REALISTIC FICTION FOR CHILDREN

A SENIOR THESIS
PRESENTED TO
THE DIRECTOR OF THE HONORS PROGRAM
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
for
GRADUATION WITH HONORS

by
PEGGY L. MANSFIELD
ADVISER - EMERITA SCHULTE

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
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I recommend this thesis for acceptance by the Honors Program of Ball State University for graduation with honors.

[Signature]

Thesis Adviser
Department of English

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The reading and discussion of appropriate realistic fiction can aid children who experience problems to develop favorable psychological attitudes.

Overview

For the purpose of substantiating the idea presented in the previous statement the writer has developed four chapters and a summary chapter which present a reason for realism in children's literature, theory supporting bibliotherapy, and the guided use of realistic fiction in the classroom. In addition to the introduction, chapter one includes criteria for defining realistic fiction. In chapter two the writer discusses: (1) children as well-informed individuals; (2) the relevancy of realistic fiction to children; and, (3) benefits children can gain from realistic fiction. Chapter three is devoted to the role of the classroom teacher and the concept of bibliotherapy. Procedures a teacher might follow when incorporating realistic fiction into the curriculum, specific situations and applicable books are presented in chapter four. Chapter five summarizes the main points of the thesis. An expanded, annotated bibliography divided according to the major concern
of each book appears in the appendix.

WHAT IS REALISTIC FICTION?

For the purposes of this study, realistic fiction is defined as fiction which presents current concerns in a lifelike manner. The focus here is on realistic fiction written for children in the intermediate grade levels, generally grades four, five, and six.

To determine the quality of literature certain criteria must be considered. First, realistic fiction must meet standards set for all fiction. A few criteria state that a good story should have: (1) a substantial theme which seems to develop naturally in the story and avoids moralizing; (2) a credible plot which is logical, well developed, action packed, conclusive, and original; (3) believable characters who are human and memorable; and, (4) appropriate style that combines clarity, ease of reading, natural dialogue, and rich expression so that the story is not merely a "watered down" version of adult literature. ¹

In addition to meeting standards of good literature and being absorbing reading, realistic fiction needs to answer basic needs of children such as the need for security, belonging, and self-confidence. Realistic fiction should provide for development of insight into personal problems

¹Charlotte Huck and Doris Young Kuhn, Children's Literature in the Elementary School, pp. 21-22.
and accordingly convince the reader that he is capable of facing and resolving problems.  

Moreover it is thought that a problem should be of primary concern but should be presented without moralizing. A story should be directed toward modern children or be of universal appeal to be considered valuable realistic fiction.

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Chapter II

MODERN DAY CHILDREN AND
REALISTIC LITERATURE

The modern world is complex and demanding. People living today must face and solve problems and adjust to changes if they are to function within their intricate environment. Parents, children, old and young alike need to meet demands and to achieve harmony with their surroundings if they are to know happiness.

Children Are an Informed Part of the World

Children are not sheltered from life as it really exists because their world is intertwined with the adult world. Children are in the midst of serious problems. Most children are aware of or have experienced conflict, hate, disruption, poverty or other unpleasant aspects of social being.

They [children] sit with their parents around the same television screen and watch the same programs, they read the same newspapers. . . .

In a recent article, Julius Lester wrote, in reference to

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his childhood: "... I had to be an adult to cope with the world in which I lived."\(^4\)

Lester continues with the idea of the enlightened child in relation to books written for children:

We talk about a child's world as if it were totally separate from our own. It is not. But in books we write and publish for children we create a world that bears little resemblance to the one the child is growing up into--our own . . . . We present them [children] with fantasy, nonsense, and fairy tales, none of which are bad. However they do not represent the totality of a child's world.\(^5\)

Lester also states:

Stories that have no other purpose than sheer fun are good . . . . But they are not, by themselves sufficient for the world in which the child will grow to be an adult.\(^6\)

An agreeing point of view was expressed by Frances Humphreville: "... in real life the everyday situations and many of their endings are not always--happily ever after."\(^7\)

Children Want Realistic Literature

According to Ervin Gaines, present day children


\(^5\)Ibid.

