A CREATIVE PROJECT IN LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN
WITH EMPHASIS ON
THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON THEIR READING HABITS

A Creative Project
Presented to
the Honors Committee
Ball State Teachers College

In Fulfillment of the Requirements
for I. D. 499
and Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
for Graduation with Honors

by
Karen Dianne Smith
May 1964
ACCEPTANCE SHEET

I recommend that this creative project be accepted in fulfillment of requirements for graduation with Honors.

________________________________________

Dr. Mildred Ballou
Ass't Prof. of Education
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to thank Dr. Mildred Ballou for her suggestions and guidance in preparation of this creative project.

K.D.S.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. ABSTRACT ................................................................. i

II. INTRODUCTION .......................................................... iii

III. PART I
    Review of Related Literature ................................. 

IV. PART II
    Creative Stories for Children ................................. 

V. PART III
    Children's Reactions to the Stories ....................... 

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ........................................ 

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................... 

ABSTRACT

The first part of this thesis is a short review of the various cultural stimuli which influence children's reading interests. Primary children watch television and learn much about space and their modern world. Therefore, they like compact action stories and science books. Middle-grade children are great collectors of things and enjoy reading the many series books. The type of literature that is most popular for a certain age group and for either boys or girls reflects the physical, psychological, and socio-logical phenomenon of the times.

Adult critics find it difficult to select books based on children's criteria. Children dislike many critics' choices of best books and often choose their own lasting favorites. Authors of children's books must write from their own genuine experience as if children were walking "beside them, not in front or behind."

The second part of this thesis consists of four original short stories by the author written for children. "Billy Bumpkin" is the tale of a dissatisfied pumpkin who leaves his corn patch in search of a friend. After being scratched by mice and butted by cows, he finds a true friend in the boy who makes a jack-o-lantern of him.
"The Day Before Easter" tells of a little girl who believes the Easter Bunny didn't escape from a burning brush pile until she discovers three candy Easter eggs left under a tree. "Eerie the Owl" is the story of a young boy who nearly starves a screech owl unintentionally. He selfishly tries to keep him for a week that he might win a prize in a pet parade. In "To Catch a Fish" a boy believes he is really grown-up until he is faced with the task of baiting his own hook to catch a fish.

The final part of this thesis is a brief summary of the reactions of children to the four stories. Each story was read to two different classes at Burris Laboratory School, grades K-4. Each teacher was given the same eight leading questions to guide the children's responses in informal discussion. This experiment was conducted to discover the grade level for each story and the children's opinion about each story.
INTRODUCTION

The impetus for completion of this creative project in literature was the author's sincere desire for self-expression through creative writing. The author also hoped to bring pleasure to others who might read her work. This necessitated discovering the reactions of those who might hear or read the products of the author's creativity.

The creative project will be geared to stories of interest to elementary children. The author is an elementary education major and feels she could use her stories in the classroom. The author shares the desire to learn with children and realizes their need for individual pleasure from reading literature. She believes that writing short stories not only will fulfill her personal desire for self-expression, but will give her project meaningful projection through focus on her chosen profession.

Before beginning her project the author found she knew little about the literary needs and interests of children. What cultural influences affect reading tastes? What types of books and stories do children like best and why? How well do authors write for children?

The author plans to survey related literature to help answer these and other questions. When she has a better and
deeper understanding of this background, her stories will possess more of the qualities children look for.

The author's work will have little value unless it is exposed to those for whom it is written. Their reactions are essential in completing this project. The author plans to have each of her stories read to two different classes at Burris Laboratory School. Their reactions will be recorded by the teacher or a participant during group discussion of each story.

In summary the author plans to satisfy her personal desire for self-expression only after this desire has been given direction through related reading. To discover if she has in any way satisfied the literary needs of children, she will arrange to have their reactions recorded. In effect, this third intended procedure will be a learning experience for the author.
Many wonderful things result from the interaction of books and children. Books strengthen the imagination of children and give them something to think about. The ideas expressed in books unite people in a common language of understanding. Humor in books brings people together and helps develop tolerance. Books which children know by heart give them a certain security, while other books broaden and expand their interests. Books also satisfy emotional and aesthetic needs of children. The favorite book of some children may also be the saddest. It is pleasing to repeat the poetic and beautiful words found in books.¹

During the past quarter century there have been distinct trends in children's literature. A general widening of interests fields of children has occurred. Authors have responded by producing a vast variety of stories, including fantasy, poetry, nonsense, old and new, here and there stories. Children's writers have experimented in numerous fields and written about many topics--from snakes to atoms. Most important, authors write about what interests children now. Stories of covered wagons and Indians are waning in popularity because of the changing times.²

Perhaps nothing in recent years has had such a profound effect upon society and reading trends as television. Class lines are less distinct in our free and easy atmosphere where

¹Fenner, Proof, p. 17
²Helen Ferris, Writing Books for Boys and Girls, p. 11.
nearly every family has access to a television set.\textsuperscript{1} Both city and country children are gaining new knowledge of all types of people and common interests through television. Times have changed for everyone. Things are telescoped, hurried, speeded up.\textsuperscript{2}

The literature of our society is thus affected. Children, and adults as well, want their stories fast-moving, with action at the very beginning and little description. They want compact stories. These traits resemble those of the most popular television programs.\textsuperscript{3}

In at least one important aspect, however, our culture lags behind the technological advancement of television. The approved word lists which children's writers refer to were compiled in the 1930's from words already in print. The lists do not include words commonly used by children today. Children entering the first grade bring with them a large sight vocabulary from television including many scientific and space terms. They have a very good knowledge of such things as jets and rockets.\textsuperscript{4}

An interesting example is the author of a children's space story about travel to the moon. In describing the deep depressions on the surface of the moon, he wanted to use the

\textsuperscript{1}Fisher, \textit{Intent}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{2}Fenner, \textit{Proof}, p. 132.
\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{4}Nancy Larrick, \textit{A Teacher's Guide to Children's Books}, p. 25.
word "crater," but it was not on the approved word list. Therefore, he selected the words "dish" and "hole" to describe a crater. Children would know the word "crater" by ear, and even though they might not recognize the word in print the first time, they would remember it because it held special meaning for them.¹

Television is especially important to young children learning to read. They like stories with sparkle and a touch of the dramatic but with no condescension because they listen to adult television. The stories must have action, strong plot and convincing characters.² Primary children watch an average of twenty hours of television weekly. Thus, they become more critical and specific in voicing their favorite topics concerning what is read to them and what they read.³

Television whets the curiosity of children to seek facts in their reading. They love straight forward information about science, from prehistoric times to space travel.⁴ Television moves too quickly for most children to absorb everything. They want to study certain subjects that interest them more deeply. Many classes of children therefore study guides of the better television programs and choose related

²Ibid., p. 25.
³Ibid., p. 29.
⁴Ibid., p. 10.
books for later study.¹

The general characteristics of primary children beginning to read give an insight into the type of literature best-suited for them. In her Atlanta University study on readiness of first graders, Dr. Esther Milner found three traits common in the homes of the children who passed the readiness tests. The youngsters handled the books in the home, their parents read to them, and the children were encouraged to take part in the family conversations.² Children must have a background of books before they develop the enthusiasm to read on their own.

