in the *Oxford Current English Dictionary* as, "expressing the writer's emotions, usually briefly and in stanzas."

Depending on point of view (POV), a riff can take the reader deeper inside a character or outside within the setting for a completely new and unexpected perspective. In metafiction, a riff can take the reader distractingly out of the book.

A classic example of a micro riff for very young reader is in Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon*. A bed-going-bunny says goodnight to all the things in his room, in a poetic, almost prayer-like recitation. "Goodnight clocks and goodnight socks/Goodnight little house/And goodnight mouse/ Goodnight comb, And goodnight brush/Goodnight nobody/Goodnight mush" (16-22).

The illustration for the line, "Goodnight nobody," is a blank page. Text and illustration (or lack thereof) come together harmoniously to give young and old readers alike a riff, a brief flight from the concrete to the imaginary and emotional.

HUMOR

Humor deserves close examination because it is such an important and desirable result of surprise, and spans both the micro and macro levels in fiction. Unexpected use of language will often result in amusement - as in the previous "a little lamb" word twist. And when "normal" characters are plopped into surprising worlds, or surprising characters are set in "normal" worlds, the resulting comedy can open up gaps that create delight, truth and transformation.

Humor stemming from surprise can be broken down into: incongruity/juxtaposition, exaggeration, understatement, absurdity, embarrassment, and even recognition of the (uncomfortable) truth. The last is perhaps one of the most important. The truth that is at the core of most of what is funny, is pain. Carol Burnett said, "Comedy is pain, plus time" (Schreiber, 3). And E.B. White elaborated, "Humor plays close to the big, hot fire, which is the truth, and the reader feels the heat" (Fitzhenry, 222).

Humor even more than surprise, is subjective. Dissecting it proves elusory. But comedy writer John Vorhaus makes a good go of it; "The comic premise is the gap between comic reality and real reality... Any time you have a comic voice or character or world or attitude that looks at things from a skewed point of view, you have a gap between realities. Comedy lives in this gap" (19).

The comic premise exists in all comic structures, writes Vorhaus. “—no matter how large or small. Even the lowly pun is a function of the gap between the ‘real’ reality of the way you expect a certain word to behave and the comic reality of the way it ends up behaving in the joke” (20). “The boy had a lot to be spankful for” (Helitzer, 83). The reader expects “thankful,” gets “spankful,” and is (may be) amused.

Many jokes take advantage of the expectation of pattern and also rely on the power of three: 1) there’s the setup, 2) repetition which establishes a pattern, and 3) surprise; breaking the pattern for the joke. For example, Lily Tomlin’s says, “If peanut oil comes from peanuts, and olive oil comes from olives, where does baby oil come from?” (151). These micro twists of language result in humor.

To create humor on a larger scale requires characters and settings that can generate the incongruities (that create the gaps) that will make readers laugh.

Comedy starts with a character, and that character’s way of viewing the world, which differs in some critical way from “the ‘normal’ world view” (Vorhaus, 31). Conversely, a “normal” character can also be put into a comic universe, which will produce the same gaps. The stronger or more exaggerated the differences between the character’s perspective and her world are, and the more pain it causes for the character, the more likely it is to produce surprise and humor.

In Ian McEwan’s *The Daydreamer*, in the chapter, “The Baby,” main character Peter believes he has been transformed into his baby cousin’s body by his sister and that he’s trapped:

Peter was on his feet, swaying as he struggled to keep his balance. He clutched at a pillar. But it was alive and warm. It was a leg, a gigantic leg...

He was on the edge of tears, but he could not quite remember what it was that had upset him. His attention half drifted, half swam from one thing to another.

‘Help me someone!’ he shouted.... But what came from his lips was a succession of clumsy ‘shhh’ sounds. His tongue wouldn’t go where he told it, and he seemed to have only one tooth.

Tears were pouring down his face, and he was just drawing breath to fill his lungs and bawl out his sorrow when something powerful clamped under his armpits and he shot fifty feet into the air. (McEwan p.116-117)

McEwan allows the reader fully into *two* comic viewpoints; a nine month-old character who sees the world very differently than the reader, and through ten year-old Peter’s painful discomfort and frustration at being trapped inside the nine-month old’s comic universe.

Polly Horvath’s novel, *The Canning Season*, employs sophisticated, often dark humor that in the following example comes directly from the “normal,” although comically named main character, Ratchett, who has landed in the bizarre world of twin, elderly spinsters Tilly and Penpen Menuto.

Ratchet is sent by her mother to visit these eccentric, great-second cousins, of whom Ratchet's never even heard. The ladies take Ratchet into the nearest small town to pick up some things and in the car on the way, tell her about their own mother:

"She's what people today would have called a people person," said Penpen.

"So at least she was spared that," said Tilly, "dying when she did. At such an early age."

"We were just girls, Tilly and I. Exactly your age, actually."

"How did she die?" Ratchet asked.

"She offed her self," said Penpen.

"What?" Ratchet said.

"She killed herself in a particularly brutish and horrible way. I don't know why. I suppose it was all she could come up with at the time. Or maybe she was experimenting. She was very imaginative."

"How did she do it?" asked Ratchet.

"She cut off her own head."

"Oh, no!" said Ratchet.

"I suppose you think that's rather thrilling," said Penpen. "People think children are going to be upset by things that I'm sure they think are quite thrilling. Tilly and I were proud of her. It must have taken extreme nerve, wouldn't you say, Tilly?" (17)

"She offed herself," may take the reader aback, but when Penpen reveals her mother's choice of method, the reader is shocked not only at the absurdity, and the seemingly impossible physical nature of the feat, but also at the women's surprising reaction to something so terrible. They take pride in their mother's creativity. The humor springs from the unusual characters and their take on the world. The reader also feels the pain of poor Ratchet who is stuck with these two women for the summer.

That this passage is surprising is indisputable. That it is humorous is more subjective. Exaggeration and surprise, not to mention the incongruity of one form of death against another, are used to elicit humor from the darkest of places. Suicide is certainly one of the big, hot fires, to which White was referring, the truth being that some humans find living unbearable and take their own lives.

Humor's subjective nature is affected by culture, gender and most importantly for this discussion, age. One author who has the six-to eight-year-old, largely male sense-of-humor down to a lucrative science, is Dav Pilkey and his graphic *Captain Underpants* series. He uses surprise brilliantly.

My son George, when he was seven years-old, avidly read Pilkey, memorably *The All New Captain Underpants Extra-Crunchy Book O' Fun 2* laughing until he needed a slap on the back to get him breathing again.

In a section called “The Night of the Terror of the Revenge of the Curse of the Bride of Hairy Potty,” Pilkey uses in addition to overstatement, exaggeration and absurdity, the old comic trick of parody. Parodying J.K. Rowling’s venerable Harry Potter with a *hairy potty* is not just surprising, it’s so off-the-wall that it is difficult to discuss soberly. A female and male hairy potty (drawn just like they sound, toilets sprouting hair all over, with eyes and legs) run amok vandalizing signs, such as “THEATER: Now Showing, Bridget Jones’ Diary,” into “Bridget Jones’ DiarRHEA” (68). But George laughed hardest at the page that showed a sign that reads “Please drive very slowly over the tracks. Children at play,” which is already absurd as few children are allowed to play on train tracks. The male hairy potty zaps part of it, leaving a broken sign that now reads, “Please drive slowly over children.” When asked why he found an invitation to run over kids so hysterical, George said, red-faced and gasping, “I don’t know. It just is.”

The shock that there would be a sign inviting people to drive over children playing, astonishes and delights him, although perhaps appreciation of dark humor runs in the family.

In addition to absurdity, Pilkey employs scatological humor throughout *Captain Underpants* that relies on the embarrassing. There is also anti-authoritarianism at work here and plenty of rule-breaking. In *The All New Captain Underpants Extra-Crunchy Book O’ Fun 2*, the male and female hairy potties fall in love, undoubtedly another source of hilarity to seven-year olds. Throw on top of all this the threat of death or serious dismemberment and Pilkey has a sure-fire winner. The characters do nothing BUT the unexpected. How could a reader possibly know what to expect from talking toilets?

Pilkey and McEwan use the reader’s feeling of superiority as well as surprise to fuel their comedy. So often the elements to create surprise overlap with other story-telling elements, and teasing them out separately proves tricky. Nonetheless, the lifeblood of these examples and of almost all humor and comedy, from the micro to the macro, is the unexpected.

“Shock or surprise is the undergarment that holds in the unsightly flab of humor writing”
(Schreiber, 7).

SURPRISE IN FICTION: THE MACRO LEVEL

In addition to humor, surprise is used on a macro level in story telling in irrealism, riffs, plot developments and plot twists. Irrealism surprises readers because it departs from “reality.” In plot developments, the action takes a surprising turn, for the character or the reader or both. In plot twists, the entire story builds to something so unexpected it changes the readers’ and usually the characters’ assumptions about all that has gone on in the story up to that point.

Irrealism

The term “irreal” is defined by John Gardner in *The Art of Fiction*, as illusory or not actually existing, not real, or lacking realness. Gardner and many others compare irrealty with dreams - where “details of psychological reality are directly translated into physical reality”(137). The broad term irrealty also applies to magical realism and the absurd, and brings to mind fiction from Gabriel Garcia-Marquez to Franz Kafka.

Irrealism is completely outside of a reader's expectations since it leaves the realm of "reality." All fiction can be argued to be unreal, since it is the product of an author's imagination, and good fiction will confidently explore where the left brain leaves off and the right brain takes up. The French philosopher Michel Foucault insisted art should always "touch the unreal" (A. Brown, 4), and Christopher Morley went even further when he said "the courage of the poet is to keep ajar the door that leads into madness" (Fitzhenry, 348).

In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, the first 27 pages of the story are eerie in effect, but realistic. When Coraline gets the "cold, black key" to the strange door in the drawing room that has been bricked over, and opens the door, the story slides into the surprising unreal. The door leads to a passageway, much like the one in her house, with even the same painting on the wall of a boy looking at bubbles, only it's strangely different. Coraline then hears her mother and runs into the kitchen to see her, "Only she was taller and thinner. Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp. 'Coraline?' the woman said. 'Is that you?' And then she turned around. Her eyes were big black buttons" (28).

With these unexpected images, the reader knows that he is in a different world, a spooky one where all his assumptions and expectations are moot. Surprise here is perceived as frightening because Gaiman has succeeded in creating a threatening atmosphere.

Irrealism can be argued to be the ultimate unexpected. Unlike Fantasy in which a strange new world exists according to rules the reader must determine, there are no rules in the unreal.

Macro Riffs

Earlier I discussed riffs as used in prose on a micro level. But riffs can also be used in fiction in a macro way that defines character, shapes a reader's perceptions and draws him in to an unexpected reality.

An author who combines irrealism and riffs brilliantly is Russell Hoban in his novel, *Riddley Walker*. The main character and narrator, twelve-year-old Riddley, experiences the world directly in an intuitive, irrational and unreal way. By setting the story in a post apocalyptic, futuristic/throw-back world Hoban frees Riddley from modern, rational Anglo influences. Riddley's riffs are long, rambling, and circuitous and take him and the reader into almost unintelligible, primitive places. Yet his riffs are credible because we understand that this is how his society works. The novel is science fiction/fantasy but it also transcends both genres, as well as YA/Adult.