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Frances Humphreville, "Realistic Reading and Literature," Elementary English, 46:537, April, 1969.
choose literature that deals with more mature subject matter, perhaps indicating that they prefer to read about the more realistic treatment of life as opposed to "sugar-coated" versions. He also implies that children's literature has not kept up with children's demands for the expression of adult attitudes in what they read.

... A revolution in children's reading habits has rolled over us without evoking a response equal to the scope of the change ... and people knowledgeable about children--like parents--observe that their offspring turn more readily to audio and visual representation, while those who do read move into publications designed for adults at an earlier age than formerly.

Sheila Egoff, in an evaluative article on children's books, suggests that because children are exposed to many of the same informative media as their parents, they tend to prefer realistic fiction. Continuing from a previous quote from Egoff: "... and in many cases they [children] own the same books as their parents just as they have done in the past whenever their own literature did not satisfy them." 9

Children Can Benefit From Realistic Fiction

If children find that realism in literature meets their needs then undoubtedly they can benefit from such

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9Egoff, op. cit., p. 150.
literature. Possible positive results from a child's reading of realistic fiction could be the following: identifying his problems, seeing that others share his problem, preparing for future problems, gaining insight, and forming solutions to problems.

The common occurrence of a reader's identifying with characters in a story can be especially desirable if the story has a "true to life" quality. The reader may see traits in a character which he sees in himself or he may relate events in his own life to events in the story. For example, an overweight boy might identify with Bertie in *Bertie Comes Through*\(^\text{10}\) or a girl faced with adjusting to a new home and being accepted by new peers could associate her problems with those of Sue in *The Janitor's Girl*.\(^\text{11}\) However, simply identifying with characters because of similarity to one's self or because of admiration for the character, where the reader has no specific problem or adjustment to face, is important to reaching mental maturity. A child's faith in himself and his future is a matter of feeling which grows . . . from identifying himself voluntarily with ideals or models. Reading or having read to him, interesting, lively stories about other children like himself in some ways can strengthen the growth of such a feeling.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{10}\) Henry Felsen, *Bertie Comes Through*.

\(^{11}\) Frieda Friedman, *The Janitor's Girl*.

Identification with a character is not sole assurance of needed results. "We cannot be certain, of course, that such identification will help the child adjust to his own situation or to develop a wholesome personality."  

However, for the child reader the realization of a problem and association of the problem with a similar one in a story is an initial step toward beneficial results from realistic fiction.

Another positive reason for a child's reading realistic fiction is for the child to gain more perspective about his problems in relation to problems of others. A problem to a child may seem terribly serious so that he believes that no solution exists or that no one else has ever encountered such a plight. "Moreover, this approach promotes an awareness that 'no man is an island,' and that problems that seem unique are universal."  

Providing children with "true to life" literature may not only correlate with their childhood experiences as previous quotes suggest, but may be of possible help in the future.


The world . . . in which these elementary children will live may well be more crowded, more filled with small frustrations, more difficult to adjust to, and will probably be filled with numerous incidents requiring fast but very careful decisions from them.  

As a result of reading realistic fiction, it is believed that children might be better prepared to resolve problems later in their own lives.

A final result of a child's reading of realistic fiction would be better understanding of his problems and possibly formation of solutions. Even though the previous result would seem to be a logical development, it would probably not occur for a child without some special inducements from an adult. Suggested procedures to promote more complete benefit from realistic fiction will be discussed in chapter four.

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Chapter III

ROLE OF THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

If the ultimate goal of education is to develop well rounded members of society, then every aspect of the individual student must be taken into consideration. Not only academic growth, but physical, social, and psychological development should occur during the years children spend in school. Consequently it is the duty of the school and each teacher to aid the growth of children in all aspects of development.

Schools can justify their existence only to the extent that they are able to help children and youth learn what they need to know for a productive, useful, and satisfying life. . . . Children must grow in knowledge, sensitivity, and in human relations skills in order to reach their full stature as human beings. 17

Ultimately it is the responsibility of the classroom teacher to help her students mature.