Beginning readers can reason for themselves quite deeply. They possess a knowledge of worldly matters that far exceeds their reading ability. They need warmth and security in adult relationships. They are intelligent, sensitive, appreciative and egotistical. Most first grade children must make one major adjustment to insure success in school and in reading. They must learn to alter their dominant egotistical attitudes for more effective group work.³

Children beginning to read still must have many books read to them. Books with pictures on every page are best, for they help keep up interest and should help tell the story. Illustrations do not have to be in color to be good, but they

²Ibid., p. 20.
³Jean Poindexter Colby, The Children's Book Field, p. 23.
should set the mood of the story. Children in the first grade especially are intrigued by the rhythm of language. They love repetition, exaggeration, and the sounds of words. A good story, then, must appeal both in text and in illustrations.

Suspense and action must convey convincing and understandable situations. Characterization must be precise, and the plot should contain few emotional problems. Non-fiction should be brief and clear. Beginning books must be written with a limited, though not babyish vocabulary. The new words should challenge children. The text should be written in short, but not choppy sentences and be free of complicated dependent clauses. Most important, the content must appeal through language that is picture-making and rhythmical.

Even though a multitude of juvenile literature is published each year, it is still difficult to find suitable books for primary children to read. Books must be easy enough to read but not babyish. They should contain good illustrations but cannot be merely picture books. At the same time they must satisfy the special needs and interests of children. Children want a story, not merely words to read. The Brockhampton Press was the first publishing house to produce books for the young, slow, or reluctant reader. The domestic episodes

1 Colby, Children's, p. 79.
2 Ibid., p. 29.
3 Larrick, Teacher's Guide, p. 27.
in their stories give children plenty to think about.¹

Youngsters in the first three grades like special types of stories. Animal stories, exaggerated humor, legends, fairy and folk tales, and fantasy are favorites. They like stories about children like themselves and children in other lands. Stories based on American history are also well received.²

Primary children differ in some ways from intermediate children in characteristics and reading preferences. The reading interests of primary children seem to be less diversified than the interests of older children. Perhaps this is because books of a wide variety of topics have not been written for younger children. Sexual differences in reading tastes, too, appear to be slight. Even though distinct books for boys and girls do become available beginning around fourth grade reading ability, there are but few sharp sex differences in reading tastes. Science, action and adventure remain top interest factors in all grades. These facts were revealed in the Shores and Rudman survey of 1951.³

Intelligence seems to have very little effect on types of books selected by children of the same age.⁴ A wide reading range is evident in the intermediate grades, and books written on the same topics but at different reading levels should be

¹Fisher, Intent, p. 43.
³Ibid., p. 84.
⁴George W. Norvell, What Boys and Girls Like to Read, p. 184.
provided. Even so, some bright children will read hard, then
easy books; slower children will attempt harder books.\(^1\)

Children age nine to twelve thrive on an unbounded
enthusiasm. Their fast-growing thinking ability is sparked
by searching curiosity. Children in grades four to six under-
stand their world and are quite frank in their questions about
it.\(^2\) These pre-adolescents are rebellious. They want to get
as far from babyhood as possible, and they can't seem to do
it fast enough. They seek knowledge, adventure, and mischief
both in life and in books.\(^3\)

The years between age nine and twelve comprise the
major reading age of children. Before age nine children do
not possess the ability to read all they want to. After age
twelve there is never enough time for recreational reading,
for homework and other activities take up much of their free
time. In this period of their lives many children can and
do read and thoroughly enjoy books.\(^4\)

Certain subjects should be kept from these children,
yet they should not be thwarted in other topics. They should
not be encouraged to read about emotional, intellectual, or
political situations to which they respond but cannot under-
stand. Nevertheless, they do not like things kept from them

---

\(^1\) Larrick, *Teacher's Guide*, p. 53.
\(^2\) Colby, *Children's*, p. 31.
that adults think should be. For example, illness and death should not be excluded from their lives or their reading.¹

Books for this age group should appeal through both text and illustrations. The possible subject matter is boundless, but the length of sentences and extent of thought must be tuned to the children's level of comprehension. Fiction should be alive with action and real characters. Children become involved in the atmosphere of a good book and carry out the plot in determining outcomes. Non-fiction must be authentic, clear, and interesting.²

Children in the fourth to sixth grades like specific, not general information in their books. They consult encyclopedias for facts about outer space and astronomy, two of their favorite topics. Children of this age are also great collectors of things and often have as many as six collections, from baseball cards to sea shells. This hobby affects their reading in an interesting way.³

Because they are such avid collectors, they are fascinated with the various series of books. They become attached to certain topics and buy or read every book available. They like the security such books give them and identify books by brand names. If one book in a series is good, then all books in that series are good.

¹Colby, Children's, p. 31.
²Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 74.
Various publishing companies now produce a number of series books especially for this age group. Random House's Landmark series was the first and is the most publicized and widely read of all the series. The books are nonfiction accounts of turning points in American history written by various well-known authors of adult books. They include frontier biographies and stories of inventors and historic figures. The World Landmark Series tells of world historical events. These books are most attractive in design, type, and illustrations.1

The Childhood of Famous Americans series published by Bobbs-Merrill is written for younger children and older children who do not read well. The small orange size and color are popular with youngsters. Many authors write books about a wider variety of subjects than the Landmark series. The content of these Bobbs-Merrill books include more biographies about women and more people less-well-known than the the Landmark books. These hundred and fifty fictionalized biographies are written for third grade children but are enjoyed by older children, too.2

The Grosset Signature Books are excellent for poor readers. They are realistic biographies written by well-known authors in the juvenile book field.3 Other series of books include First Books, Real Books, All About Books, Challenge

1Tanner, Proof, p. 172.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
Books and North Star Books. These books tell of science, social science, geography, history, sports, and hobbies for middle grade children.\(^1\)

Intermediate grade children are generally interested in several types of stories. Immediate action and suspense are essential in good mysteries, stories about the West and World War II, animal stories, stories of present-day boys and girls, and family stories. Children like the exaggerated humor in tall tales and talking animals in make-believe stories. Biographies and nonfiction nature and science books are very popular. Stories about patriotism and holidays are enjoyed, too. The comic books read by these children often encourage reading in other related books.\(^2\)

In general poetry about nature and fairies is rejected by children of this age. Girls do not like stories about wild savage animals and grim adventure. Boys would rather not read stories of self-sacrifice, romantic love, or sentimental stories. However, girls like this type of story, while boys thrive on stories of courage and heroism.\(^3\) It is interesting to note that girls do like stories like Davy Crockett which seem to be written for boys, while boys will not read books written exclusively for girls.\(^4\) Boys care moderately for reading in grades four to six, and their interest declines. Girls enjoy