Ridley is appointed a "connexion" man, and he travels around to tell stories and interpret the society's quasi-religion/propaganda for each settlement.

This lyrical passage comes from Ridley's story, "Why the dog wont show its eyes."

"You know what they got 1st knowing of. She has different ways she shows her self. Shes that same 1 shows her moon self or she jus shows her old old nite and no moon. Shes that same 1 every thing and all of us come out of. Shes what she is. Shes a woman when shes Nite and shes a woman when shes Death. The nite bearths the day. Every day has the shape of the nite what it come out of." (18)

This is poetry disguised as prose, and recalls Rainer Maria Rilke's work. When a narrative riff captures something not just emotional but transcendent or other-worldly, it can blur the lines of reality and irreality and of prose and poetry, fully utilizing the power of the written word.

Plot Developments

Surprising plot developments are a fundamental element of storytelling. If nothing unexpected happens in a plot, there is no story. Authors are often advised to start a story, "on the day that's different." Also, plot developments are closely tied to choices a character makes - and the gaps that can result. In any case, with the skillful use of surprise, tension and conflict will increase, as will reader attention and engagement with the story.

In Margaret Bechard's *Hanging on to Max*, an unexpected plot development is used at the end of the first chapter, which is a surprise for the reader, but in this case, a normal day for the male, high school-student character, Sam.

The book opens with Sam having a difficult time staying awake during math class. Before leaving, his teacher, Ms. Garcia, encourages him to do more challenging work. In a hurry at his locker, he grabs homework, then runs down the hall:

The secretary looked up from her monitor as I burst through the day care doors. "We'd about given up on you," she said, but she was smiling. They all smiled at me, all the time.

"I had to talk to Ms Garcia," I said. I shouldered through the door into the crawlers room.

"Here he is!" Mrs. McPherson, the teacher, said. "Here's Daddy."

Max leaned out of her arms toward me, his hands stretched out, his face red and swollen with crying.

I took him. "Hey, buddy. It's okay." (7)

Even though the reader will know the novel is about a teen father, they will likely be surprised. Teen-aged men attending high school with their babies are outside of our expectations. Everything the reader initially assumed about this character is shaken, resulting in a strong desire to know more.

Blasting Open the Reader's Perceptions: Plot Twists

I have examined surprise up to now as a supporting element in fiction. Surprise adds humor; it contributes to the sense of irreality; and it engages the reader more closely with characters. In the following two examples, the plot twists surprise the characters and reader so much that their perceptions of the story and even of the world are affected.

In Virginia Euwer Wolff's *True Believer*, a plot twist near the end of this novel in verse throws everything that has happened up to that point into a new light. Main character and narrator LaVaughn is madly in love with childhood friend Jody, but cannot work up the courage to let him know. She decides to bake cookies for him, and deliver them.

The first thing I saw was the lamplight on the fishtank,
and two people, just their heads
partly hidden behind the tank.
like they were whispering to each other.
I got my eyes to focus and
there was something in my spine pulling me back
but something in my eyes pushing me forward
and I recognized Jody but not the other one,
I only noticed it was a boy.
I stood ice-still and I saw their mouths go together and stay
and I froze.
The plate of cookies
went straight onto the rug
and my lifetime jumped upside down. (193)

That Jody and LaVaughan were so close and Jody acted like he loved her, but wasn't *in* love with her, suddenly makes sense. Discovering that Jody is gay and cannot return her love in the way she hoped is a shock to LaVaughan that takes her the rest of the book (months) to get over, and increases the reader's sympathy for her heartbreak.

In Richard Peck's U.S. Civil War novel, *The River Between Us*, the reader is aware that the two exotic young women who get off a river boat from New Orleans may be hiding something. Delphine, a fancy-dressed refugee and her servant, Calinda, come ashore in Grand Tower, Illinois, and take refuge with main character and narrator Tilly and her family. The family suspects that the smaller, darker young woman, Calinda, may be an escaped slave. But the plot twist that comes near the end of the story reveals a great deal more.

Tilly and Delphine travel to Illinois to tend to Tilly's brother, Noah, who joined the Union Army and is gravely ill. The two young women take quarters with a wealthy lady named Mrs. Hanrahan who comes to meet them, along with their mutual friend, Dr. Hutchings. Tilly recounts:

Delphine glanced up from her work in the glowing room. Mrs. Hanrahan's hard gaze fell on her and jarred something inside me. Her eyes scanned the place---the hanging dresses, the portrait of Delphine's papa. Then she was looking at Delphine again.

Drawing away from Dr. Hutchings, she propped a fist on her hip and said, "Well, well, what have we here?"

Another silence fell while the doctor saw he was in a room with too many women. She turned to him, showing us her hawk's profile. "Ah declare, Doctor, just see what you have brought me. A colored gal." (125)

The reader is surprised. Tilly is flabbergasted. "What had she said? I reached out for something to hold on to" (125).

This plot twist has upped tension and conflict significantly. Then Delphine calmly explains that she is one of the free people of color, daughter of the rich planter Jules Duval. Her mother, his beautiful, colored mistress is unmarriageable by law, but is kept in style as is the New Orleans custom.

Then Tilly asks Delphine:

“Do your people own slaves?”

“It happens,” she answers.

‘Is Calinda your slave?’

The great fringed violet eyes turned on me. ‘Ah, *ma chère*, she is my sister.’ (130)

Now Tilly *and* the reader are dumbfounded!

Everything that has been assumed throughout the story about these two young women and their relationship to the narrator and her family is called into question, as is the outcome of the book.

Wolff and Peck’s denouements are examples of surprise at its most powerful. The authors carefully structured their stories to lead to these large surprises. These plot twists not only broaden a reader’s ideas and perceptions about the story, but transcend the entire novel, allowing the reader to understand new truths about the world. This is the great strength of literature, and it is powered by surprise.

CONCLUSION

If a plot proceeds as expected, there is no story. To be delighted or even transformed by the unexpected is one of the main reasons a reader chooses a book.

The need for stories and the taste, even hunger for surprise are biologically programmed into human brains, as part of the human “cognitive imperative” or search for meaning. Humans look for meaning and pattern to create the best models of our universe in order to make sense of and navigate our worlds. The unexpected helps readers revise and expand the polar extremes of these models.

Surprise in fiction starts with micro choices of language and metaphor that tickle the nucleus accumbens. Surprise will entertain and engage the reader through humor and the unreal, both of which can also transform reader perceptions. A writer can bring the objective and subjective realms together in gaps that surprise reader and character alike, increase tension, conflict and what’s at stake for the characters. Finally, on the most macro level, well-orchestrated surprise will result in plot developments that compel and plot twists that shake the very foundations of the story.

Surprise may be simply another concept through which to examine and break down the building blocks of good writing: language, metaphor, character, humor, conflict, suspense, and plot. But it is the most fundamental element of good storytelling. And when an author pushes beyond the cliché and the expected, she may hit upon a truth through which readers come to understand, even if fleetingly, something about the nature of this seemingly random and always surprising world. May it bring writer and reader closer to eternal truth.

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Engaging Struggling Readers: Supporting Skill and Will Using Authentic Informational Text

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Abstract

Research indicates that engagement plays a central role in the literacy development of elementary readers. Struggling students often lag behind their proficient peers in both the skill and will to read. While most struggling readers receive assistance, many of the materials available for such instruction over rely on fiction, lack authenticity and do little to support intrinsic motivation. Studies indicate that struggling students benefit from engaging with authentic informational text and exploring critical text structures. To this end, the following article reviews the evidence for such instruction and offers a collection of authentic informational titles to challenge struggling readers.

Keywords

Reading Struggling Engagement Informational Literature Authentic

*

Most educators agree that engagement plays a central role in the literacy development of elementary readers (Wigfield and Guthrie 1997). However, teachers continue to voice concern that despite their efforts, struggling young readers continue to lag behind their more proficient peers. While most struggling readers are receiving additional assistance through RTI (Response to Intervention) and similar efforts, research has shown that many of the materials used in this reading instruction lack authenticity and do little to support the intrinsic motivation to read (Margolis & McCabe 2006).

Studies indicate that the text used with struggling readers over relies on fiction and is often contrived (Margolis & McCabe 2006; Quirk, M. & Schwanenflugel 2004). The result of such instruction is what has been referred to as the vocabulary paradox (McKeown & Beck 2004). Specifically, children need to learn more words to read well, but they need to read well to learn more words. Hence without authentic text, struggling readers never meet the rich, interesting and rigorous words needed to grow proficiency. Consequently, these students need to be exposed to more informational text in order to grow their skill and will. However, it is often informational text that proves frustrating and confusing to students reading below grade level. Therefore, in addition to including more informational text during instruction, struggling readers also require explicit text structure modeling.

The Skill and Will of Struggling Readers

Research indicates that many struggling readers have difficulty with the skill of comprehending informational text. Investigations indicate that there are a number of reasons students struggle. A lack informational text experience and minimal skill instruction contribute to comprehension difficulty when reading informational text (Dymock 1998; Williams, Hall, deCani, Lauer, Stafford, & DeSisto

2005). Research indicates that a lack of text experience is due to informational materials not being available and/or used in elementary classrooms. Book collections are not adequately balanced between narrative and informational materials and teachers often do not provide informational reading practice. For example, in her notable 2000 study, Duke found a lack of informational text in reading collections, in classroom libraries, and displayed in written activities. She also found that primary grade children in suburban school districts read informational text for about 3.6 minutes per day. In low-SES schools, the scarcity of informational text was even greater, with students reading for only approximately 1.9 minutes per day.

At upper elementary and middle school, the problem persists or worsens. Many studies have found that students engage in little content area reading, either in class or as homework (Alvermann & Moore 1991; Armbruster, Anderson, Armstrong, Wise, Janisch, & Meyer 1991; DiGisi & Willet 1995; Goodlad 1984). Findings suggest that students may not be reading because they find classroom texts to be inconsiderate, difficult to comprehend, or not engaging.

Numerous studies have documented gains in reading comprehension for at-risk readers when students are familiar with the structures of informational text. Specifically, struggling readers benefit from instruction in how to read informational material. In several critical studies, Joanna Williams and her colleagues documented comprehension gains in at-risk second grade readers. Specifically, in a 2004 investigation, Williams, Hall, and Lauer demonstrated that primary grade at-risk readers are sensitive to text structure and improved their comprehension of informational text following explicit instruction. In another study, Williams, Hall, Lauer, Stafford, DeSisto, and deCani (2005) demonstrated that elementary students (including at-risk readers) showed statistically significant gains in reading comprehension following text structure instruction when compared to students in a treatment condition that did not receive such instruction.

In addition to gains in reading comprehension following text structure instruction, studies have also found evidence that such structural knowledge can be transferred to new learning demands (Broer, Aarnoutse, Kieviet and van Leeuwe 2002; Palincsar & Duke 2004). For example, Palincsar and Duke (2004) found that children learn to value and use the features of informational text following instruction. Teaching with and about informational text promotes general literacy knowledge as well as subject matter knowledge for students as young as second grade. Consequently, it is important that students receive explicit instruction in the structures of informational text. Such instruction helps students become comfortable and familiar with the academic language necessary to read and respond to a wide variety of informational text.

