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Introduction

The purpose of this creative project was manifold. (1) The writer loved children and writing, and could think of no better way to become involved with them than to write a book for children.

(2) This project also fit well with the writer's academic work. With a major in Elementary Education and an English minor, she saw an opportunity to apply things learned in both areas.

(3) Since a creative project was a requirement for graduation on the Honors Program, the writer felt that her project should be something she truly would enjoy doing.

She felt that children's reading material has a great effect in the shaping of their values, and is therefore an important field. This also places a certain responsibility on the author of children's books to make sure that they are suitable for young readers.
What Goes Into a Good Children's Book?

In appraising what goes into a good children's book, it would appear that the most important single consideration is that the book leaves the child with a good impression of literature so that he will develop and maintain good reading habits throughout life. Reading is one of the most important avenues of gaining information, and it is, therefore, important that a child not be discouraged about reading at a young age because of bad experiences.

What interests a child in a book, however? Difficulty is an important factor. If the the book is too hard the child will be discouraged, and if it is too easy he often will not even finish it because he thinks it is "babyish." 1

Appearance of the book matters a great deal also. If there are not enough pictures, or the book is too short or too long, the child will not finish it. In fact, a public library study in Chicago determined that when books are not read, 63% of them are rejected because of appearance, and only 37% because of subject matter. 2

The length of the book should be short enough that it can be read in an hour or so at the most for young children, and yet not so short that it only consists of a few pages. 3

Although appearance of the book is the reason most often given for rejecting a book, subject matter seems to be the main reason for selecting one book over another. The study cited earlier found that 58% of the children chose their book because of its subject, and only 38% because of its appearance. 4 Recommendations accounted for the other selections.
If subject matter and content of the book is that important, what types of subjects interest children, and yet are suitable? Before the age of seven, nursery rhymes and nature stories are enjoyed the most. At the age of eight years fairy tales hold greatest interest, and then at the ages of nine and ten interest changes to travel books and stories of other lands, such as Heidi.  

At the ages of eleven and twelve girls' and boys' interests diverge. Boys enjoy stories about electricity, aviation, or exploration, and girls like stories of home life. These interests should be kept in mind when writing a book for a certain age level, but there must also be a point to the story that teaches the child something. It should not be written simply to write a story about airplanes, for example.

The way in which the story is written makes a difference also. The story should involve a problem to be solved, and also a theme. The ending or climax of the story should both solve the problem in some manner and also prove the story's theme. This theme should involve some idea that the author firmly believes in.

The problem in the story must involve some conflict between characters to generate interest. For this reason, "The cat sat on the dog's mat" makes a much better story then "The cat sat on the mat" would.

The wording of the story is important, especially for young children. The words used in the story should at least be in the child's listening vocabulary, and devices such as rhyme and alliteration are often helpful in holding attention and interest.
Finally, children's literature is unique because its ultimate audience, children, is neither its creator nor primary consumer. Children's books are written, edited, published, and purchased by adults, so the interest of adults must also be considered.

The project has been introduced and the criteria for a good children's story established, so the story will now follow and be evaluated according to these criteria, and also by children.
BENNY BEAR'S PROBLEM!
Benny Bear's Problem

It was a beautiful, sunny spring day, and all the animals of Boringwoods were playing games. The birds were singing, and everyone seemed happy except one little bear.

Benny Bear and his family just moved to Boringwoods from the north. Benny was a polar bear. He didn't know any of the other animals because he was new, and felt left out because they were all having fun. Benny decided the best thing to do was to ask one of the other animals if he could play with them. He was tired of just watching!

Benny looked around and saw a group of Chipmunks playing tag and walked over to one of them.

"Hi, my name's Benny Bear and I just moved here. What's your name?", he asked.

"My name's Charlie," said the Chipmunk. "Where did you come from?"

"Sunnyhollow," Benny answered. "I'm kind of scared, and I don't know anyone. Do you think you could play with me and introduce me to some of your friends?"

"Well, I really would like to," said Charlie Chipmunk, "but around here we only play with those who are the same color as we are. My friends would laugh at me if I played with you, because you're white and we're brown. I don't care myself, you understand."

"Oh," Benny said sadly, "I guess I'll have to find someone else to play with." He walked to where Rachel Raccoon was playing and thought to himself, "Maybe I should try a girl this time. Perhaps girls will be different."
"Hi, my name's Benny Bear and I just moved here from Sunnyhollow," he said. "What's your name?"