\(^1\)Larrick, *Teacher's Guide*, p. 75.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 55.
\(^3\)Horvell, *What Boys and Girls*, p. 179.
\(^4\)Larrick, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
reading, and their interest increases.¹

More specifically, boys react favorably to several qualities in good stories. They like courage and heroism in adventure stories which are filled with action. They want physical struggle such as fighting and rugged games, realistic older men and boys as characters, and wild as well as tame animals in books. They enjoy humor, mystery, patriotism and stories about Christmas and Thanksgiving.²

Boys don't like rambling description, didacticism, fairies, romantic love, sympathy and self-sacrifice, physical weakness, or lack of aggressiveness in stories. They feel indifferent toward brief description, the supernatural, literary quality, and women or girls as minor characters.³

Certain magazines are favorites of boys. Since they like mechanical things, such as guns and cars, and are interested in how they operate, it is only natural that *Popular Mechanics* would lead the list. In order of preference these types of magazines are liked by boys: other science magazines, comic books, boys' magazines, news magazines (Weekly Reader), general adult magazines, general children's magazines, and girls' magazines.⁴ Although there are no surveys available to verify this statement, it is believed that *Mad* magazine is

---

²Ibid., p. 177.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 165.
rapidly becoming the most favorite magazine for boys.

Girls differ from boys in the things they look for in books. They like lively adventure but prefer it be focused on stories of home and school life, domestic pets and animals, or love and romance. They favor men, women, older children, and babies as characters. Girls become involved in plots of self-sacrifice and sympathy. Similar to boys, they like mystery, the supernatural, patriotism, Thanksgiving and Christmas as themes. Girls disapprove of bloody, violent action, description, didacticism, younger boys and girls as characters, and fierce wild animals. Literary quality means little in selection of books.1

The magazines that girls enjoy are similar to boys' favorites but rank differently. First choice for girls is comic books, then the various types of magazines: girls', children's news, general adult, general children's, mechanics and science, and boys' magazines.2

Age and sex do affect the reading interests of children to some extent. Each type of story is popular for a certain age group. Even so it is difficult and unsound to assign specific stories for each grade. As children mature they become more interested in short stories, newspapers and magazines. At the same time comic books, fairy stories and magic tales attract fewer readers.3

1Norvell, What Boys and Girls, p. 177.
2Ibid., p. 166.
3Ibid.
Children should read a variety of books, beginning with picture books, nursery rhymes and ABC books. The in-between years should include Bible stories, fairy tales, fables, myths, legends, hero tales, poetry, biography, animal and adventure stories, stories of other lands and people, as well as books on crafts and hobbies. Factual books about science and history are more important in later elementary grades.¹

Several of these classes of books deserve special attention and discussion. Some of them have been old favorites for generations, while a few types of books are known only by young modern readers. Some of these types of books satisfy urgent psychological needs of children. Others are enjoyed simply for the universal pleasure they give.

Fairy tales are the first stories told to children and become the gateway to all great literature. Fairy tales offer an escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life and take children to all parts of the world. Fairy tales not only provide entertainment, but increase children's imagination, cultivate a sense of humor, and teach a lesson.²

Fairy tales are concerned with simple things and are simply told. The domestic note in fairy tales makes the magic easy to accept and completely matter-of-fact.³ Fairy tales are not only practical, they are poetic as well. In the background

²Fenner, Proof, p. 54.
³Fisher, Intent, p. 73.
is a magical land which all long for but never see. In the foreground is the comfortable world of pots and pans to be made magical. The true writer of fairy tales moves with ease from the world of reality to that of fantasy.¹

The happenings in traditional fairy tales do not become concrete in the minds of children. They are beset by haunting visions just out of reach. They know what is happening, feel the mystery, but don't want to see it. It is these two emotions, fear and wonder, that all good fairy tales arouse in their readers.² In her book Intent Upon Reading Margery Fisher states that "fear in one story may be wonder in another: the two are never far apart. Both rise from an apprehension of the supernatural which still nourishes the fairy tale today."³

Fairy tales provide all people with a certain compensation for events that happen or do not happen in life. Fairy tales are invented from a natural desire to change life in imagination if it cannot be changed in fact. A wish for luck or something with magical powers will make up for human lack of good fortune.⁴ Children and adults can laugh at themselves through fairy tales. However, it is difficult to laugh at fairies, for they are too ethereal. Humor in fairy tales comes

---

¹Fisher, Intent, p. 78.
²Ibid., p. 70.
³Ibid., p. 72.
⁴Ibid., p. 77.
best from the more robust supernatural beings such as brownies, leprechauns, giants, and witches. These characters are more closely identified with the human race.¹

In other types of stories, too, children find emotional release through identification of personal problems with people or animals in stories. Children need the security of knowing that others are shy, have family problems, or are members of minority groups. Domestic episodes are especially good stories for such identification.²

Animal stories offer a different kind of identification. Good animal stories are not only about animals, but about a whole environment. All of us wish to identify ourselves with the land around us.³ The life of animals is closely related to the life of humans. People anguish and rejoice with animals because they feel close to them. Intolerance of cruelty to animals, the theme of many stories, may give men insight into cruelty to other men.⁴

There is some debate over the humanization of animals in stories. Margery Fisher believes that "children can easily be deluded by stories they read in early years, and silly books about animals are among the most corrupting influences they can meet."⁵ Animals in stories today use direct speech less often

---

¹Fisher, Intent, p. 102.
²Larrick, Teacher's Guide, p. 94.
³Kathleen Lines, Four to Fourteen, p. 53.
⁴Fenner, Proof, p. 106.
⁵Fisher, Ibid., p. 51.
than in stories thirty years ago. As long as animals behave like animals, there is no harm in giving them human attributes and a human name. Characterization must be genuine, accurate, and not the least bit sentimental. A good example is the animals in Beatrix Potter's stories. The animals behave like themselves masquerading as humans.

When animals are humanized in stories, the author is usually trying to communicate a moral. In stories for older children this is inevitable. It is the fashion today to decry the story with a moral, but no story can be written without one. Even the adventure story of today proclaims courage, honesty, and self-reliance in a different and less direct tone than stories of the nineteenth century. The chief moral standard that books try to teach children is to live honestly and usefully in the world as they find it.