In addition to providing skill instruction, it is also important for struggling readers to engage with informational text in order to support their will to read. Numerous studies conducted in the past two decades confirm a correlation between children's reading proficiency and their motivation. Chapman and Tunmer (2003) found a statistically significant correlation between skill and perceived competence. McKenna, Kear and Ellsworth (1995) found erosion in academic and recreational attitude for struggling readers beginning in third grade that continued for the duration of the elementary school years. And Marinak & Gambrell (2010) found statistically significant differences between struggling and proficient readers in self-concept to read. Gambrell (1996) argues that without the intrinsic motivation to read, struggling readers may never achieve proficiency. More importantly, without intrinsic motivation, these students will most likely not value the act of reading and consequently not choose to engage with text for purpose or pleasure (Marinak & Gambrell, 2009). Therefore, the research suggests that the use of informational text is critical to supporting the reading engagement of struggling readers. In addition, studies indicate that such informational text should be authentic, complete with interesting topics, rich vocabulary, and structural integrity (Guthrie & Humenick 2004; Margolis & McCabe 2006; Williams, Hall, deCani, Lauer, Stafford, & DeSisto 2005).

The Case for Authenticity

Vaughn and colleagues (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Woodruff, Murray, Wanzek, & Scammaca 2008) have suggested that scripted programs for struggling readers can help teachers learn about effective practices if delivered with fidelity. The question becomes fidelity to whom...the program or the needs of the student? The RTI (Response to Intervention) Commission of the International Reading Association (2010) advocates for authenticity when suggesting that instruction and materials must be derived from specific student-teacher interactions and not be constrained by packaged programs. The Commission notes that students have different language and literacy needs, so they may not respond similarly to instruction—even when research-based practices are used. The group suggests that the boundaries between differentiation and intervention are permeable. Instruction must be flexible enough to respond to evidence from student performance and teaching interactions. In addition, Margolis and McCabe (2006) note there is no correlation between well designed scripts and growth in the skill and will to read.

It is Turner and Paris (1995), however, that offer the most compelling case for providing struggling readers with authentic informational text. These researchers found that the most reliable indicator of reading motivation was not the type of reading program districts follow but the actual daily classrooms tasks that teachers provided. For example, tasks in which students had some control over product and process were found to be more beneficial than tasks whereby students had little control and few choices. Based on this investigation, Turner and Paris suggest that reading engagement can be supported by providing instruction that includes *Six Cs*; choice, challenge, control, collaboration, constructive comprehension, and consequences. The researchers propose that both literacy learning and intrinsic motivation to read can be nurtured by incorporating specific actions based on the “Cs”. This includes: providing authentic choices and purposes for reading and writing; allowing students to modify tasks so the difficulty and interest are sufficiently challenging; affording opportunities for students to control their learning by engaging in self-monitoring; encouraging as much collaboration as possible; emphasizing strategies that encourage the construction of meaning; and using consequences to build responsibility and ownership. In short, research clearly suggests that instruction for struggling readers must address both the ability to read and the motivation to read (Guthrie & Humenick 2004; Margolis & McCabe 2006; Turner & Paris 1995).

The Structures of Informational Text

Kletzien and Dreher (2004) define informational text broadly to include three distinct types of informational text: narrative-informational, expository-informational, and mixed. Narrative-informational text conveys factual information using a story format. Expository-informational text also conveys factual information (including biographical information) but does not use a story structure. Mixed text is defined as a hybrid of styles and structures. These texts typically convey information, contain some story elements, and use cartoon-like formatting.

For the purposes of this discussion, informational text is defined as materials primarily designed to convey information using predictable and readily identifiable structures. Such text comes in many forms, including books, magazines, reference books, encyclopedias, newspapers, posters, pamphlets, and electronic sources such as websites.

The term *text structure* refers to the organizational logic of a text (Neufeld 2005). In other words, structures are the manner in which information in the text is organized for presentation. Up to ten text structures can be found in informational materials. However, three occur frequently in elementary literature and textbooks. They are enumeration, compare and contrast and time order. (Neufeld 2005).

Moreover, each of these text structures is associated with a set of signal words. Signal words can be used during reading to recognize the text structure being used to present information. These same signal words must be used to effectively write within a text structure. Figure 1 contains examples of signal words for these three elementary text structures.

Figure 1: Three Elementary Text Structures and Signal Words

Text Structure	Definition	Signal Words
Enumeration	A major idea is supported by a list of details and examples.	for instance for example such as to illustrate another
Time Order	A major idea is supported by details. Both major ideas and supporting details must be in a particular sequence.	at first next last before afterwards finally following
Compare and contrast	The supporting details of two or more major ideas indicate how those concepts are similar or different.	but different from same as similar to instead of however compared with as well as both

Enumeration, the least complex text structure, is a list of major ideas supported by details. There is no specified order to the major ideas. The instructional analogy when teaching enumeration is that of a shopping list. The order things go from the list into the cart does not matter as long as they are all collected before checkout. In other words, in an enumerative text structure, the major ideas do not have to be read, discussed or retold in a prescribed order.

More complex relationships exist within the major ideas and supporting details in the two remaining elementary text structures. The *compare/contrast* structure describes how concepts are similar or different using a common set of attributes. In other words, two things cannot be compared and contrasted unless details are offered for each relevant attribute. And though compare and contrast is a regularly occurring expectation on most high-stakes tests, it is difficult to find authentic informational books written in this structure. Therefore, in order to hold compare and contrast discussions, there is a need to find high interest, well written informational books that contain details about the same attributes. The *time order* text structure contains major ideas and supporting details that are carefully sequenced.

Authentic Informational Text for Struggling Readers

In order to engage struggling readers, it is critical to model these three structures using exemplar informational texts. Exemplars are authentic texts or portions of text that can be used to teach one or more structures. Below are several authentic informational recommendations for the three elementary structures. The books contain high interest topics, are rich with vocabulary and embody a well executed structure. In addition, it is noted that each recommendation is discussed under two text structures. The suggestions are “high utility books”. In other words, these outstanding titles can be used to model enumeration as well as one or more additional text structures. They are perfect for illustrating multiple structures as well as the importance of revisiting text for a variety of purposes. Therefore, the following authentic, high interest informational texts are perfect for struggling readers. The books are discussed hierarchically moving from lower to upper elementary with grade level recommendations included. In addition, all are currently available as inexpensive paperbacks.

Enumeration

Seashore Babies by Kathy Darling (Grades K-3, Ages 5-8)

Seashore Babies (1997) is an introduction to fourteen young marine animals including seals, sea lions, dolphins, etc. The formatting of this engaging text is predictable making it readily accessible for young readers. Each double-page spread profiles one animal with the right page containing a color photo and several paragraphs of narrative and the left page offering additional information arranged in a text box. The entire book is written in an enumerative structure. The presentation of the animals is random from beginning to end allowing students to read in the order of their choice. Facts about each animal can be enumerated after viewing the photos and reading the narrative and/or text boxes.

Wild Babies by Seymour Simon (Grades 2-3, Ages 7-9)

Wild Babies (1998), also an introduction to over a dozen young animals, is a bit more challenging than *Seashore Babies* for several reasons. First, the highlighted animals are not from one habitat. This fascinating text describes wild babies from all over the world. In addition, though once again double-page spreads profile one animal, there are no textboxes. All the information is presented in running paragraphs. However, like *Seashore Babies*, the enumerative structure allows students to read the book and list facts in any order they choose.

Zippping Zapping Zooming Bats by Ann Earle (Grades 2-4, Ages 7-10)

Zippping Zapping Zooming Bats (1995) describes a wealth of facts about bats. The little brown bat is the star of this text. In brief well-written paragraphs accompanied by color illustrations and several explicit diagrams, readers learn about the bat's body structure, hunting habits, and reproduction. Several concluding appendices offer information about additional bats and directions for building a bat house. And though this text should be read cover to cover, the bat topics can be discussed in any order.

Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine, and a Miracle by Major Brian Dennis, Kirby Larson and Mary Nethery (Grades 2-4, Ages 7-10)

Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine, and a Miracle (2009) is an amazing photo documentary about an Iraqi dog adopted by marine. This special dog was the leader of pack living off the land and barely surviving when Major Brian Dennis befriended him. The two became inseparable after Dennis gives Nubs care and attention he had never experienced before. Unfortunately, the Marines had a rule- no dogs allowed. So begins a journey that will result in Nubs traveling to a new home in the United States. Facts about Major Dennis and his men, their surroundings, and Nubs the dog can be enumerated and discussed.

Wolves by Seymour Simon (Grades 3-5, Ages 8-11)

Wolves (1995) is a compelling text about one of the world's most misunderstood animals. In attempt to set the record straight, Simon shares facts about virtually every aspects of this animal's life. Included are descriptions of physical characteristics, senses, predatory style, mating, reproduction, and development. Though it offers an abundance of facts, the enumerative structure in *Wolves* is rigorous because the book lacks headings and subheadings. Readers must follow the topic transitions carefully from page to page in order accurately discern important information.

Compare and Contrast

Seashore Babies by Kathy Darling (Grades K-3, Ages 5-8)

Seashore Babies (1997) is not written in a compare and contrast text structure, but due to the text boxes provided for each animal, the high interest title can be used to model a critical structure. The book is perfect for such discussions because the same attributes are shared for each baby. Not only does *Seashore Babies* illustrate the concept of attributes, but readers can scan the various text boxes to compare, contrast, and compare and contrast two or more animals. For example, the dolphin and the tern can be contrasted because they are more different than similar, the seal and sea lion can be compared because they are more similar then different, and the penguin and pelican can be compared and contrasted because both similarities and differences are present in the attribute boxes.

Wild Babies by Seymour Simon (Grades 2-3, Ages 7-9)

Wild Babies (1998) can also be used to discuss similarities and differences in young animals. Several "wild babies" are described using the same attributes (type of birth, number of young, etc.). However, this text will prove more challenging than *Seashore Babies* due to the absence of text boxes. In other words, readers must read carefully for similar attributes across animals. For example, given that Simon includes information about the number of young each female has and how the young are protected, the emperor penguin and the giraffe can be compared and contrasted. Figure 2 shows a text map completed by elementary students during a discussion of the two animals. Though compare and contrast is not a readily identifiable text structure in *Wild Babies* (1997), the students were able to identify important attributes and discuss similarities and differences between the two animals.

Figure 2: Compare and Contrast Text Map

Compare and Contrast

Major Idea		Major Idea
Giraffe		Emperor Penguin
Supporting Details	Attributes	Supporting Details
Africa	Live	Antarctica
One	Number of Babies	One
Live	Type of Birth	Egg
Kindergarten	Protection of young	Kindergarten

Zippping Zapping Zooming Bats by Ann Earle (Grades 2-4, Ages 7-10)

Bats can be compared and contrasted in *Zippping Zapping Zooming Bats* (1995). This book also offers heightened rigor because students must read about the little brown bat within the text and other bats in a concluding glossary. For example, little brown bats from the main body of the text and gray bats from the glossary share many of the same characteristics and can therefore be compared. On the other hand, little brown bats and grey-headed flying foxes are very different making them perfect for contrasting. And finally, little brown bats and California leaf-nosed bats share several similar characteristics. These two bats can be compared and contrasted.