The influence a classroom teacher has with her students can be very useful in guiding children to maturity and happiness. Often a teacher represents certain

17Muriel Crosby, Reading Ladders for Human Relations, p. 2.
characteristics of strength and understanding that children admire. Numerous possibilities for guiding of student attitudes and adjustments are open to the classroom teacher. In part, each child's present success and happiness and undoubtedly his future success and happiness are dependent upon his teacher.18

BIBLIOThERAPY

The teacher can utilize books as a basis for guidance. "Books have a unique role in human relations education, for they help a child to live more fully in the world of reality. . . ."19 The vicarious experiences found through reading are of major importance in bibliotherapy. The term "bibliotherapy" perhaps implies an in-depth form of clinical analysis which involves books. However the consideration here is not bibliotherapy as an involved clinical process but as a term for associating the vicarious experiences of reading with situations in one's actual life and benefiting from the association. There are several related views of bibliotherapy: (1) "Bibliotherapy is simply healing with books;"20 (2) "Bibliotherapy


19 Crosby, op. cit., p. 3.

is the theory that personality and vicarious experience are related: "21 and, (3) "... bibliotherapy is both a therapy and a process of learning new attitudes and values..."22

The Process

The bibliotherapeutic process can be seen in three stages: (1) identification—the reader's associating of self with a major character in a book; (2) catharsis—the release of tension as a result of step one; and, (3) insight—the development of awareness and proper perspective of the problem as a result of tension release. In other words, the utilization of realistic fiction can be a way to achieve better understanding of psychological and physiological behavior of self and others through a bibliotherapeutic process.23

A book can promote psychological relief in two instances. In one case the reader may have an existing problem and through identification with a similar problem presented in a book, recognition and insight, logical steps to solving the problem, may emerge. In a second case where the reader has no existing problem, ideas from realistic fiction may be preventive bibliotherapy, which enables the


23 Charlotte Huck, Children's Literature, p. 264.
reader to cope with future potential problem situations because of having had a similar experience vicariously.\textsuperscript{24}

**Limitations and Precautions**

Although bibliotherapy can be successfully utilized by the classroom teacher, certain care in its use should be considered. "... bibliotherapy is an activity that lies within the province of every teacher working with children who are not seriously maladjusted and in need of clinical treatment."\textsuperscript{25} Not only should the classroom teacher not attempt to work with possible clinical cases, but caution needs to be taken with every child. "There can be considerable danger in giving a child a story which deals with his particular behavior problem."\textsuperscript{26} If a child's problem happens to be too serious for him to handle, confronting him with a simple solution in a story may stimulate negative results or cause the child to reject books.\textsuperscript{27} Similarly, too much stress on the bibliotherapeutic process, in any case, would not be wise. "The child's pleasure in a good book should not be destroyed by prying into his personal feelings about it, by making him talk, tell why, by forcing


\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 898.

\textsuperscript{26}May Hill Arbuthnot, *Children and Books*, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.
him to analyze." The prime caution, then, should be to avoid forcing a child into a discussion that could be disturbing for him.

Summary

Summarily, it may be said that any teacher choosing to utilize the process of bibliotherapy should carefully consider her procedure in relation to her students and be aware of precautions and limitations. Bibliotherapy is not to be used indiscriminately, with all children, in all settings, for all purposes, or by all teachers.

No claim is made . . . that bibliotherapy is a panacea with automatic and measurable results. Rather, it is one among many influences which may motivate a child's behavior in a positive way and contribute to his development.


29Moses, op. cit., p. 403.

30Clara Kircher, Behavior Patterns in Children's Books, p. 111.
Chapter IV

USE OF BIBLIOTHERAPY

The following are requirements for a teacher who wishes to utilize realistic fiction to develop maturity in her students: (1) familiarity with individual personalities; (2) establishment of rapport with students; (3) knowledge of reading ability of individual students; and, (4) familiarity with appropriate books.

By being familiar with individual personalities, the teacher can know which students have problems and which students would benefit from bibliotherapy. The nature of the teacher's approach depends on the characteristics of the individual students. For example, an extremely sensitive student would probably require caution and restraint on the part of the teacher. In addition a teacher may need to know a child's interests in order to select books and motivate independent reading.

For a teacher's attempts at guidance through bibliotherapy to be successful a relationship of mutual trust that would facilitate openness and understanding is essential. It would probably be of little use to attempt guidance discussion before such an informal classroom atmosphere
rapport with them, is familiar with the nature of bibliotherapy, and sees a need for guidance, bibliotherapy can begin in the classroom.