Humor and mystery stories hold a special place in the hearts of children. Humor is the most enjoyed reading characteristic of both boys and girls. Children love riddles, cartoons and jokes, too, but only when they are not adult humor. The suspense in mysteries urges children to seek solutions and

---

1Fisher, Intent, p. 61.
2Ibid., p. 51.
3Ibid., p. 54.
4Ibid., p. 17.
5Ibid., p. 45.
6Fenner, Proof, p. 65.
become involved in the plot.\(^1\)

Old stories and the classics are favorites of children. The common universal quality in them gives continuity from generation to generation. The character and plot development provide long leisurely hours of recreation and enjoyment for all ages. Mary Lamberton Becker in *Adventures in Reading* made this statement about the classics. "The older one gets the more one sees in them. It is like climbing a hill; the scene is the same, but we get a different perspective."\(^2\)

Today it is a fact that facts are popular. Children are naturally inquisitive, and science books are very popular. A love of reading is based on children's interests. These include information about true things and facts. Books that tell "how to do it" and books on natural science have many young readers.\(^3\)

The opinions of adult critics of children's literature and the opinions of children concerning their literature very often clash. When critics write about children's books, they are in a special position. They bring an experience of reading to bear on books which are not intended primarily for them, but in which they share by invitation.\(^4\)

Adults think children are "natural" literary critics.

---

1. Fenner, *Proof*, p. 34.
Critics select the best children's books according to adult literary standards because they think children demand the highest quality in style and content. However, average children do not think about how good the style is or how well-drawn the characters are.

Children don't read the critics' "best" books but select their own favorites based on a different set of criteria. For example, Huckleberry Finn was considered trash for fifty years by adults. Swiss Family Robinson and The Wizard of Oz are not considered to be good books by the critics. Yet, children claim these books as favorites. Alice in Wonderland is lauded by critics but rejected by children because they sense it was not written for them. Children readily reveal their opinions of books as they save the real books and discard the false.

However, writers must expand the world of books for children. The innate competence of experts must guide the selection of literature. The interests and tastes of children should be the guiding factor as critics recommend from an adult standpoint.

---

3 Norvell, on. cit., p. 154.
4 Ibid., p. 149.
5 Ferris, Writing Books, p. 12.
6 Fisher, Ibid., p. 12.
It is most difficult to understand new children's books as a child would understand them. Criticism of children's literature is also prejudiced by personal taste and the passage of time. There is a constant need to revise and restate standards of children's literature because of the great number of books published each year.\(^1\) Though values shift, critics must still judge books on quality of content, theme, plot, characterization, style and format.\(^2\)

Style and content are two of the most important qualities of a book. Sir Walter Scott stated in his 1827 *Journal* that "children hate books that are written down to them." It is still true even today. Children are quick to sense patronage. Writers must have respect for children's minds and their conception of the world.\(^3\) In effect "children must be addressed as if they were walking beside us, not in front or behind."\(^4\)

A delicate balance must be maintained between the message a story tries to tell and the method used to tell it. Authors definitely must feel their stories. They must have a story to tell. Yet children do not respond to writers who try to teach a lesson. They become too conscious of the lesson and lose sight of the story.\(^5\) Nevertheless, writers are

\(^2\)Huck, *Children's Literature*, p. 16.
\(^3\)Fenner, *Proof*, p. 223.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 30.
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 82.
interpreters of contemporary life for children, and children expect them to make statements about life and guide them in understanding it.¹

Writers should endeavor to stretch the mental growth of children whenever possible. They should use long unusual words, for children like a mixture of the rational and irrational, the known and unknown.² Children need to read books that are written on a slightly higher level than their reading ability; youngsters develop in jumps, and reading always needs to be a jump ahead. Interests of children, too, are usually more advanced than their reading ability.³

It is difficult for authors to write books that beginning readers can read and that they are interested in. Writers should tell their stories with sincerity and modify vocabulary and sentence structure later.⁴ The qualities children look for must not be stifled by an over-protective vocabulary list.

Writers of children's books come from a special breed of people. They try to create from their own experience a world to please children. It takes genius to draw sympathy from children for a tin soldier with only one leg. This results from a certain unique power to compel truth out of an adult self that has grown slowly from personal childhood.

²Ibid., p. 28.
³Penner, Proof, p. 195.
⁴Colby, Children's, p. 30.
impressions. Authors must become involved with their stories, must enter into the world of their books by starting with their own knowledge and reaching outward and backward into their own childhood, and by sharing the childhood of young people around them.

Anyone who enters the child's world, whose dreams and wishes in some measure become merged into a child's dreams and wishes will produce a better book than the writer who writes... from the top of his head.2--Margery Fisher

When writing for children of all levels of maturity, writers must preserve the feeling of adventure and enchantment that are in "things." The curiosity and imagination of children must be nurtured. "Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and a last you create what you will."3--Serpent to Eve in "Back to Methuselah."

---

1Fisher, Intent, p. 100.
3Fenner, Proof, p. 223.
He so wanted someone to talk to. Billy squirmed on his vine, trying to move into some shade and trying to move closer to his neighbors to talk with them.

**BILLY BUMPKIN**

Billy Bumpkin was a pumpkin, a jolly fat round pumpkin. He lived with all his aunts and uncles and cousins and brothers and sisters in a great green corn field. Billy liked his home between the corn stalks, but sometimes he was unhappy.

The warm afternoon sun always soaked into his tender skin during the day and made him feel strong and proud. The sun never made him hot enough to get a sunburn though. Whenever he felt too hot, he would whisper to the corn stalks nearby, and they would wave their broad leaves above his face and make him cool again.

Yes, Billy was comfortable, resting on his pad of dirt. He always got plenty of food to eat through his long vine which burrowed into the ground. The sun was always kind to him, and the leaves gave him shade. Still something was wrong. Billy was lonely.

He only had two friends in the world to talk to. Harry and Larry were his neighbors, but sometimes he got tired of sharing his vine arm with them. They were always trying to sleep when Billy wanted to talk. The pumpkins who lived across the street in the next row of corn were too far
He so wanted someone to talk to. Billy squirmed on his vine, trying to move into some shade and trying to move closer to his neighbors to talk with them.

Ssssnap! What was that thought Billy. He looked along his strong straight stem and down the tangled vine. His stem was split from the vine! He really hadn't planned on moving that much!

Oh, well, he thought. I might as well squirm some more. Maybe I can break away completely. I don't like it much here anyway. No one is my friend. These silly pumpkins won't talk to me. Billy tugged and pulled as he scooted in the dirt. The vine split a little farther. He puffed out his round cheeks and gave a mighty yank. Snap! He was free at last!

Now Billy was scared. What could he do? All the other pumpkins would see him if he left now. They would try to get him to stay, but he had to get away. He waited for a few minutes until he thought no one was looking. Then he rolled himself right into the middle of the street between the corn stalks. He lay very still. No one had seen him. They're all asleep he thought.

"Oh, well, what do I care," Billy murmured. "I don't care if they do see me. They're not my friends anyway. I'm going to leave this corn patch and find some friends of my own."

With that Billy rolled and bumped down the cornfield street and made a very loud rukus. He rolled faster and tried
to skip over a vine, but he tripped and fell flat on his nose. The other pumpkins stared in wonder; they were too surprised to speak. Billy only stopped long enough to find out where he was, then bumped and rolled on, over the clods of dirt.