Time Order

Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine, and a Miracle by Major Brian Dennis, Kirby Larson and Mary Nethery (Grades 2-4, Ages 7-10)

Though information about Major Dennis and his dog can be enumerated, *Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine, and a Miracle* (2009) is written in a fascinating time order text structure. Major Dennis' efforts to rescue Nubs unfold over a period of five months. From October, 2007 when Major Dennis finds Nubs until March 23, 2008 when the marine and his dog are reunited in the United States, the sequence is described in both narrative and time stamped emails embedded periodically throughout the book. In addition to telling a dramatic time order saga, this selection also exposes struggling readers to signal words in a variety of formats.

Wolves by Seymour Simon (Grades 3-5, Ages 8-11)

Wolves (1995) is a high interest book for older readers that contains an excellent example of time order text structure. The sequential section describes the birth and development of young wolves. And though this time order passage is only two pages long, the reading is challenging. Rigor results from several style elements used by Simon. First, five paragraphs do not represent five passages of time. On the contrary, some paragraphs describe only one period of time while other paragraphs describe multiple developmental episodes. In addition, the signals marking the passages of time are highly varied including words that describe weeks, months, seasons and years.

Concluding Thoughts

Research clearly indicates that authentic literacy tasks can promote higher order thinking and nurture motivation. According to Neuman and Roskos (1997) participation in authentic tasks provides opportunities for students to use their prior knowledge and to practice interpretative strategies. Both are of the utmost urgency when planning instruction for struggling readers. Supporting students in developing the language, strategies and skills needed to read informational materials is a vital step in preparing them to comprehend within and across all types of text. Proficiency in comprehending informational text will help struggling students build the enduring skills needed to read their world -- in school, work, community, and everyday life.

In support of such efforts, this article had several purposes. First and foremost was to advocate for the use of rich, authentic informational text when teaching struggling readers. Next was to suggest that such literature can grow the skill and will students need to engage with text as content demands become rigorous. And finally, it hoped that the carefully selected titles highlighted here can serve as models when choosing and using authentic informational books for instruction.

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Write4Children

Liminality and the Figure of Pan in the Children's Literature of J.M.Barrie and Kenneth Grahame

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Introduction

‘So we pass, with a gusto and a heartiness that to an onlooker would seem almost pathetic, from one droll devotion to another misshapen passion; and who shall dare to play Rhadamanthus, to appraise the record, and to decide how much of it is solid achievement, and how much the merest child's play? (Grahame, 1921[1895]: 199)

One of the defining themes of Victorian and Edwardian children's literature is that of liminality - of the threshold or the space between. Consider, for example, Tom, who lives and works in chimneys, dies and is reborn as a creature of water (Kingsley, 1994 [1863]), or Alice in the Looking-glass room, for whom the mirror became 'soft like gauze', and melted away 'just like a bright silvery mist' so that she could pass from the real to the fantastic (Lewis, 1872), and who, after falling down the rabbit hole, is confronted by doors that will not open and a too-small passage from which she wanted to escape (Lewis, 1866). Then there is the door that leads from sickness and sadness to health and happiness in *The Secret Garden* (Burnett, 1911), and the railway children, whose adventures begin at the mouth of a train tunnel with its 'shifting, sliding stones', 'slimy, oozy trickles of water' where 'Your voice, when you speak, is quite changed from what it was out in the sunshine' (Nesbit, 1906). These, and many other examples, show that authors of the period¹ were well aware of the power and significance of the threshold for the child reader, and of its metaphorical power for adults. For the former, the place, moment and process of transition within fiction, mirroring the very process of opening the book and entering its world, provides an opportunity to explore the hidden, the dangerous, the unexpected - to escape from a real and rational world peopled and marshalled by adults into a fantastical or imaginative one in which their perceptions and experiences, however confusing and complicated and (literally) "edgy", find legitimation and expression.

Both Barrie and Grahame understood this, although Barrie's treatment of the liminal is more complex and challenging. In this essay I want to consider the ways in which each author uses liminal themes, images and the figure of Pan as a way of establishing place, and for exploring certain spatial and temporal relations critical to their narrative purpose. To do this we need first to be clear what is meant by liminality in this context, and why it is such a potent idea in the children's literature of the period.

Liminality derives from the Latin, *limen*, meaning threshold. It marks a place, or a point or period in time, at or in which change occurs. As such, it is a status characterised by uncertainty, ambiguity and instability; and, as a quality, it suggests porosity, permeability and fluidity. Peter Pan, who is described as something 'betwixt and between', exemplifies the idea, and his capacity to unsettle is thus unsurprising. As Deborah Lupton, discussing the work of Zygmunt Bauman, explains:

‘Liminal figures, such as the stranger who crosses borders between “inside” and “outside” a social group, are commonly treated as threats to social order. Bauman identifies the figure of “the stranger” as being a central source of uncertainty in late modern societies. The stranger cannot yet be categorized as either friend or enemy and is therefore disorderly, blurring boundaries and division. The ambivalence created by strangers' liminal status, their monstrous status as neither-nor, creates u

ncertainty, which at best is discomforting and at worst carries a sense of danger ... “they bring the outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos”.’ (Lupton, 199: 134; Bauman, 1991)

The works discussed here were published in the decades that spanned 1900, a period which was in itself liminal - an end and a beginning (Kerman, 2002.) It was a time of transition in which reflection on the past, anticipation of the future, and attempts to understand, resolve - and sometimes simply revel in - the conflicts in religious, social, political and cultural values and institutions suffused scientific, artistic and literary creativity (Hynes, 1968: chs 1 and 5). Of particular importance, for our purposes, there was increased anxiety about children and the meaning of childhood. Much nineteenth century literature for children, especially in the earlier period, had been explicitly moral, a medium through which the child might be educated to understand the importance of deference, obedience and godliness and from which “all childishness was exorcised” (Avery, 1965). Towards the end of that century, and into the twentieth, a radical transformation took place (Thacker and Webb, 2002). Parents could on the one hand be entreated to allow children fully to experience the romance of childhood as such - that they who walk “among mists and rainbows” Stevenson, 1925 [1881]: 129² should be left “in their native cloudland ... pretty like flowers and innocent like dogs”; and on the other, encouraged to put them to the service of a decadent Empire³ by training them in the skills necessary for the defence of the realm⁴ and colonial administration (Baden-Powell, 1908; 1909). The psychic and emotional borderland between what William Blake had earlier dichotomised as innocence and experience was as fragile and contingent as the physical borders and cultural values for whose protection those children would one day be responsible.

Spatial Liminality

At the core of the concept of liminality is the idea of the threshold, or crossing point. This spatial dimension of the liminal is deployed by Grahame and Barrie in analogous ways, although Barrie is both more subtle and more adventurous. For Grahame, the space, movement and distinction between environments provides a strong a persistent metaphor through which he can assert the tension between the security of home and the desire for risk and adventure. Mole, safe underground and in his element (earth), is tempted out into another (air) because of the change in the season (another manifestation of liminality):

‘Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing.’ (Grahame, 1963 [1908]: 9)

He leaves the house and is met by another element (fire): ‘The sunshine struck hot on his fur’ (*ibid*: 10), and then - the most important transition - by another (water):

‘... suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before ... all was a-ashake and a-shiver - glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble.’ (*ibid*: 11-12)

Overwhelmed by the difference between the solidity of the earth and the fluidity of the water, he asks his new friend Rat if he can row and immediately experiences the difficulty of managing this transition from one to the other when he falls from the boat:

‘O my, how cold the water was, and O, how *very* wet it felt. How it sang in his ears as he went down, down, down! How bright and welcome the sun looked as he rose to the surface coughing and spluttering! How black was his despair when he felt himself sinking again!’ (*ibid*: 27-28)

Mole’s fear and excitement is contrasted throughout with Rat’s urbanity, a product of his natural ability to function equally well in water and on land - the fact that he at home in both environments and can thus guide and support Mole (as a parent might a child) through this rite of passage. The theme of domestic security *versus* the risks associated with leaving is a recurrent one. It finds expression in the touching return to Mole’s old house (Dulce Domum) after getting lost in the Wild Wood, a place beyond and outside his comfort zone, about which he has been warned:

‘There was nothing to alarm him at first entry. Twigs crackled under his feet. Logs tripped him, funguses on stumps resembled caricatures, and startled him for the moment by their likeness to something familiar and far away; but that was all fun and exciting. It led him on, and he penetrated to where the light was less, and trees crouched nearer and nearer, and holes made ugly mouths at him on either side.’ (*ibid*: 57)

Security there is found when Rat, who has come to the rescue, identifies the threshold to Badger’s house, something that Mole cannot see, and they find warmth and safety after moving

‘down a long, gloomy, and to tell the truth, decidedly shabby passage, into a sort of central hall, out of which they could dimly see other long tunnel-like passages branching, passages mysterious and without apparent end.’ (*ibid*: 76)

The space between environments, which Grahame explores elsewhere is, essentially, the space between what is safe and what is not, and it is a manifestation of his essentially conservative and nostalgic vision that everyone is, in the end, restored happily to their rightful place.⁵ (Consider, for example, Toad - a cross-dressing amphibian, and thus liminal in almost every respect - who finally gets back to home and civilisation, having initially escaped *via* his window returns through the secret passage from the riverbank) and the narrator in *The Golden Age* who - one leg in the water, one on land, eases under netting by the stream’s edge and stands ‘safe but breathless’ in a garden where ‘Gone was the brambled waste, gone the flickering tangle of woodland’ (Grahame, [1895] 1921: 46-47)). There is, however, no such easy resolution in *Barrie*. For him, the space between *is* the critical space. It is not a question of leaving and returning, but of constant oscillation and destabilisation - almost as if he wants to reinforce the idea that childhood is in itself a complicated experience in which security and risk are immanent and concurrent. *Barrie* explores this in a number of ways. The Gardens, which he maps at the outset of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* in extraordinary detail, are bounded, with many gates, but only one by which ‘you’ enter (*Barrie*, 1991 [1906/1911]: 3). There is a fence over which the only ‘celebrated Fig’ (a ‘superior’ person) climbed, and a well down which a boy fell. Having established firmly in the reader’s mind where he is as a place of adventure (and the reader is definitely a ‘he’), *Barrie* then develops the idea of liminality in more detail using the character of Peter Pan so that it establishes itself as a core theme.