Initially the teacher should form a workable plan and set objectives. The plan should include specific books with which the children in question can relate and with which the teacher is familiar. When planning bibliotherapy, the teacher may wish to consider the size group she will work with and who will comprise the group. Perhaps small group discussions would be more effective but it may be desirable to include an entire class when topics are applicable to everyone. Effective ways to motivate reading are essential. Use of filmstrips, previews of books, recordings, open-ended discussions, and the like might be used to stimulate interest. However, undoubtedly the important part of a plan for bibliotherapy is the follow-up sessions after individual reading which give students a chance to think about, react to, and as a result gain insight from the literature.

To have greatest impact, follow-up sessions should occur as soon as possible after reading. Discussions should be planned to stimulate individual thought concerning actions of book characters or reactions to particular events in a book. Discussions should have a "... cumulative effect on building concepts and extending sensitivity." The following plan might effectively guide

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33Patricia Cianciolo, p. 899.
discussion toward beneficial thought: (1) retell highlights of the story; (2) analyze feelings and behavior of characters; (3) relate incidents to practical life situations; (4) discuss results of actions of the characters and possible alternative behavior; and, (5) draw conclusions or evaluate accomplishments of discussion. Probably the most worthwhile discussion is that related to practical situations. 

Questions posed by the teacher to stimulate discussion should require subjective answers thereby calling for individual thinking. Questions such as "How did you react to . . .?", "What would you have done when . . .?", or "How would you have felt?" allow for expression of individual attitudes.

Related role playing could be used to enhance discussion. For example, to accompany discussion of The Janitor's Girl one girl might try to imagine that she was Sue who had just moved to a new neighborhood and was going to a school where she had no friends. Other students could play the part of Rosalie, who thought a janitor's daughter was not so good as she, and the part of Cathy who wanted to be a friend of both girls. Additional situations for role playing might be: leaving friends when moving, going into a strange classroom of students, being ridiculed.

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34 Ibid.
35 Frances Humphreville, p. 537, 539.
36 Frieda Friedman, The Janitor's Girl.
or being ostracized. Possibly children could suggest problems to enact. 37

Hypothetical Situations

To further illustrate the entire classroom procedure for bibliotherapy the writer will propose two hypothetical situations and suggest a plan for the teacher to follow.

Situation one. Suppose a teacher of fifth or sixth grade is familiar with the beneficial use of realistic fiction, but has never tried it with her class. Rather than focus on a specific problem to begin with, she decides that guided discussions concerning human fortitude as exemplified in realistic fiction might be effective to develop more acceptable attitudes in several students. Four books concerning responsibility and courage shown by children and involving adventure are chosen by the teacher to stimulate student interest.

Snow Treasure, 38 Call It Courage, 39 The Black Pearl, 40 and Island of the Blue Dolphins, 41 are suggested to a small group by the teacher and the books made available to the students. The teacher may choose to read provocative

37 Humphreville, op. cit., p. 539.
38 Marie McSwigan, Snow Treasure.
39 Armstrong Sperry, Call It Courage.
40 Scott O'Dell, The Black Pearl.
41 Scott O'Dell, Island of the Blue Dolphins.
 excerpts from each book to motivate students to read on their own. When three or four students have read a book, the teacher begins discussion sessions. Initially to review the plot she may ask questions concerning the main points of the story. If discussing *Call It Courage*, for example, further discussion questions might be: "How did the chief's son feel when he overheard the other boys talking about him?"; "Did he want to leave the island?"; "Why then do you think he went out to sea by himself?"; "Would anyone like to tell about a time you had to do something you were afraid to do?"; "If you had been the chief's son, what would you have done?"; "What might have happened if he had not gone to sea?"; "Would he have gone if he had known what dangers he would find?"; "What did you learn from *Call It Courage*?".

**Situation two.** In another instance perhaps a teacher has students of mixed economic status and senses some difficulty in social relations. To give more affluent children an understanding of how less fortunate children live, the teacher could suggest *The Hundred Dresses*,42 *Queenie Peavy*,43 or *The Road to Agra*.44 Showing the film

42Eleanor Estes, *The Hundred Dresses*.
43Robert Burch, *Queenie Peavy*.
44Aimee Sommerfelt, *The Road to Agra*. 
"Other Fellow's Feelings" would be a good way to introduce discussion. Caution would need to be taken not to offend any student. All comments should be in reference to a book or film. After reviewing the plot, questions the teacher could pose concerning The Hundred Dresses might be: "How do you think Wanda felt when she could not wear clothes like the other girls?", "Why did she make drawings of dresses?", "Why were the other girls cruel to Wanda?", "How could Wanda have been happy despite her way of dress?", "If you knew someone like Wanda, what could you do to make her happy?". In the class just described, effect of the reading and discussion could probably be easily seen and evaluated by the teacher, since there is direct relationship to the immediate classroom environment.