"Thu-bump, thu-bump.
Roll and jump.
Don't stop now 'til you're
Over the hump."

Billy sang as he puffed and rolled up the slanting hill. He could see the green pasture on the knoll of the hill. Just a little farther he thought. At last he reached the barbed wire fence and rolled slowly under it. He lay on his side exhausted. He sighed and took deep breaths.

"Billy! What's that?" squeaked a mother field mouse as she peeked from her nest. Her babies squealed with delight.

"Let me see. Let me see. What is it?"
"It's only a pumpkin whose lost from his home."
"Can we play with him, play with him?"
"Of course, my dears. Have yourselves a time."

The baby mice squealed with joy and climbed upon Billy. Their claws tickled Billy's face, and he laughed and jiggled his body. "At last I've found some friends," he said.

The mice were frightened by his booming voice and his bouncing body and held on tightly to his smooth round body. "Ouch, Ouch!" cried Billy. "Scat off my back. Your claws are like needles pricking my skin."
The baby mice leaped from his back and scampered to their nest. Billy moaned at the thin scratches all over his body. They didn't hurt much, but now his smooth body was all broken and scarred. He looked longingly at the green corn patch. The corn tassles and leaves seemed to wave him back home.

"No, I can't go back now. What would everyone say? They'd laugh and make fun of me. No, I can't go back now. I must go on." He slowly rolled to the top of the hill, then stopped and looked down at the little valley below. He saw some great tan-colored animals grazing near the creek, but he wasn't afraid.

"They must be the cows that Farmer Dale talks about when he comes and looks at his corn, or maybe they're the pigs. Well, I'll just roll down and see who they are."

Billy slowly turned a somersault and rolled head over heels down the slope. He was going much too fast. He tried to dig his stem into the ground to slow down, but he only went faster and faster. Finally he shut his eyes and only hoped he would stop before he reached the creek.

Thud! Suddenly he rocked to a halt.

"Moooooo!" the beast above him yelled. It kicked clods of sod into Billy's face as it tore across the field.

"Moooooo! Moooooo!" the animal blared to the others in the pasture. They all began to run in wild circles. After a while they slowed down and cautiously walked toward Billy with their heads lowered. Billy stared at the beasts that
surrounded him.

"Don't hurt me," pleaded Billy. I'm just a pumpkin who's come to find a friend."

"A pumpkin?" they all laughed. "If you want a friend, then why not go back to your corn field?" They chuckled, "We're cows. How can you be friends with us? Do you eat grass or chew your cud?"

"Well, no," Billy replied.

The cows all kicked up their heels and bellowed with laughter. One of them lowered his head and butted Billy several feet.

"Hey, wait a minute! Don't do that! I'll pop!"

The cows thought this great sport and one by one booted and butted poor Billy across the field. One of them nudged Billy near the creek with her nose. Billy saw his chance to escape. Two big bulls were coming toward him. Billy didn't stop to think twice. He turned and with a rolling lunge threw himself into the cool creek.

The water felt soothing to his cuts and bruises. He held his breath for a few minutes and rested in the soft mud at the bottom of the creek. He tried to change positions, but could barely move an inch. The sticky mud held him fast. With his last ounce of strength Billy puffed out his cheeks and tugged his weight to one side. He landed ker-plop on a hard rock. The sunfish and minnows swam around in circles kissing his face.

Billy could scarcely hold his breath a minute longer.
How would he get out of the creek? Just then the mud-rock on which he was lying moved. Billy wrapped his stem around the edge and held on tightly. He was so surprised that he almost forgot to hold his breath. The rock moved slowly upward, and then Billy's head popped above the surface of the water. He gulped deep breaths of fresh air.

The rock moved closer to the bank, then actually pulled itself from the water and tilted its side. Billy bounced onto the grass.

"What's a fellow like you doing in the bottom of the creek?"

"Why, who are you?" Billy spluttered.

"I'm Tilly the Turtle. I know where you belong. I've seen you in Farmer Dale's corn field. Whatever made you run away?"

"I'm lonesome," sobbed Billy. "I want a friend. Can you help me?"

"I'd sure like to be your friend myself, only I live in the water part of the time. You'd never last very long down under."

"Who can be my friend then, Tilly?"

The turtle looked at Billy's cut, bruised body and his tear-stained face. "You sure could use a friend, Billy. Hmmm... Let me see. Maybe if you'd roll down to Farmer Dale's barn, you might find a friend."

"Well, I guess it's worth a try. Thank you, Tilly, for saving my life. I couldn't have held my breath much longer."
Those fish down there were just a little too friendly for me," he laughed.

"Just follow this path, and it will take you straight to the barn."

"Thanks, Billy. So long," Billy waved his stem and started to roll, and turn down the level path. He moved slowly so his bruises wouldn't hurt so much.

At last he came to the board fence around the barnyard. It was painted white and made Billy feel better just looking at it. He slid under the bottom board and rolled toward some small speckled animals pecking at gravel in the driveway.

"Hello," he greeted. "I'm Billy Bumpkin, and I've come to be your friend."

The animals stared at him with their small beady eyes.
"Clack, clack. You look like a pumpkin to me," one of them said.

"That's right, I am," Billy answered. "I know I don't look much like myself now," he said, touching his cuts and bruises with his stem.

"Well, in that case, we like pumpkins."

"Oh, you do," smiled Billy happily.

"Yes, we do. We're chickens, and we like to eat pumpkins!"

"Oh, no!" cried Billy, trying to hide his face.

The chickens all hop-stepped toward him and began to peck the bruises on his face.
Billy cried in pain. "Help! Help!"
"Wrouf, wrouf." A sharp cry came from behind Billy.
"Oh, no!" They're sending for help," Billy wailed.
The sound grew closer. "Wrouf! Wrouf!" Suddenly the
chickens flew in all directions. Billy dared not open his
eyes. What will this new monster do to me? Why, oh why did
I ever leave my safe home in the corn patch he thought.

The animal tapped Billy with his foot and rolled him
sideways. Then he grabbed Billy's stem in his mouth and ran
around the barnyard, tossing his head and giving Billy a
scary ride.

"Corky, what've you got there? You bad dog. Put that
thing down."
Billy landed with a thud on the sharp gravel.
"Why, it's a pumpkin! However in the world did it
get here. They aren't ready to be picked yet. I'll have to
ask Dad. Maybe he knows."

This must be Farmer Dale's son thought Billy. What
will he do with me. Billy shuddered as he remembered all
that had happened to him. Surely nothing worse could happen.