‘... Peter Pan got out by the window, which had no bars. Standing on the ledge he could see trees far away ... and the moment he saw them he entirely forgot that he was now a little boy in a nightgown, and away he flew ...’ (*ibid*: 13)

The windowsill of the nursery, the space between nurture and freedom, is not, though, merely a passing point. It haunts *Barrie*’s Pan fiction as a setting for tragic desire, as a place of vacillation and rejection. Out through the open window he is able to lead the darling children to Neverland in *Peter Pan* and *Wendy*; but having earlier decided that he would like to return, he finds it shut:

‘... the window was closed, and there were iron bars on it, and peering inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm around another little boy ... In vain he beat his little limbs against the iron bars.’ (*ibid*: 40)6

Just as the Gardens are inaccessible to children after darkness falls, so a return to childhood - once given up - is impossible:

‘Ah, Peter! We who have made the great mistake, how differently we should all act at the second chance. But Solomon was right - there is no second chance, not for most of us. When we reach the window it is Lock-out Time. The iron bars are up for life.’ (*ibid*)

Throughout the Peter Pan texts this desire both to stay and to return, to be both adult and free, and be a child and be safe, is reiterated through the use of threshold imagery. Peter is trapped on the island in the Serpentine until a nest is built in which he can swim to the ‘mainland’, and he would be marooned on the rock in the Mermaid’s Lagoon but for the Never bird relinquishing her nest to him (*ibid*: ch. 9). He learns of the capture of the Lost Boys from Tinker Bell, who - invisible on the other side of a door - teases him by refusing to say who she is (*ibid*: 183). The Lost Boys themselves reach safety underground *via* hollowed trees above - which in the end are their undoing; they are about to die by being forced to walk the plank (a liminal space between the pirate ship, itself a dangerous, exciting and solid place, and the sea) (*ibid*: ch. 14); and Wendy is protected by building a house round her which ‘looked so cosy and safe in the darkness, with a bright light shining through its blinds and the chimney smoking beautifully, and Peter standing on guard’ (*ibid*: 132). The point to be made is that, in contrast to Grahame (with one exception, discussed below) liminal spaces are not simply places of transition from one status, emotion or experience to another. Even when Wendy and her siblings return home, the happiness a reader might experience is tainted by the fact that

‘... there was none to see it except a strange boy who was staring in at the window. He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must ever be barred.’ (*ibid*: 214)

and that ‘our last glimpse’ of Wendy

‘shows her at the window, watching [Peter Pan and Jane, Wendy’s daughter] receding into the sky until they were as small as stars.’ (*ibid*: 226)

Just as Schopenhauer, whose philosophy of despair was a profound influence on *fin-de-siècle* writers and thinkers, ‘saw human consciousness caught in endless predetermined conflict and flux’ (Lester, 1968: 64), so for Barrie the threshold at which Pan appears generation after generation is a place always and forever marked by loss, denial, and regret as much as it is by optimism and anticipation.

Pan as a Liminal Figure

‘To certain smoke-dried spirits matter and motion and elastic ethers, and the hypothesis of this or that or other bespectacled professor, tell a speaking story; but for youth and all ductile and congenial minds, Pan is not dead ...’ (Stevenson, 1925 [1881]: 141)

For many writers in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, Pan was an important creative inspiration. There are many reasons for this. For one, he represented both opposition to the Anglican church and the morally rigid organisation of society which it sought to enforce (Houghton, 1957: 61-64) (one that

was reflected in much early to mid-Victorian literature for children (Avery, 1965: chs 3 and 4) and also a force in tune with the Darwinian theory of nature and natural selection that were concurrently challenging religious authority (Houghton, 1957: 33-38; 48-53). More importantly, for our purposes, he was a character that represented a particular kind of freedom: a freedom *from* the constraints of adult cares and rationality, but at the same time a freedom *with* a spiritual dimension - a freedom that meant something, was valuable and worth caring for. As scholars of the period have commented, the decades spanning 1900 were ones of radical experimentation, representation and innovation in European literature, art, architecture, music, philosophy, science, and technology each of which drew inspiration from the other (Hynes, 1991 [1968]; McFarlane, 1976; Bullock, 1976). While anything seemed possible, the febrile climate served also to create confusion and doubt about what really mattered. For those such as Grahame and Barrie, born in the mid-nineteenth century, nurtured in its traditions, and adults at its turn, the changes would have been mind-boggling; and it is perhaps no accident that they each drew their own kind of inspiration from a mythic figure who symbolised both disorder and escapism.

For Barrie, Pan *qua* Peter Pan, is chaotic and quixotic, hybrid and theriomorph (goat and bird and human, pagan and Christian (Jack, 1994), fixed in age and immortal⁷, traditionally played on the stage by a woman (Birkin, 1979; Carpenter and Prichard, 1994), the fictive consolidation of the characters of real children (Birkin, 1979), innocent and sexual (Rose, 1984), son and husband to the same woman / girl), a leader who has experienced absolute loss, a boy who challenges natural laws by flying and losing his shadow, a hero and 'an affectionless psychopath' (Fraser, 1976). As Kincaid has argued of both Peter Pan and Carroll's Alice:

'No figures are more insistently Other, more adept at resisting satisfaction, blocking fulfilment [sic], keeping the chase and desire alive. They do this not by vanishing but by moving in and out of the next room, tantalizing us, coming almost within reach, almost within focus, and then scooting off. They do not ... set up a static binary with the adult; they engage in a shifting dynamic, seeming to allow both seeing and being seen, a move from subject to object and back, but no chance to hold the child or the desire.' (Kincaid, 1992: 276)

The god Pan, who lived among mortals in Arcadia, was fickle with his affections and unsure of his parentage, who literally plays the object of his desire (Syrinx) by breathing through a pipe made from her body post-metamorphosis, is a perfect vehicle for a childless author drawn to but terrified by women, obsessed by a mother who loved his brother more (Birkin, 1979: ch 1), and whose only means of emotional satisfaction is to insinuate himself in the life of a real family⁸. Just as Pan was liminal, a god among mortals, an inspiration and a nuisance, so Barrie created - and inhabited - a fictional but autobiographically inspired landscape, populated by characters that existed in the space between the real world and his imagination.

In contrast with this chaotic and multi-valent deployment of the Pan figure, Grahame uses Pan in a far more direct way, albeit one that is just as psychologically complex. It was suggested above that Grahame's use of liminality is not as radical as Barrie's, at least so far as this concept relates to the experience of being on the threshold. Where he is just as challenging is in the way he places Pan himself at the threshold, makes him a fulcrum, in order to create a transcendent idealisation of childhood. In 'The Rural Pan', he appears among men unawares and symbolises a yearning to retreat from 'Commercialism, whose God is Jerry, and who studs the hills with stucco and garrottes the streams with the girder' (Grahame, 1898: 65-71). At risk in an increasingly technological world which Grahame abhorred (Prince, 1994), and emblematic of the resistance to the positivism and materialism of the later nineteenth century that so many writers and artists felt (McFarlane, 1976: 71-77), 'The Lost Centaur' indicates and guards the path to truth and beauty (Grahame, 1898: 175-81).

These initial manifestations of Pan find full expression in 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', the central chapter (literally and symbolically) of *The Wind in the Willows*. Set on the river bank, between earth and water, the chapter begins at twilight, between day and night, and reaches its crescendo at dawn. The baby otter, Portly, is lost and there is fear that he may be injured by the (man-made) weir or 'traps and things'. Mole and Rat set out in their scull before darkness falls so that on the river 'wherever shadows fell on the water from bank, bush, or tree, they were as solid to all appearance as the banks themselves' (Grahame, 1963 [1908]: 146). All is for a short time dark until, as the moon rises, the shadows reappear 'all softly disclosed, all washed clean of mystery and terror' (*ibid*). Then, as day breaks, there is a rustling in the reeds and they are drawn as if by a magnet to Pan's call until

'Breathless and transfixed the Mole stopped rowing as the liquid run of that glad piping broke on him like a wave, caught him up, and possessed him utterly. He saw the tears on his comrade's cheeks, and bowed his head and understood. For a space they hung there, brushed by the purple looestrife that fringed the bank ...' (*ibid*: 149)

Suspended in time and motion, everything is more vivid, odorous and riotous and they are impelled to the 'flowery margin' of an island set with 'Nature's own orchard-trees - crab-apple, wild cherry and sloe', the place of Rat's 'song-dream' which turns Mole's 'muscles to water' inducing not a 'panic terror' but peace and happiness. Nature seems to 'hold her breath' as they encounter Pan - shaggy, stern, with a half-smile - cradling the baby otter. Asked if he is afraid, Rat answers "'Afraid! Of Him. O never, never! And yet - and yet - O Mole, I am afraid!'" (*ibid*: 153). They bow their heads and, when they raise them again, the vision is gone so that they 'stared blankly, in dumb misery deepening as they slowly realized all they had seen and all they had lost'. A 'capricious breeze' makes them forget, although Mole stands still

'As one wakened suddenly from a beautiful dream, who struggles to recall it, and can recapture nothing but a dim sense of the beauty of it, the beauty! Till that, too, fades away in its turn, and the dreamer bitterly accepts the hard, cold waking and all its penalties; ...' (*ibid*: 154)

There are themes here which find parallel in Barrie - not just in terms of the spatial and temporal terrain (islands, margins, night and day), but in the metaphorical use of the shadow and dreaming. However, whereas Barrie's deployment is self-consciously fantastical Grahame seeks to achieve a synthesis of the mythic and natural. Peter Pan's shadow is separated from him and must be re-attached, time is frozen (he is a baby that never ages), conflict occurs with the stock pirates and Red Indians of boy's own fiction, and adventures happen in Neverland. In contrast, Grahame's shadows produce emotional effects, but behave as shadows do; time passes as time does; trees are not hollowed out to provide escape routes, they are described - along with other vegetation - with a passionate naturalism; the baby otter is in danger and will, one day, grow up. For Grahame, unlike Barrie, Pan appears and vanishes, a figure whose liminal presence in space and time affirms the tragic and real transience of childhood, as much as it does as its magic.

Conclusion

'As we are sliding down toward the child, the child is roaring past us in the opposite direction, growing up. Nothing contributes more clearly to the child's fluid status than this sense of being in motion - and in the wrong direction.' (Kincaid, 1992: 277)

In the space of fifteen years, from 1895 to 1910, X-Rays and electrons were discovered, Einstein exploded the constancy of time, Freud theorised that dreams illuminated unconscious and repressed desire, the Labour Party was founded, Moore's *Principia Ethica* was published, Stravinsky's chaotically joyful and challenging *Rite of Spring* was first performed, Monet bathed Parliament in fog while Picasso

represented women as African masks. Children, who had been innocents whose moral decay must be prevented at all costs had become, for some at least, the symbolic guardians of a unique and special innocence that must be cherished. For Barrie, unable to grow-up and establish conventional adult relationships, autobiography and fiction, reality and fantasy, elide and express themselves through his works for and about children in an unresolvable liminality - one in which the threshold is never passed but is instead continuously reiterated and destabilised⁹. As such his work represents the flux and turbulence of the modern world as much as it articulates, with imaginative exuberance, the instability of childhood experience. His Pan, Peter Pan, fascinates and appals in equal measure because he exemplifies the abject, something that disturbs order but is not absolute Other:

‘...something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.’
(Kristeva, 1982: 4)

In contrast, Grahame - a remarkably conventional Edwardian gentleman - uses the liminal (in the form of the river bank and the figure of Pan) as a means of capturing something elusive but true. For him the threshold - between past, present and future, between childhood and adulthood - represents a rite of passage whose momentum cannot be stilled, and upon which one cannot stay forever.