45 Young America Films, Inc., Other Fellow's Feelings, 1953.
Chapter V

SUMMARY

Realistic fiction is fiction which deals honestly with contemporary concerns. Modern day children often face problems that cause them much bewilderment. They want and need realistic fiction to help them understand their environment more fully.

This study presents ways in which children can gain better understanding of life through realism in books. It should be the concern of each teacher to help her students toward mature attitudes. One way a teacher can promote desirable attitudes in her class is through bibliotherapy which includes guided discussions of appropriate realistic fiction. The entire class, a small group, or one student may be involved in informal discussion periods. Role playing is another means of focusing attention on the concerns of children.

When attempting to develop favorable attitudes in children the teacher needs to exercise caution. Harmful results may occur if deep feelings are probed, introspection is over-emphasized, or extremely troubled children are included in bibliotherapeutic sessions. There is disagreement
among authorities as to the benefit from bibliotherapy, since positive results are difficult to measure. In any case it should be noted that possibilities for success in molding attitudes through bibliotherapy are limited and results may not be immediately noticed.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Young America Films, Inc. *Other Fellow's Feelings*, 1953.
APPENDIX

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books which the writer feels are representative of valuable realistic fiction available to children have been selected according to the following categories: (1) Alcoholism and drugs; (2) Children without parents; (3) Death; (4) Family relations; (5) Human relations; and, (6) Mental and emotional health. For each book there is a short discussion of the plot, the nature of the problem treated in the book, and relevancy of the problem to children. The reading levels of the books vary but are generally for grades four through six, although the interest level of some books may be appropriate for junior high students.

Alcoholism and Drugs

Set in Harlem, The Contender is the story of a black boy, Alfred Brooks, who through strength and determination becomes an amateur boxer. Alfred overcomes fear and physical pain to prove to himself that he can be a contender. Yet he never forgets his boyhood "partner" who has become a drug addict.

The Contender is a captivating book that transfers
emotion to the reader. It emphasizes the reality of a Harlem slum but also deals with the universal theme of human strength.

In the manner of modern adult fiction Lipsyte writes from deeply within the boy's self and life of the ghetto. The reader suffers with Alfie's humiliations, is stirred by his strivings. Mechanics disappear, and between reader and struggling boy no obstacle stands.¹


Jim, who idolizes his older brother, Kevin, is terribly troubled by Kevin's use of marijuana and LSD. When Kevin is having a bad LSD trip, Jim calls a doctor and Kevin is taken to a hospital for treatment. Until Kevin's admittance to the hospital, the boys' middle class parents know nothing of Kevin's drug problem.

Tuned Out is of very current concern. It seems to be realistic while presenting the degrading aspects of drugs from a teenagers point of view. "To witness, as readers of this book must do, a boy struggling with a beloved older brother in the throes of a 'trip' . . . is horribly unforgettable. . . ."²


Jenny's twin has died and her mother just recovered

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from a breakdown and alcoholism, when her family moves to another state to begin a new life. Jennifer tells of the problems Jenny has with establishing new friendships and with the fear that her mother will return to alcoholism. Gradually Jenny begins to realize her mother's strength.

Jennifer combines the typical social problems of a young girl with the less typical but nevertheless existing problem of understanding the alcoholic. The book:

... touches on two painful subjects--the death of a child and alcoholism, both of which exist as real or potential problems in many American homes... and... are met here with understanding and compassion.

Children Without Parents


Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is a description of the fate of children near the time of the Korean War who have American fathers, Korean mothers and have been deserted by both parents. The story relates the experiences of four such boys who came to live together under a bridge in Korea.

The reader is concerned with the hostile attitude and neglect shown toward the children. Although most child readers could probably not find much in common with the characters, a possible point for consideration might be the feelings of small children (John was only five) who

have no adult to care for them.