The boy picked up the pumpkin and carried it gently
in his arms. Billy could smell new things as they neared
a big white building. He liked white. It made him feel
good inside. The boy set Billy down on a low place near the
house and left him for a few minutes. Soon he returned with
something in his hand. The boy took the long silver thing
and cut a great circle around Billy's stem.
Billy was so surprised he didn't even think about the cut in his head hurting him. The cuts and bruises tingled with a dull pain, but he felt nothing from the deep cut in his head. Billy just sat there, watching the boy. He lifted the stem from Billy's head and began to scoop out Billy's insides. It felt cool and refreshing to Billy. He didn't feel so fat and bloated anymore.

Next the boy wiped his blade on a cloth and cut a V-shaped wedge on top of Billy's eye. He thought it would hurt and waited for the pain, but when the boy removed the section, Billy could see everything more clearly. The world was bright and fresh and colorful. Billy could hardly wait until the boy cut out the other eye. The world was even more beautiful.

The boy cut Billy's nose out. He could smell the good things in the house much better. Billy was fascinated by what was happening to him. He wanted to shout because he was so happy and because he felt like a new person. He tried to shout, and then the boy did something to help him. He took his knife and made a long curving line almost reaching to Billy's chin. The wedge fell to the ground and Billy squeaked with joy. The boy looked at Billy as if he couldn't believe he had heard a pumpkin talk. Then he shook his head and went inside the house.

Billy suddenly felt very sad, for his new friend had left him. He wanted his stem back on top of his head. He
felt cold inside without his hat. Soon the boy returned carrying a short stick with a flame on the end of it. He placed the lighted stick inside Billy. Instantly Billy felt warm and happy. The boy picked up Billy's stem cap and set it securely on his head. Billy looked at the boy and smiled his broad smile. The light in his eyes beamed into the twilight.

"What a long day this has been," sighed Billy. "But it was worth it." He looked at his bruises and cuts and saw that the heat was beginning to heal them. He remembered the frisky mice who had cut him and the bully cows who had butted and bruised him. He thought of the silly fish who had tried to kiss him and the pesky chickens who had tried to peck him.

Billy remembered all that had happened to him as he sat on the front porch step. "None of that for me," he glowed into the dark night. "Boys are the only friends for pumpkins!"
THE DAY BEFORE EASTER

Carrie held onto her father's finger as they walked down the gravel road. She skipped every other step in her mud-red boots trying to match his stride. Her father swung a small can in his other hand and whistled as he walked. The warm March wind whipped past them from the side and brought a faint odor to Carrie. She screwed up her nose and asked, "Oooh, Daddy, what's that smell?"

"It's gasoline--here in the can."

"What's it for?"

"It's to help the brush piles burn better."

"Oh."

She tossed her head, and her dark curls bounced as she skipped. She could see their new house set in a corner of the woods and looked back to see how far they'd come from Grandpa Fisher's. "Come on, Daddy. Hurry! We're almost there," she shouted, running ahead.

Just then a rabbit darted across the road, and Carrie halted in surprise. "Look, Daddy! Look at him run!"

"He sure is in a hurry, all right."

"Hey, Daddy. Do you suppose he could be the Easter Bunny?" she asked excitedly.

"Oh, he could be."

"Maybe he's out trying to see where the houses are so he won't get lost tomorrow when he comes." Her brown eyes
were round, and she was breathless as she spoke. She watched his white tail bob up and down as he disappeared into the woods by their house.

"Oh, hurry, Daddy!" She tugged at his arm. "Let's see where he went."

He kept the same stride. "We might scare him away, and then he wouldn't come tomorrow. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you, Carrie?"

"Oh, no!"

They soon stood in the sticky mud of the drive-way. The front yard was criss-crossed with tractor tread prints where Carrie's father had dragged the trees from the clearing. The soft yard was cluttered with dead branches that had broken from the trees and roots that he had grubbed out. Today Carrie was going to get to help pick up branches and burn brush piles. She was eager to start and ran across the yard toward a large limb. She tugged at it, but it wouldn't budge.

Her father laughed as he set the gasoline can under the sweet gum tree. "Here, Carrie. Let me help you."

They worked steadily for over an hour. Carrie tossed small branches on top and sometimes poked them into the sides of the brush piles. She picked up a long rough branch and pulled it behind her as she walked toward the largest brush pile near her father. She stuck the branch into the brush pile and a crying squeak came from within. Startled, she jabbed the stick in a little deeper. Again the sound squeaked.

"Daddy! Daddy! Come here! Listen!"

"What is it, Carrie?"
"Come here, Daddy. I think I found the Easter Bunny. Listen." Again she poked the stick, and the squeak was louder. "Did you hear him? He ran in here when I scared him. Now he's stuck. How can we get him out?" She looked at her father anxiously.

"Why don't we just walk away and leave him alone. Maybe he'll get loose."

"But, Daddy. What if his leg's broken, and he can't run away? Maybe he'll come out if I call him. Here, Bunny," she called softly.

Her father picked up the last few branches and threw them toward a brush pile. The yard was dotted with several piles of branches. The afternoon sun sent long slanting shadows across the yard and made the brush piles look like mountains.

"Has he come out yet, Carrie?"

She shoved the stick in slowly, and the squeak sounded louder than before. "He's still in there, but I can't see him."

"Keep trying, Carrie. I'll be back in a minute to help you."

A few minutes later Carrie heard a crackling sound behind her. She spun around. Two of the brush piles were blazing with fire! Her father swung the gasoline can over another brush pile, then he set it down behind him. She watched as he reached in his pocket then stood on one foot as he struck the match on his heel. He tossed the match into
the brush pile, and it burst into flames.

Carrie looked around her. All the brush piles were on fire but hers. Her father came closer, swinging his gasoline can. "Oh, no, Daddy! You don't burn this one. Don't you remember? The Easter Bunny's inside!" She backed up with her arms outstretched, protecting the brush pile.

Her father laughed as he set the can down. "Oh, Carrie. Don't get so excited. I wouldn't burn your brush pile, not while the Easter Bunny's inside."

Carrie sighed with relief. "Well, then how are we going to get him out? Could we move all the brush over on the ones that are burning?"

"No, Carrie, I'm afraid that would take too long. We've got to get back to grandpa's before dark. I'll tell you what. Let's go into the house and have a snack. We can watch the brush piles from inside. Maybe we can think of a way to get the bunny to come out, or maybe he'll get out all by himself while we're gone."

"Well, okay. You won't burn this one 'til he gets out, will you?"

"Of course not."

Carrie was glad to go inside and eat. Every day they took time out to snack on candy, cookies, or pretzels whenever they were hungry. Carrie wasn't hungry today, but she thought the Easter Bunny just might work himself free if they stayed inside long enough.

Her father reached high into the cabinet above the sink
for the box of pretzels. They sat on a sawhorse eating them. The walls of the kitchen were covered with plaster board, and half of the woodwork was nailed in place. Several boards lay in a corner of the kitchen, and wood shavings gathered dust near the walls. They ate silently for several minutes.