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Notes:

1. There are also, of course, more contemporary expressions of the theme - from C.S. Lewis's wardrobe, the plate on the nursery mantelpiece in P.L. Travers' 'Bad Wednesday', to Pullman's subtle knife, and the invisible-to-muggles Platform 9¾ in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books.
2. The quotation is from *Virginibus Puerisque*, dedicated by Stevenson to W.E. Henley, whose daughter was the inspiration for Wendy in *Peter Pan and Wendy*.
3. This was a persistent theme. See, especially, Balfour (1908).
4. Invasion stories were extremely popular at the time. See, especially, Childers (1903); Le Queux, (1906). For a discussion of Peter Pan and imperialism see Brewer (2007).
5. Prince suggests that Mole is Grahame himself: '... born from the Freudian darkness and narrowness of his underground home into the dizzying heights of sunshine and meadow and river' (Prince, 1994: 229). Zornado, makes the point more politically, analysing *The Wind in the Willows* as a story about class struggle and the importance of maintaining the status quo (Zornado, 2006: 118-126).
6. There are parallels with the myth here. In one account 'He is said to have been so ugly at birth ... that his mother ran away from him in fear' (Graves, 1955: 101).
7. It is a strange paradox, though an understandable one given that a source of his inspiration was a brother who died in early adolescence, that Barrie is inspired by the only Greek deity to have died: Graves, 1955: 101-103.
8. This is the plot of *The Little White Bird*, the first novel in which the character of Peter Pan appears. The author creates a fictional child so that he may emotionally appropriate a real one. See, for discussion, Rose, 1984: 20-34.
9. Although it has not been the focus of this essay, it is worth noting that such destabilisation also occurs at the level of the narrative itself, with its constant change of voice from first, to second, to third person, and in Barrie's denial of ever having written Peter Pan (see, e.g., the dedication to the Play: Barried, 1995,76)

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Domestic and International Multiculturalism: Children's Literature about Africans and African Americans

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Abstract:

In today's global community, multicultural literature can expand student's' understanding of their world to shape a global perspective. Despite the plethora of quality and authentic multicultural literature available for educators, there remains a disparity about how to select and integrate multicultural selections of literature. In this essay, the authors wrestle with how multiculturalism is defined. In many instances, it is defined as a domestic affair ignoring global diversity. Thus, in this piece, the authors argue that it is imperative that teachers link domestic and international diversity by discussing and integrating literature from the African continent and the African diaspora.

Key words:

Children's literature, domestic, global diversity, African diaspora, praxis.

INTRODUCTION:

Children's literature, as many educators can attest does make a difference in children's lives, for not only does it entertain, it stretches children's imagination, reminds them of their humanity, and exposes them to other cultures (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002; Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown, 2005; Norton, 2007). In addition, Rudine Sims (1982) notes that literature should also serve a social function helping children develop a sense of self.

With such a high premium placed on children's literature, selecting books to include in one's library collection or literacy curriculum, therefore, requires great care and thought, especially when it involves choosing books that reflect our diverse cultures. This is not necessarily because the books are not there. However, for some reason despite the availability of appropriate resources such as Violet Harris' (1997) *Using Multiethnic Literature in K-8 Classroom* that clearly identifies some basic criteria to consider for this purpose, some classroom teachers, like most pre-service teachers we have worked with remain unsure as to how to select such books. When uncertainty sets in, as Henderson (2005) observes about a former student's experience, some may simply fill the void in their curriculum with classic stories with which they were familiar growing-up. Although this is a good survival strategy because classics are celebrated within our educational and scholarly community for their artistic and aesthetic merit, some contain cultural content that may be problematic. Therefore, the story may be well-written and quite entertaining, but the characters and what they represent may be troubling, especially to young readers who look like these fictional characters.

This strategy of falling back to an old classic tale can be a nightmare to teacher educators, since most of us, like Henderson take the trouble to expose student teachers to a variety of books about our

diverse cultures, and to a cross section of professional resources that would facilitate the process as well. However, when a former student - now a teacher - is still unable to select wisely, it cannot only be frustrating but also disturbing, as we learn from Henderson's experience. For example, he could not understand how a former student [now a teacher in her own right] would actually think that by including *Little Black Sambo* in her curriculum she was indeed exposing children to African American culture.¹ Although Henderson eventually helped her figure things out, not many schoolteachers have direct access to professors who are willing to patiently guide them *again* through the process of selecting books; neither do most remain in touch with their professors, or have the resources to take advanced literature courses or workshops where this exposure would occur. The situation can be complicated further when teachers have to decide on the cultural relevance of books to their curriculum identified as international literature, and those labeled multicultural. This notwithstanding, we argue that schoolteachers should include both sets of literature in their curriculum, especially as it pertains to Black culture. It is the only way they would get a comprehensive understanding of who Blacks are, the cultural origins of their traditions, and fate as a people vis `a vis Eurocentric cultures. We will begin by explaining our definitions of international and domestic multiculturalism; then we would demonstrate one way teachers can integrate both types of literature in their classrooms, as we focus specifically on literature about African and African Americans. We would conclude the essay with a general discussion on the advantages of incorporating both types of literature in the K-8 curriculum.

Children's Literature: International and Domestic Multiculturalism

What exactly is international children's literature? To Freeman and Lehman (2001), this type of literature basically is published in countries outside of the United States. Many perceive this literature culturally diverse primarily because it reflects multiple experiences and cultures across the globes. Some educators in the United States, however, are skeptical of this kind of diversity, partly because American society already reflects an array of cultures from racial/ethnic categories through gender and lifestyle considerations (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002).

In their book, *Global Perspectives in Children's Literature*, Freeman and Lehman (2001) not only clarify this issue but also provide pertinent information about international children's literature and its importance to the understanding of our global cultural diversity. To them, education should "foster children's understanding and appreciation for others so they can actively participate as citizens in a global community" (p. 12). One way teachers can promote this kind of understanding they believe, is through international children's literature. Despite this benefit to the curriculum, many schoolteachers are still not familiar with international children's literature, especially those that originate from non-Eurocentric traditions.² Perhaps this lack of awareness is partly due to the fact that international literature may inadvertently "compete" with multicultural literature - literature many in the United States believe truly reflects our cultural reality as "Americans," hence emphasizes what we may refer to as domestic diversity.

Temple et al (2002) define multicultural literature as "literature that reflects the multitude of cultural groups within the United States" (p. 84). They argue that although they see value in an "inclusive definition, . . . a broad definition dilutes the focus" (p. 84). We understand perfectly what they mean; however, they make it sound as though global diversity and domestic diversity are competing for space within the American school curriculum. This should not be so. Norton (2005), on the other hand, advocates a much more inclusive definition focusing exclusively on ethnicity without necessarily distinguishing global from domestic diversity. From her perspective, the two forms of cultural diversity are interdependent. We find her definition particularly interesting, especially when she makes the connection between the cultures of the old world, as in Africa and those of the new world, as in America. She remarks that, "our journey through the study of African American literature includes both the literature from Africa and from the Americas," and that "African American traditional literature . . . cannot be understood and appreciated without also studying the literature that provides the foundations for it; namely African folklore" (p. 15). Thus, like Freeman and Lehman

(2001), she acknowledges a certain interconnectedness among cultures, in this case, between African and African American.

In his article, “Multicultural Literature and the Politics of Reaction,” Joel Taxel (2003) takes the debate one step further providing a slightly more complex definition of multicultural literature advanced by Cai and Bishop. For these children’s literature scholars there are three kinds: “World literature, Cross-cultural literature, and Parallel literature” (as quoted by Cai and Bishop, 1994, pp. 65-67; p. 144). Each of these three can therefore be considered multicultural literature depending on the individual and his/her purpose. Without necessarily rejecting this view, Taxel (2003) simply reminds educators and authors of their social responsibility to all children. This means despite our lack of consensus as to how the term should be defined, or how the concept should be implemented in practice, we may still be held accountable. And as Cai (2003) adds we must never lose sight of the fact that books do impact children in ways that many may not realize.

We gather from this debate then that in as much as African American literature and literature set in Africa emphasize different cultural experiences in their capacities as multicultural and international literatures, it is still important to read them simultaneously. We believe that regardless, of how educators reconfigure the cultural diversity landscape, there will still be an overlap among cultures, especially between African and African American literary traditions (Harris, 1997; Norton, 2005). In this case, literature set in Africa, although considered rightly as international literature, continues to be relevant to our overall understanding of African American cultures and people. We are not arguing here that African and African American cultures are one and the same; rather, we are suggesting that to fully understand Black experience as a collective whole it is important to read the international version of its literature vis `a vis the domestic version. In the closing chapter of their edited book, Henderson and May (2005) share a dialogue they had with Dianne Johnson, a children’s literature scholar and children’s book author on this topic. Johnson, they note (2005) declares that, “multiculturalism has to be interpreted in terms of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the limited states and of the world” and that “multicultural children’s literature, like any literature, [is] a cultural product that can help people to think about their own humanity as individuals and as members of small and large communities” (p. 371). Multicultural literature, therefore, whether from a global or a domestic perspective remains a cultural product that has tremendous value to the community at large and to the schools. What we, as educators should do then is harness the benefits it provides as we seek to understand who we are right now, where we came from, and how we can make our world more accepting of everyone. It is for all these reasons that we advocate for the pairing of books about Africans with books about African Americans in the classrooms, especially those that explore similar themes or issues.

It is true that there are some cultural differences that exist between Africans and African Americans; and that there may be friction among pockets within the groups. When it comes to the school curriculum, however, Black culture in general unsettles many educators just as it fascinates some. However, with consistent exposure to high quality literature, be it international or domestic, this pervasive uneasiness and/or objectification of blackness may slowly dissipate. Thus, although literature set in Africa may not necessarily fall under the domestic category of multicultural literature, we will reiterate that it is worthy of the classroom teacher’s attention. Teachers need to be familiar with this body of literature in order to further understand African American children, and recent African immigrants’ children, and how Black culture has evolved over the centuries, just like they need to be well versed with other types of multicultural literature that are available to us.³

A good place for teachers to start looking for possible books to include in their curriculum would be with award-winning books that depict Black culture in Africa and America. Why start here, some may ask? We would go ahead and acknowledge that whether educators would admit it or not, there is something magical about awards within the American culture. For lack of a better word, they seem to add more “value” to products, ideas, professionals, and yes, to books as well, and as Kidd (2007) notes, they “prolong the shelf life of a book” (p. 178). Sometimes, we ponder the obsession over awards. However, having taught children’s literature at the college level for more than ten years, in the departments of English and Education, we have come to appreciate the warm glow on our pre-service teachers’ faces when they discover that a book they liked had won an award, regardless of how minor or major the award really is. So we reckon there’s some cultural value in this word and/or idea called AWARD.

Some key awards given out specifically to books that portray Black cultural experiences include Coretta Scott King award and Children Africana Book Award. However, there are other mainstream awards in the United States such as the Newbery Medal and the Caldecott Medal, and now the Notable Books for a Global Society that also recognize books that have depicted African and African American cultures.⁴ Some concerns have been raised about award-winning books though. In his analysis of three award-winning historical fiction novels [*Words by Heart*, *The Slave Dancer*, and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*], Taxel (1986) draws readers' attention to the culturally flawed content of the first two books. In doing so, he reiterates the point of balancing aesthetic consideration with cultural and historical accuracy to establish quality. This is so that the "demands for realistic, non stereotyped characters, and for historical and cultural accuracy and authenticity in writing about the black experience, need not conflict with the demand for literary excellence"(Taxel,1986, p. 249). Thus, when selecting literature for a unit on Africans and African Americans, like literature from other ethnic and social groups, teachers should therefore remember that cultural content is equally a great indicator of quality as literary aesthetics regardless of whether the book in question has won an award or not.