... this story ... is only slightly weakened by the pat ending; it is an affecting account because the youngsters are illegitimate waifs rejected by society and struggling for survival. 4


*Ellen Grae* is the story of a girl whose parents are divorced. Ellen, who lives with a rural family, has a habit of telling tall tales so that when she tells an unlikely story that happens to be true, no one believes her.

Along with the treatment of divorce, the book presents other ideas about honesty and human relations. "... Ellen prys the lid off the platitude about honesty being the best policy. That question, the book and its heroine are worth talking about."5 A favorable view of divorced parents is presented.

The seldom explored situation of divorce is nicely handled, with Ellen Grae's parents on friendly footing and no less responsible and loving toward their child because they don't live under the same roof. 6


An orphan boy working on a lonely Australian cattle station becomes attached to a dog. The love between the boy and dog is not destroyed by a stern dogman.

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Boy Alone allows the reader to experience real
human feeling as exemplified in a boy.

One comes to live fully in this
boy's world and the setting . . .
is powerfully real . . . A book
of unflagging vitality, authentic
and sometimes grim, yet compass-
oneate and unexpectedly comfort-
ing. 7

Rodman, Maia (Wojciechowska), Hey, What's Wrong With This

The father of three motherless boys does not find
much success retaining housekeepers, thanks to his sons.
When the sixth housekeeper leaves, the boys decide that
what they really need is a mother. Consequently they take
it upon themselves to find one.

Boys probably can easily identify with the characters
in Hey, What's Wrong With This One?, since they possess
qualities often found among preadolescents.

[The brothers] are drawn somewhat
louder and rougher than life; but
they are surely drawn from life.
[The author] knows the human boy, and
not only on the surface. 8

The reader may also feel what it means to be without a mother.

Weir, Ester. The Loner. New York: David McKay Co., Inc.,
1963. Illustrated by Christine Price.

A young migratory worker knows nothing of his family
and has no name. When he sees his only friend killed in a
farm machine accident, he pretends he does not care. Finally

the boy finds a place for himself with an old sheep herder and earns a name.

The Loner is a story told with awareness and meaning which would give the reader insight into a search for identity. "Many values for a young adolescent, especially one who is himself a 'loner' . . . . sensitive and imaginative treatment. . . ." 9

Death


Brothers Bruce and Robby live with their grandparents during the summer after their mother's death, but when school starts they move home with their father. To Bruce home does not seem the same. He finds it difficult to adjust to his mother's absence along with having a housekeeper and accepting responsibility.

With Dad Alone brings out questions children have about death such as when Robby asked, "Will Mommy be mad if we have a good time on Christmas without her?". The book draws together not only the aspects of childhood feelings about the death of a parent, but also about peer relationships and self reliance. "... issues of human understanding and a strong heart, make the book an honest look at life as it is." 10


*The Big Wave* is the story of the destruction of a Japanese fishing village by a tidal wave. Jiya, a young boy, is sent by his family from his home on the beach to higher ground. When he reaches his friend Kino's home above the beach, Jiya sees a big wave approaching which takes his family and the entire beach village with it as it recedes. As a youth Jiya chooses to make his home with his friend, but eventually he returns to the beach to live.

The profound statements made in the book concerning life and death are of widespread significance and not merely for children. The simple presentation does not deeply involve the reader; however, it allows for perspective and reflection toward realities of life. *The Big Wave* is concerned "... immediately with the fact of death..." Buck avoids sentimentality and morbidity, writes instead with dignity about life and death..."11


When Tim's mother is sick, his father sends him to visit his great aunt in Colorado cattle country. Tim is upset at having to go away from his mother, but he gains from his experiences in Colorado. When his father comes to tell that his mother has died, Tim is ready to understand why

he was sent to Colorado.

The High Pasture shows development of sensitivity and awareness of reality.

The understanding of the characters is unusual, the handling of the mother's death and Tim's adjustment perceptive. . . . The very subjective treatment may limit the audience, but a sensitive reader should find the book rewarding. . . .

Family Relations


When her mother dies, Julie goes to live with her aunt in the country. Julie misses her mother and has trouble adjusting to a new life at her aunt's house. When her father remarries, Julie resents her stepmother. Gradually as she matures Julie learns to understand others and face life.