Then her father spoke. "Well, Carrie. I guess I'd better check on the brush piles. Could you sweep up the floor a bit for me. Then we'll move the sawhorse and lumber into the other room."

"Sure, Daddy," she replied. "Then can we see if the Easter Bunny's out yet?"

"You bet. Just come on out when you're finished."

Carrie busied herself with the broom and hummed "Here Comes Peter Cottontail" as she swept. She finished in a few minutes and happened to glance out the window as she put the broom in the closet. She was so startled she stopped in her tracks. Her father was striking a match for the last brush pile, her Easter Bunny brush pile!

"Oh, he can't burn it," she wailed. "He promised he wouldn't 'til we got the Easter Bunny out! I just know he's still in there."

Carrie flung open the kitchen door and ran toward her father, crying with loud sobs. "Wait, Daddy! The Easter Bunny's still inside! You can't burn it yet!"

"Don't worry, Carrie. I saw him hopping away from the brush pile when I came out."

"But how do you know for sure it was the right bunny,
the Easter Bunny?"

"Oh, I'm sure it was."

Carrie hung her head in disbelief. She just knew her father had seen the wrong bunny. How could she wait until tomorrow to make sure? If he left her good things to eat in the morning, she would know for sure he was safe. But what if he doesn't come tomorrow she thought.

Carrie turned her head away from the burning brush pile. She leaned against the sweet gum tree, the wind flapping her coat tails. She hung her head and tried to keep back the tears. She pressed a gum ball into the mud with her boot, then she stood on it with all her weight. Through blurry eyes she saw something lying in a clump of grassy weeds. She stooped to see what it was then touched them to see if they were real. She could hardly believe her eyes. There on the ground were three candy Easter eggs. Quickly she grasped them in her hands and ran to her smiling father.

"Look, Daddy! See what the Easter Bunny left me! He did get out of the brush pile after all!"
CHRIS AND ERNIE PUSHED THEIR LUNCH BOXES NEXT TO EACH OTHER ON THE SEAT. THE DUSTY ORANGE SCHOOL BUS BOUNCED OVER A BUMP, AND THEIR THERMOS BOTTLES RATTLED INSIDE. CHRIS SCOOTED BACK IN THE SEAT AND LOOKED AT ERNIE.

"HEY, ERNIE, HAVE YOU GOT A PET YET FOR THE PARADE?"
ERNIE SLUMPED HIS SHOULDERS. "NOPE, NOTHING BUT OLD LIMPIT. HE'S SUCH AN OLD DOG. I CAN'T TAKE HIM."

"WHAT ABOUT YOUR GOLDFISH, ERNIE?"
"NO, THAT WOULDN'T WORK EITHER. GOSH, CHRIS, I'VE JUST GOT TO HAVE A PET THAT CAN DO A TRICK, OR ONE THAT'S UNUSUAL. FALL HARVEST DAY IS JUST FIVE DAYS AWAY. I'VE GOT TO HAVE A PET FOR THE PARADE."

"I'D LET YOU SHARE JO-JO WITH ME," SAID CHRIS, "ONLY IT'S AGAINST THE RULES. BEIDES I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN RIDE HIM WHEN HE DOES HIS TRICKS."

THE BUS LEANED AROUND THE CORNER AND STARTED DOWN THE ROAD TO CHRIS' HOUSE. JO-JO STOPPED GRAZING, TOSSED HIS HEAD UP AND DOWN, AND RAN ALONG THE FENCE TOWARD THE DRIVE-WAY.

"LOOK AT HIM GO. HE LEARNED TO DO THAT ALL BY HIMSELF," SAID CHRIS.

"HE SURE IS A SMART PONY," SAID ERNIE.

THE BUS JERKED TO A HALT AS CHRIS GRABBED HIS LUNCH BUCKET AND JACKET. "SEE YOU TOMORROW!"
"So long, Chris."

Ernis moved closer to the window of the bus. He squinted into the sun as he watched Chris climb the fence to pet Jo-Jo.

Jo-Jo is a smart pony thought Ernie, and he can do all kinds of tricks. If I only had a pet that was different from any other's, maybe I could win a prize. I wouldn't have time to train a dog or cat now to win the prize for the most talented pet. Ginny Miller's Angora cat will probably win the most beautiful pet prize. But nobody's got an unusual pet.

The bus churned up dust clouds as Ernie thought and thought about a pet. He was still thinking that night at supper.

"Ernie, for heaven's sake. Stop playing with your food and eat some supper."

"Not hungry." Ernie moved his fork in circles around the spinach and pork chop.

"What's the matter, son?"

"Dad, It's just that old Limpit isn't good enough for the pet parade. He limps so bad he couldn't even walk, and he can't do anything."

"Well, Ernie, why don't you go to the creek and catch yourself a frog."

"Oh, anybody can do that. My pet's got to be different than anybody else's."

"Well, keep thinking, son. You'll come up with
something."

After supper Ernie helped his mother by taking the scraps out to Limpit in the shed. He was still thinking about a pet as he opened the door and stepped inside. It was dark, but he knew where Limpit was. He heard him get up from his bed in the corner. The dog leaned against Ernie's leg as he ate, and Ernie bent down to pet his back.
"How are you, fella?"
"EEEeeech! EEEEeeech!"

Ernie grabbed Limpit's body close to him. "What was that?" Ernie crouched to the floor and looked around him, his eyes wide.
"EEEeeech! EEEEeeech!"

Ernie searched the beams overhead. Two dots of light glared down at him. Slowly he inched toward the door, opened it a crack, and slipped into the safety of the dark night. He took a deep breath then ran like a rocket toward the back door.
"Dad! Dad! Come quick! There's something in the shed! Hurry! Bring a flashlight. Let's see what it is!"

They hurried back to the shed and opened the door slowly.
"You should have heard it, Dad. It was the spookiest sound!"
"EEEeeech! EEEEeeech!"

"There it is again, Dad. Up there." Ernie pointed to the two dots of light. His father held the lantern up
over his head.

"Why it's a baby screech owl, Ernie."

"How'd he get in here?"

"He must have come in when it was still light and then couldn't find his way out."

"Hey, Dad! Can we keep him?"

"Why, whatever for?"

"For the pet parade! He'd be perfect! No one would have a pet like him! Could we keep him in here, Dad, 'til after the parade Saturday? Could we?"

"Oh, I don't know, Ernie. How would you feed him."

"Oh, put some food around in here. He could find it."

"Do you know what owls eat?"

"Well, not exactly."

"They eat fresh raw meat like field mice."

"Well, couldn't we put some raw meat in here? Please, Dad."

"Well, I don't know," he shook his head.

"Couldn't I just try for a day or two?"

"Well, I guess there's no harm in trying." His face broke into a smile.

"Gee, thanks, Dad! Yippee! Now I can win the prize for the most unusual pet!"