Representations of Black Culture in Children's and Adolescent Literature

When it comes to literature about Africa - its people and culture, like African American literature, educators are still wrestling with issues of aesthetic sensibilities, cultural authenticity and representation (Sims, 1982, 1983; Taxel, 1986; Osa, 1995; Harris, 1997; Randolph, 2004; Henderson, 2005; Yenika-Agbaw, 2008). Nancy Larrick (1965) drew people's attention to this a long time ago in her article, "The All-White World of Children's Literature." Since then other educators have replicated the study with similar results, or have identified stereotypes that persist despite the small gains made over the years (MacCann and Woodard, 1972; Chall, Radwin, French, and Hall, 1979; Sims 1982, 1983; Osa, 1995; Martin, 2004). Karen Sands-O'Connor (2005a; 2005b) also detects similar stereotypes about West Indian Blacks in British children's literature, just like Randolph (2002, 2004), Kuntz (2005), Yenika-Agbaw (2008) and other scholars have pointed out some in books about Africa set in the United States.

Although literature for children set in Africa continues to be dominated by stereotypes (Osa, 1995; Maddy and MacCann, 1996; MacCann 2001; Maddy and MacCann, 2002; Yenika-Agbaw, 2008), some of the authors attempt to capture the complexity of the cultural experiences in their books. This notwithstanding, the problem remains endemic partly because of the capitalistic nature of our society and the role publishers play in aiding and abetting this socially irresponsible behavior from otherwise talented individuals. In an e-mail correspondence with Brenda Randolph, the director of AccessAfrica project, award-winning author, Cristina Kessler remarked that her book, *The Bee Keeper of Lalibela: A Tale from Africa* originally did not have a subtitle. The subtitle, she said was later added by her publishers, much to her surprise (email correspondence, 2007). The understanding then is that a subtitle that mentions the continent will sound more appealing to the average American book buyer, hence adding more commercial value to the precious picture book. Dan Hade reiterated this point emphasizing that "80 percent of children's books are published by only eight companies;" and in addition, that corporations such as Disney and Viacom "play an enormous role in deciding which children's books will meet commercial success" (Trotter, 2007). Moreover, McNair (2008) discovered that Scholastic, one of the major book clubs for students and teachers, did not include many selections of literature written or illustrated by people of color. From all indications then there is no doubt that corporations inadvertently decide what needs to be published and also who should author a particular book. We are drawing attention to these issues so teachers should also be aware of this capitalistic frenzy that has taken hold of the publishing industry, and forcing us to read only *what they want us to read*.

Domestic and International Multicultural Literature in the Classroom

As the twenty-first century unfolds, there's now a certain urgency to re-open the dialogue on multicultural children's literature, especially since we currently live in a world where national, international, digital, and corporate cultures are competing for our children's attention. Even then children's literature for the most part, is still identified primarily with Europe and/or Euro-American cultures, thereby rendering nonwhite cultures invisible. It remains Eurocentric in nature, theory, scholarship, and practice with well-meaning scholars ignoring literature about children of color. Interestingly, children's literature has always been marginalized in the academy and now with the overly emphasis on standardized test it is fast disappearing from classrooms across the United States. However, what is worse is the fact that multicultural literature, in a sense had never really been fully recognized as an integral part of this broad discipline we refer to as children's literature. This notwithstanding, we are arguing that not only is it a valid subgenre of children's literature in its own right, but that recognizing the existence of multicultural literature in all its complexities and forms is beneficial to children.

Considering the current reality of globalization, Eurocentric children's literature must now publicly share space with multicultural literature, and if black literature for children [which is an inherent part of this subgenre], whether from a domestic or international perspective unsettles literary scholars and educators who work with children, then frankly, we must declare that the issue is not with the literature itself but with the individuals. Serving as gatekeepers in terms of how stories are disseminated, it is easy to interpret any form of resistance to literatures other than the one these individuals have been schooled or socialized to uphold as the standard as tantamount to exclusion. This is an issue that educators should ponder.

We are imploring that educators make both domestic and international multicultural literature, and in particular literature about black children an integral part of their curriculum. Not only do these literatures provide us with possible outlets through which we can further understand Black people and their customs in the continent and in the diaspora, to an extent, they expose us to our racialized history as a people. In so doing, they begin to fill gaps in our official narratives told from Eurocentric perspectives and/or by white folks. Such stories may also reveal the sources of racial/ethnic gender, and class tension amongst people of African descent, and between black and whites in our global community. Reading literature about our diverse cultures is of utmost importance in the twenty-first century. A greater understanding, perhaps of how people have struggled in the past and are still struggling to co-exist as "racialized," "genderized," and "classized" Others would enable us to rethink our role in perpetuating social injustice in society. We do not expect miracles to happen overnight, for as Dianne Johnson reminds us "Anglo-American parents and book buyers are not, for whatever reasons, consciously or not, purchasing books with images of non-white characters" (Henderson and May, 2005, p. 371). We believe, however, that as we evolve as an "inclusive' society, with time this may change; and we are eagerly looking forward to that moment.

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Notes:

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1. Helen Bannerman's (1899) picture book, *Little Black Sambo* has caused a lot of controversy for decades. For some details on this book and the controversy check out the following sites:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1567555>
<http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/picaninny/>
<http://www.hbook.com/magazine/articles/1990-96/bader.asp>
<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/childlit/Lectures/PLC%20lect%202-06.ppt>
2. As a matter of fact in "Using International Literature to Enhance the Curriculum," Clark, Ruth Cox, Maureen White, & Nancy Bluemel (2004) define international literature as "books originally written in English by authors in countries such as New Zealand, England, Australia or Canada, then published or distributed in the U. S." And secondly, as "books first published in a foreign language, then translated and published in the U.S." (Unpaged in the online version of an article that was originally published in *Teacher Librarian*, volume31, issue 5, pp. 12-15). Nowhere in their definition does a list of books published in continental Africa feature; one could only speculate that they might have insinuated this in the second half of their definition. Even then, it is not clear.
3. See suggestions on selection criteria for multicultural literature and some possible instructional ideas in Violet Harris' *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-12 Classroom* and Pamela Gates & Dianne L Mark's *Cultural Journeys*.
4. See The American Library Association website for a complete listing; also check out the websites of the different awarding institutions for specific titles.

Write4Children

Discussion Paper: Zen and the Craft of Writing for Children *or as Antony Hope Hawkins said*

‘Unless One Is a Genius it is Better to Aim at Being
Intelligible’

- further Conversation with Katherine Langrish

Peter Hunt

Formerly of Cardiff University

Katherine Langrish has provided a useful corrective to my rather over-analytical - nay, academic - approach to creative writing. Not that I'm particularly repentant - academics are, after all, paid (slightly) to make things difficult - mostly because I was writing for people who want to learn a craft, rather than those who rely on inspiration. One of the great losses of the modern world seems to me to be the erosion of the apprentice system, where young craftspeople could learn by imitation and observation - and I was putting forward the case that aspiring writers could do worse than learn from their predecessors.

As for my suggestion that writing for children is more difficult than writing for adults, Ms Langrish wonders whether I think the difficulty lies in ‘bridging the experiential gap between the child reader and the adult reader’. She very shrewdly points out the corollary that writing for adults must involve ‘less mediation and more shared experience’ and that, in any case, ‘adult readers are also pretty diverse.’ Yet I have to say that if we are assuming, when we write for adults, a certain shared level of experience of life and language, then, yes, writing for adults *is* easier. We write diverse books for diverse adults - the audiences that we *imply* when writing, say, chick-lit or lad-lit, as opposed to serious political fiction, are different - but we assume that there is a great deal that we all have in common, ‘adulthood’, perhaps, and that our adult readers are simply choosing which kind of adult they want to be while they are reading. Childhood, as someone nearly said, is a foreign country and although its inhabitants are diverse too, they have in common something that Peter Hollindale identified as ‘Childness’ - and that *necessarily* infuses their books. (*Signs of Childness* published by that most pragmatic - if not actually anti-academic - of editors, Nancy Chambers, is worth a read. (South Woodchester: The Thimble Press, 1997)

Children's books and adults' books *are* different - and obviously to describe the ways in which they are different, or the things that writers think about (or, perhaps, *ought* to think about) is pretty laborious. Ms Langrish sorts this all out in her subconscious, as perhaps all good authors do - but it might just be that apprentice writers need such a truism to be pointed out: to say that you are simply writing a book, without making any adjustment, conscious or unconscious, does not accord much with reality. Arthur Ransome, famously, wrote:

‘You write not *for* children, but for yourself, and if, by good fortune, children enjoy what you enjoy, why then you are a writer of children's books.’

Aidan Chambers (and he was not alone) would have none of this:

‘All very well... but it is difficult to believe on the evidence of Ransome’s books that, had he really thought he was speaking to an adult audience primarily, he would have adopted the same tone of voice or would have treated his stories in the way he does. Even a traditional critical reading of his books...must surely reveal that Ransome’s books are for children in quite specific ways.’ (Aidan Chambers, *Booktalk*, London: The Bodley Head, 1985, 41.)

Writers may not *consciously* think of their audience - but they *must* think of them: we make an adjustment for audience with every act of communication.

Which brings me to the most serious criticism that Ms Langrish makes of my views: that thinking about such things may be positively detrimental to the act of writing - which would be a bad thing indeed. She concedes that analysis has its place: we need muscles, and bones, and blood to kick a football into a goal, and it is useful to know how those things work. ‘But who could ever kick a successful goal whilst consciously thinking about the co-ordination of these things?’ Again, I couldn’t agree more: like J. D. Salinger’s Seymour (in *Seymour: an Introduction*) the successful writer, goal-scorer, stoop-ball player does not, in the instant of play, analyse what he/she is doing. Zen guides the pen or the boot. You surrender yourself to the moment. But only at that point. You don’t score great goals without years of training and practice, of honing your skills, of understanding, one way or the other, what you are doing. While I would like my dentist to be an artist who plies the drill with inspired skill, I also want him to have years of experience.

One conclusion to draw from all this may well be that academics, students of literature, might be well-advised to keep away from Creative Writing. I’d probably agree with that too, were it not for the thousands of creative writing courses and circles and festivals around the country. (Although I’m not sure that they do much harm. One of the students on an MA that I once taught on was a self-taught best-selling author (who thought it might be useful to learn how to write) and I worried that our pinning-the-butterfly approach might actually damage the inspiration. However as that author’s current web-site lists a dozen million-selling titles: I don’t think we can have done much harm - although what *good* we did is more questionable.)

So it seems to me that the very idea of ‘teaching’ creative writing must be based on the idea that writers have stories to tell, but with rare exceptions, need help with handling the language. Only a few lucky people can dance before they can walk.