Up a Road Slowly is a story of strikingly human characters. The problems experienced are especially vivid and moving. Death, consideration of others, family relations, and problems of change caused by growing up are of major importance along with some consideration given to alcoholism and poverty. "Perhaps through her [Julie] they [girls] can exercise their guilt feelings for unkindness committed during the struggle to grow to maturity." In every aspect the book is genuine and worthy of further development through discussion.


In *Home From Far* Jenny MacGregor has not completely recovered from the grief she felt over her twin brother's death, when her family takes in two foster children, one of whom is a boy her own age. Jenny is filled with feelings of resentment for her new foster brother because she feels he is taking her dead brother's place. By the end of the story Jenny begins to realize that it is better for the living to return to their normal way of life after the death of a family member.

The idea of adjusting to and accepting the death of a loved one is treated sensitively. The feelings expressed by all characters seem genuine. The book conveys a child's reactions well so that identifying with the characters would be likely. The reactions of foster children are also portrayed especially well.

Dramatic and moving are the reactions and adjustments of children and parents... So individual and real are the characters that everything happening to them is of vital importance to the reader...


*It's Like This, Cat* is about Dave, a typical fourteen-year-old, who experiences problems of growing up, relating to his parents and facing life. His pet cat is a symbol of

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his minor rebellion against parental authority, since his father thinks a boy should have a dog.

The book is a realistic and refreshing story of youth which should offer special enjoyment for most boys. "Here's a nice change from those books for boys that are set in an idyllic countryside hardly known to many of them."15 "Excellent for reluctant readers."16

Human Relations


During the German occupation of France in 1944, twenty French children willingly share their home and sparse food supply with ten Jewish children. When Nazi soldiers come in search of the Jewish refugees, the French children hide the refugee children and do not betray their whereabouts even when pressured by the Nazi soldiers.

Twenty and Ten is a simply told story of the strong spirit and generosity of children. It shows children who have been taken from their homes and faced with serious facts of life. The French children know what would happen to the Jewish children if the Nazis found them. "There are real emotion, humor, and courage in this vividly told story—all qualities that were a part of life during the occupation."17 It seems that the idea of facing a serious situation with

15*Christian Science Monitor*, May 9, 1963, p. 3B.
17*Saturday Review*, 35:54, November 15, 1952.
adult responsibility is a worthwhile discussion topic for the child reader.


Jed, a Yankee soldier, in Mississippi, helps a small rebel boy with a broken leg to his home near the Union camp. When a few of his fellow soldiers hear of the nearby farm they decide to pillage it and Jed must defend the southern family.

The tenderness yet straightforward account of the events make *Jed* a valuable book. The unfortunate situation of war is depicted and it is shown that human kindness goes beyond political divisions.

The characters talk and act like real people; they are concerned with real problems; the discomforts and boredom of the army camp are real. Thus the book is quite different from the usual 'war' story for children—to read it is to experience life.\(^\text{18}\)


In *Henry 3* Henry Lovering's family moves to an affluent suburb and at first is totally accepted by the neighbors. However, when the Loverings install a bomb shelter, hostility toward them develops. During a hurricane which strikes the suburb, Henry notices the expression of human qualities never before apparent in his neighbors.

The book is concerned with the superficial values of

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modern day society. The need for friendship and acceptance is strongly portrayed. Character action is worth examination in many instances, such as Flecher's habit of fighting boys new to the neighborhood or Mrs. Andrews' not wanting to be rescued without her sable coat. Even though some aspects of the story seem contrived, much realistic material for discussion is presented.

- - children do face questions of value at ever earlier ages. In Henry 3, these questions are presented through recognizable, ordinary people. . . . young readers will overlook the structural flaws for the powerful writing and reality of Henry and his family. 19

Mental and Emotional Health


In Don't Take Teddy Mikkel takes his fifteen-year-old mentally retarded brother, Teddy, with him to the ball field. When Teddy accidentally hits another boy in the face with a stone, Mikkel and Teddy run away because Mikkel is afraid the police will have Teddy put in an institution.

The subject of mental retardation is presented with thoroughness and vivid understanding of the problem. In a simple, genuine way for children unfamiliar with a mentally retarded person, Don't Take Teddy explains the difficulty and compassion of those who care for a boy like

Teddy.