"My name's Raechal," she replied.

"I'm kind of scared being in a new place," Benny explained, and I don't know anyone. Could you let me play with you and your friends?"

"Certainly not!" Raechal shouted. "Hasn't anyone told you that in Boringwoods we only play with animals our own color? You just won't fit in!"

Benny sat down and cried. He wanted someone to play with, but no one else was white, so he thought he would always have to play by himself. Pretty soon, however, Sammy Skunk came along and saw Benny crying.

"What's wrong," he asked, "Are you new here? My name is Sammy."

"My name's Benny, but I don't think you can help me," he sobbed.

"You probably have to get back to your group."

"But please, I want to help you," Sammy said. "I'm willing to listen."

"Well, I'm new here," Benny explained, "and I just want someone to play with. Everytime I ask someone to play with me, they say they can't because I'm not the same color as they are. There isn't anyone else who's white; I just don't know what to do."

"But I'll play with you," said Sammy.

"You will!" exclaimed Benny. "But you aren't the same color as I am either."

"That's not important," said Sammy. "You need a friend, and I want to help you. I don't care if my friends laugh at me."

"Oh, thank you! That's the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me," said Benny.
Then Sammy and Benny began to play hide-and-seek. The other animals saw that they were having so much fun playing games that they wanted to play too.

They all had a long game of hide-and-seek, and after they got done they all decided that they had missed out on lots of new friends because they would only play with those their own color.

Because the forest was so much happier after that, they decided to change its name from Boringwoods to Friendly Forest. They all lived happily ever after, even if they weren't all the same.
Evaluation

In order to objectively evaluate her story, the author used both an evaluation form given to adults and the reactions of children of various ages. In this way she felt she could ascertain how well written the story was, what age level it was most appropriate for, and what changes should be made in the story.

By reading her story to children ranging in age from first grade to fourth grade, various reactions were obtained. All of the children said they liked the story. However, the youngest seemed the most enthusiastic about it. When asked if there was any part of the story he did not like, he said that he liked all of it.

One second grade boy said he liked the story, but that he did not like the part of the story when the bear cried, because that upset him. He felt really sorry for the bear.

One fourth grade girl happened to be in the room when the author read the story to some younger children. She seemed very attentive and interested, and stated that she loved the story before she was ever asked. She did not seem to feel it was too babyish to listen to, at any rate.

This information leads the author to conclude that her story is generally well received by a wide age-range of children, but is more suitable for, and well liked by, very young children. Some of the information obtained on the evaluation forms supports this conclusion.
Copies of the story and an evaluation form were given to an elementary teacher, a librarian who has also taught children's literature classes, a parent who has often read to her children, and an elementary education major who has taken children's literature classes.

These evaluations most frequently listed pre-school or kindergarten as the most appropriate grade level for the story. This is in agreement with the information obtained by trying the story out on children.

The most frequent comment received on the evaluation forms was that more illustrations were needed to hold the interest of young children, and that was the area most often rated lower.

The item on the evaluation form which seemed to elicit the most widely differing opinions was whether or not the story avoided moralizing. Responses to this question ranged from 5 to 1, and there seemed to be no real consensus. Some felt that the story would be rejected by parents as too moralizing, and others felt it avoided moralizing altogether.

The evaluations received were favorable. However, after reviewing them, the author feels the following changes should be made in her story: More illustrations should be included, and the bear should be larger. Also, the story could be expanded with more description and one or two more animals. The evaluation forms and a summary of the project follow.
Summary

This creative project was undertaken to fulfill a requirement for graduation from the Honors College, Ball State University. Its primary purpose was to investigate the field of children's literature in preparation for writing a children's story.

The procedure for the project was as follows: The author first researched what qualities a good children's book should exhibit. After this information was obtained, she wrote her story and had it evaluated by both adults and children in order to decide if her story contained those qualities. Finally, she examined the evaluations received in order to determine what changes should be made in her story.

As a result of doing this project the author learned much about the field of children's literature, and also received some constructive criticism of her story. Because of this input, the author was able to conclude that she should put more illustrations with her story, and perhaps expand it and make it longer.
Endnotes


Bibliography

Bruce, Bertram. "What Makes a Good Story?" Language Arts, April, 1972, pp. 460-462.