All of which leads me to the idea that perhaps Ms Langrish and I are more in agreement than we seem - which was borne out by sampling ‘advice to young writers’ from my favourite book of authorial quotations (Jon Winoker’s *Writers on Writing* (London: Headline, 1988):

Truman Capote:

Writing has laws of perspective, of light and shade, just as painting does, or music. If you are born knowing them, fine. If not, learn them. Then rearrange the rules to suit yourself. (91)

William Faulkner:

Read, read, read. Read everything - trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it's good, you'll find out. (82)

Epictetus:

If you would be a reader, read; if a writer, write. (82)

and *Rilke:*

Nobody can advise and help you, nobody. There is only one single means. Go inside yourself. (95)

That book also contains probably the best advice about writing that I've ever come across (although it might be slightly tactless to quote it on in *Write4Children*), which comes from the American humorist S. J. Perelman:

Lay off the muses. It's a very tough dollar. (96)

References:

Aidan Chambers, *Booktalk*, (London: The Bodley Head, 1985)

Nancy Chambers ed., *Signs of Childness*, (South Woodchester: The Thimble Press, 1997)

J.D Salinger, *Raise High The Roof Beam; Seymour - An Introduction* (London, New York: Penguin, 2010 [1950])

Jon Winoker's *Writers on Writing* (London: Headline, 1988)

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Book Reviews

***Forbidden*, Tabitha Suzuma, (London: Definitions, 2010), 418 pages (paperback), ISBN 978-1-862-30816-9**

Forbidden is the fifth novel written by Tabitha Suzuma and is published by Definitions. It is a story that draws you in and stays with you once you have finished it. Once again Tabitha has taken a difficult subject, in this case sibling incest, and allowed the reader to explore it without any sense of sensationalism. It is a brave and powerful story that is intensely written.

Lochlan and Maya are brother and sister. As the jacket blurb states ‘...[s]he’s pretty and talented - sweet sixteen and never been kissed’ whilst ‘[h]e is seventeen, gorgeous and on the brink of a bright future’. They are characters you can empathise with as they fight to keep their family together. Tabitha has convincingly removed their Mum from the story, by making her an alcoholic who spends her time with a new man ignoring the fact she has five children. When she does appear she is often drunk and creates chaos leaving Lochlan and Maya to rebuild their lives when she walks out again. It is easy to understand why they turn to each for the support they crave; even to understand why their need turns to love. As a reader you know it is wrong, yet you still empathise with them, still hoping that maybe it can work out.

It is a poignant and passionate story. Tabitha uses short sentences to highlight the sense of breathlessness and tension between Lochlan and Maya to great effect. It is also told from alternating points of view enabling the reader to understand how torn both Lochlan and Maya are. They know it is wrong and try to fight it but they are not strong enough. Throughout the story there are moments of pure happiness which makes you believe there may be a happy ending, but there can’t be. It can only end one way.

Tabitha has had the foresight to set up a forum which has allowed readers to discuss the issues in this novel and has created a safe place for them to go in order to ask questions. ([http://www.goodreads.com/group/show/36361.Discussion about FORBIDDEN with the author Tabitha Suzuma](http://www.goodreads.com/group/show/36361.Discussion+about+FORBIDDEN+with+the+author+Tabitha+Suzuma)) She seems to know naturally how to deal with contentious issues that make them accessible and understandable without creating a great furore. Tabitha is one of the best writers for teenagers around at the moment; brave enough to give them vicarious experiences that allow them to develop and understand the world they live in. Her sixth novel on euthanasia, should make for an interesting read!

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***On Writing*, Graeme Harper, (Bristol, New Writing Viewpoints Series for Multilingual Matters, 2010), 125 pages (paperback), ISBN 978-1-84769-256-6**

On Creative Writing is a book that asks questions of itself and of those of us who are Creative Writers. Graeme Harper, who is a Professor of Creative Writing, is asking us to consider what actually Creative Writing is whilst encouraging us to use our own experiences and understanding of Creative Writing to reflect on how to increase our knowledge of it. It is part of the series *New Writing Viewpoints*, which is also edited by Graeme Harper which ultimately aims to inform teaching and research with a primary focus on the analysis of Creative Writing practice and theory.

The book is divided into two parts. These are based on two propositions that Harper puts forward in his Introduction. Part I is based on the proposition that: 'Creative Writing involves a set of activities, or process that can be discovered by the investigation of disseminated works.' Part II is based on the premise that 'Creative Writing involves personal and social activities with the intention of producing art and communication.' In the Introduction Harper offers statements that he poses as questions for each proposition. It is these statements/questions that form the basis of the chapter structure.

On Creative Writing is written with clarity using language that sits equally comfortably with undergraduates as with those who are taking a post graduate approach to Creative Writing. Harper highlights how Creative Writing as a practice is fluid particularly when being discussed as the Creative Writer will often slip easily and seamlessly between an individual approach and a holistic one. Importantly he acknowledges that as a practice Creative Writing never stands still for long and he takes this into account throughout by often asking questions of his questions. He encourages writers to make a connection between an academic viewpoint and that of their own writing by offering new tools. Throughout the chapters Harper also offers suggestions and explanations in response to the question posed in the chapter heading. It is only in the Conclusion that he finally makes some more definitive statements.

This is a book that would be useful to all, from undergrads to lecturers, who are interested in Creative Writing as a subject. Harper does makes you think by raising your awareness of Creative Writing and emphasising the human-centredness of it. He encourages you to ask questions of yourself and your subject. With this in mind Harper ends the book saying, 'Creative Writing is, after all, one of our most enduring and most significant human activities.' Something that those of us involved in Creative Writing cannot deny.

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***Tall Story*, Candy Gourlay, (London: David Fickling Books, 2010), 304 pages (hardback), ISBN 978-0385-61894-6**

Tall Story is the debut novel by Candy Gourlay. Published by David Fickling Books, it is a refreshing and astute coming of age novel where Candy manages to weave a poignant and tantalising story that starts in two very different cultures, whilst using this as a basis to celebrate difference as well as assimilation.

The blurb for the book starts with a cliché, - 'Be careful what you wish for...' This 'you' refers to Andi, a small girl who wants to be a proper sister. She also wants her own bedroom as well as play basketball for her school team. Andi does have a half brother and due to strict immigration laws, he has been stuck in the Philippines, until now. Bernardo finally gets the papers which will allow him to travel to Britain to be with his Mother and her husband and his half sister Andi. He is sixteen and had previously lived with his Aunt and Uncle in the Philippines where he is surrounded by superstition and myths. Andi gets all her wishes but not necessarily in the way she wants. For a start when she first sees Bernardo she realises he is not just tall but he is a giant at eight feet tall with size 22 feet but isn't particularly interested in basketball. Nothing is what she expects.

This beautifully written story of two siblings draws the reader in, enveloping them in an emotional roller coaster. The basketball thread continues throughout but not to the detriment of the tale. If you don't understand basketball it won't stop your enjoyment of the story. There is a wry humour and quirkiness right the way through accompanied by twists and turns that make you hold your breath as you read.

Candy Gourlay was born in Manila and having worked for several years as a journalist finally settled in the UK. It is Candy's knowledge and understanding of the Philippines which adds depth and colour to the narrative. She is still writing using various mediums including a prolific blog (<http://notesfromthelushpile.co.uk/>) and maintaining her cutting edge image Candy has created a website specifically for *Tall Story* at <http://www.tallstory.net/>

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Nought to Nine

by Rachel Rooney

A ring made of gold, a doughnut and hole,
something that's nothing that's easy to roll.

A periscope raised, a walking stick,
the cut of a cake and a candle's new wick.

A swan on a lake, a nun knelt in prayer,
an FA Cup handle raised in the air.

The pout of a mouth, a bird flying over,
a bra on a line, two leaves of a clover.

A neatly pressed ribbon, a kite without string
the nose of a witch and an arm in a sling.

The hand of a pirate, a flat-headed snake,
an apple divided, the latch on a gate.

A teardrop to wipe, a cherry and stalk,
the speech mark to use when your words start to talk.

Half a triangle, a fox's ear tip,
an arrow, an arm of a hand on a hip.

Balancing balls and a circular kiss,
a hoop with a waist and a rope in a twist.

A hook in a curtain, chameleon's tongue,
the whistle to blow when this poem is done.

This is from Rachel Rooney's forthcoming publication, *The Language of Cat*, published by Frances Lincoln (May 2011). Look out for the review of this text in our next edition.

Australasian/Oceania Special edition of Write4Children

We are delighted to announce a call for papers for our first special edition which is to be a special Australasian / Oceania Edition, to be published in the second half of 2011 which is being edited by Dr Tony Eaton of Canberra University. CFP:

The special edition will seek to provide a range of perspectives from Australia, New Zealand, Oceania and Asia on 'Writing for Children', including the creative practice, the cultural, the theoretical, and the critical.

- **DISCUSSION PAPERS** should be between 1000 - 3000 words
- **ARTICLES** should be between 2000 - 5000 words, accompanied by an abstract of not more than 100 words, and six keywords for indexing purposes.
- All papers accepted will be double-blind peer reviewed.

At this point, we are seeking **abstracts of no more than 200 words** to be submitted to tony.eaton@canberra.edu.au no later than **20 December, 2010**. Completed papers will be due by April 30, 2011

Poetry Debate within the April Edition

Rachel Rooney will be introducing this with a discussion on the gap between children's and adult's poetry. If you wish to participate in this initial debate on poetry and children we would like to invite you to send articles, discussion papers, or reviews to write4children@winchester.ac.uk by February 1st 2011. (It should be noted that this edition is not to be a special edition on poetry other articles are still welcome.)

Student Review

Calling all Post Grad and MA students we would like to invite you to submit reviews of books you have engaged with (both creative and critical). This is a good opportunity to publish in a recognised academic journal. Reviews should be no more than 750 words long and should adhere to our submission guidelines (see webpage www.write4children.org)

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Write4Children

Call For Papers

Next edition is 1st April 2011.

Submission Deadline 1st September 2011

Instructions for Authors

All papers for Write4Children must be submitted via an email with attachment to write4children@winchester.ac.uk

1. Articles should be between 2000 and 5000 words. They should be accompanied by an abstract of not more than 200 words, and six keywords for indexing purposes.
2. All papers for the Write4Children must be submitted via an email with attachment to write4children@winchester.ac.uk
3. Papers should be submitted as one file with, where possible, all tables and figures in the correct place in the text.
4. Footnotes should be avoided. Essential notes should be numbered in the text and grouped together at the end of the article. Diagrams and Figures, if they are considered essential, should be clearly related to the section of the text to which they refer. The original diagrams and figures should be submitted with the top copy.
5. References should be set out in alphabetical order of the author's name in a list at the end of the article. Please use the Harvard Referencing style.
6. Once the refereeing procedures are completed, authors should supply a word-processor file (on disc, CD-ROM or by e-mail attachment) containing the final version of their manuscript. Files should be saved in Microsoft Word. Tables and Figures (TIFF or EPS format preferred) should be saved in separate files from the rest of the manuscript.
7. The author of an article accepted for publication will receive page proofs for correction, if there is sufficient time to do so. This stage must not be used as an opportunity to revise the paper, because alterations are extremely costly; extensive changes will be charged to the author and will probably result in the articles being delayed to a later issue. Speedy return of corrected proofs is important.

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