... there is a realistic range of reactions from the people he [Mikkel] meets, and a realistic acceptance of the limits of the ... retarded ... by having the story told by Mikkel, it ... is more directed and touching. 20


A sensitive story told from the point of view of Gus, The Stone Faced Boy relates the thoughts and feelings of a young disturbed boy. Gus, the third in a family of five children, has terrible fears he keeps to himself through his expressionless face. When his little sister comes to him for help he makes himself overcome his fears and rescue her dog.

The problems of family relations and consideration for the feelings of others are presented, although the underlying causes of the sensitive nature of Gus is probably a more substantial aspect of the book. The insight into the character of Gus makes for valuable reading. "A quiet story, told simply and sensitively, but for a perceptive sympathetic reader." 21


The Kitchen Madonna tells the story of a nine-year-old boy who wants to give a shrine to the maid. In order


to get the gift he faces many difficulties and has to cope with troubling problems.

The reader is led to perceive Gregory's inner motivation and feelings: "... it is Miss Godden's ability to understand a child's mind and his developing concern for others that makes the book rewarding. ..." 22


Edward would be delighted if he could have a dog, but his parents think he is not responsible enough to have one. In addition to not being allowed to have a dog, Edward is bothered by the bully next door.

A Dog on Berkham Street points out the emotional turmoil a boy can experience as a result of fairly typical problems that are very important to a boy.

... this entertaining story is unusually convincing in its perceptive portrayal of an average preadolescent boy--his desires, thought, actions, and relationships with his parents. 23


Andy, who is mentally retarded, gets the idea he has bought a local racetrack and no one can change his mind. Despite his handicap, Andy has friends who help and protect him.

The delicate handling of Andy's problem in *Racecourse for Andy* makes the book especially good for helping the reader gain insight into human reactions.

"... sensitive, probing portrayal of Andy and his friends... a story that has very real value for today's young readers."  

**Poverty**


*The Ark* is set in West Germany after World War II. A refugee mother and her four children live with hardship and poverty in an abandoned street car.

The real tragedy that is the aftermath of war is depicted through the human struggle to build a new life.

> While it the story is a true picture of life and death among a homeless people, it is lighted by a courage and a warm human sympathy and understanding that leaves a glow in the heart of the reader."  


Set during World War II, *The Little Fishes* tells of three orphans who live in the streets of Naples, Italy. Guido, Anna, and her younger brother, Mario, search for food and shelter while trying to survive the destruction of war.

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25The Horn Book, 29:102, April, 1953.
The weaker Mario dies and the older children finally find refuge.

The incredible strength and hope of children in such adverse circumstances is of major importance in the book.

As Guido tells his story, the reader feels the cold and hunger, flinches from the smells and filth, and marvels at the vitality of a very real boy.26

The reader may pursue the reasons for hope in children faced with seemingly impossible existence.

It [the story] is a lesson in life . . . which vibrates with love and understanding. The Little Fishes is a deeply moving and beautiful testimonial to the triumph of the human spirit.27

Illustrated by Alton Rauble.

The Velvet Room is the story of Robin, the daughter of sharecroppers, who is faced with a choice between material security and the security of love from her parents. Robin is helped to realize that pleasure afforded by material goods is only superficial but her family's love and need for her is real.

The choice Robin is faced with making emphasizes the contrast between wealth and poverty, and yet shows that human bonds of love are universal and transcend material need.


27Book Week (spring children's issue), May 7, 1967, p. 34.
"Discussion of Robin's decision will help boys and girls establish their own values." 28


A story of present day Mexico, *My Name Is Pablo* tells of Pablo's attempt to earn money and his subsequent arrest and stay in a reformatory. Pablo unwillingly becomes involved with delinquents who sell marijuana. Fortunately, with the help of friends Pablo gets a real chance to earn money and to attend school.

Issues of social injustices and hardships of the poor are emphasized in the book. The slight mention of marijuana is probably not a major contribution. A child reader could possibly benefit by getting a better perspective toward the degradation associated with poverty and by seeing how easily crime can result.

The plot with its fortuitous resolution would seem a trifle mechanical were it not for the humanity and depth of understanding with which the author delineates her characters. . . . 29

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