They closed the door carefully and made sure all the windows were shut tightly. The next morning on the school bus Ernie sat on the edge of his seat as the bus rattled down the hill to Chris' house. Ernie's red freckles spread over
his face in a broad smile.

"Hey, Chris, guess what? I've got a pet for the pa-

"What is it? Where did you get it?"

Chris heard the whole story of the discovery of the owl and the plans to feed it.

"Gee, that's great, Ernie."

"Hey, Chris, why don't you get off the bus at my house tonight and see him?"

"Sure thing."

That afternoon the boys jumped off the bus and rushed into Ernie's house to get some raw hamburger from the refrigerator. They put it on an old lid from a coffee can and headed toward the shed.

"EEeech! EEeeech!"

"See, there he is. Up in the rafters!"

"Can you catch him yet, Ernie?"

"No, but we're going to try this evening. He's got to get used to us first."

The screech owl followed the boys with his round golden eyes. They moved slowly toward a shelf on one side of the shed and set the can lid of raw hamburger near the front.

"There, he'll see it here and eat. It's been over a day now that he's been inside without food," Ernie said.

"What are you going to call him, Ernie?"

Just then the owlet flapped his wings and flew a crooked uncertain circle between the rafters and the roof, landing
where he had been perched before.

"See, he must know we're talking about him. He's sure
got big ears," said Chris.

"Hey, that's it. We'll call him Eerie. Owls are sup-
posed to be spooky and eerie. It's a perfect name. Only we'll
spell it "Eerie." We'd better go now, Chris. He wouldn't
want him to get afraid of us."

The boys slipped quickly out of the door and made sure
it was latched securely. The next morning on the bus Ernie
could hardly wait to tell Chris the news.

"Chris, I held him last night. Dad and I surrounded
him and finally caught him. He wasn't wild at all. He didn't
even try to peck me."

"That's great, Ernie! How did he like his hamburger?"

"Oh, he didn't eat much of it, but maybe he wasn't
hungry."

"Could be. Hey, Ernie, how are you going to carry him
in the parade? If you need a bird cage, I think we've got one
up in the attic."

"No, silly, I'm going to have him perch on my arm with
a cord around his foot, like the falcons you read about."

"Do you think he'll do it okay?"

"Sure. If I could hold him last night, don't you think
I could teach him to perch by Saturday? That's three days.
Anyway he's a very smart bird."

Chris couldn't stay after school to see the owl, but
Ernie hopped off the bus and ran to the shed. He eased him-
self inside and looked up into the rafters for Eerie. He
whistled softly.

"EEeEeEe! EEeEeEeEe!"

"Where are you, Eerie?"

The owlet swooped down toward Ernie, and then he curved his flight upward just in time to miss Ernie's head.

"Oh, you must be glad to see me," Ernie smiled.

He walked to the pan of hamburger. It hadn't been touched since they placed it there. Ernie felt funny inside his stomach for fibbing to Chris about the food.

"What's the matter, Eerie, aren't you hungry?"

"EEeEeEe! EEeEeEeEe! The owlet ruffled the feathers around his neck and glared at Ernie. The late afternoon sun slanted through a window of the shed. A large grotesque shadow of Eerie was reflected on the rafters and roof. "EEeEeEe!"

"Well, maybe you'll eat something tonight," Ernie said quietly, half to himself.

For the next two days Ernie went to the refrigerator each evening and placed new hamburger on the can lid for the owl. He always gave the old hamburger that Eerie didn't touch to Limpit who gulped it down in one bite.

Thursday evening at supper his father asked about the owl. "How's his diet, Ernie? Have you been feeding him every day?"

"Sure, Dad. I very day I take him some raw hamburger." Ernie didn't feel the funny feeling in his stomach quite as much with that lie. After all he thought, I do take him hamburger every day even if he doesn't eat it.
"Dad, could you help me catch him again tonight? I've only got Friday left to teach him to perch on my arm."

"Of course, Ernie. We can try tonight."

They entered the shed quickly and quietly and held the light high to find the owl.

"EEeetch! EEeetch!" The ball of feathers swooped toward Ernie. He ducked as the owlet sailed over his head and flew to his perch.

"He sure is a nervous little rascal."

"Yeah," Ernie replied.

"He must be grateful to you for feeding him so much, son."

Ernie felt the funny feeling in his stomach as he glanced at the shelf and the empty can lid. Then his eyes shifted to Limpit. The old dog looked at him with tired eyes and thumped his tail on the earth floor.

For fifteen minutes they tried to catch the owl, but he flew among the rafters and screeched his weird cry.

"I don't know, son, if you can have him perch on your arm, or not. He seems to be a lot wilder than last time."

"Well, Dad, if I have to, I suppose I could put him in a cage. Maybe he would be better off there." Ernie thought about how the owlet darted for his head each time he came inside the shed. It would be a lot safer for me, too, if I had a cage he thought to himself.

Friday afternoon Ernie stepped down from the bus and walked slowly toward the house. His red jacket was slung
carelessly over his shoulder, and his sandy hair dipped low over his eyebrow. He let the front door bang behind him as he tossed his reader on the couch. He started toward the refrigerator for more hamburger, then he changed his mind and walked out the back door.

"What's the use of giving it all to Limpit," he mumbled to himself as he neared the shed. "I sure do wish Eerie would eat something though. I have to have him in good shape for tomorrow. Maybe I could get the old tom cat to catch some mice. That probably wouldn't work though. Owls like to swoop down and catch live mice."

Ernie entered the shed and looked up into the rafters for the owl.

"Eerie, where are you?"

There was no sound. The rafters showed no sign of the owlet. Ernie hoisted himself up on some boxes to try and see the owl. The afternoon twilight revealed only darkness.

Then from the far corner Ernie heard a faint cry.

"Eeech. Eeech." The sound was almost a whisper. Quickly Ernie climbed across the rafters toward the sound. "Eeech." The cry grew softer. Then Ernie saw the owl, a ball of ruffled drooping feathers. As Ernie came closer the owl remained on its perch and tucked his beak deeper into the ruff of gray down about his neck.

Ernie gently wrapped his fingers around the owl's body. The feathers crushed and matted together. All Ernie could feel was his tiny body, the size of a hen's egg.
"Leech," cried the owl weakly.

Ernie held the owl carefully in one hand as he eased his body from the rafters. The tiny bird was motionless in his hand. He could feel a faint heartbeat against his palm. He raised the owl's head with his finger. It's eyes were blurred and half closed. Slowly he removed his finger, and the owl's head fell limply into the downy feathers around its neck.

Suddenly Ernie felt the funny feeling in his stomach. Then it moved up to his throat andsmarted his eyes. "Oh, Eerie, don't die, please! I'm sorry. I should have let you go Monday. I didn't mean to starve you."

He carried the owl outside the shed and opened his hands wide. "There you go, Eerie; you're free!" The owl lay in his hands. "Go ahead, Eerie. Fly! You're free!" Ernie swooped his hands upward, and the owl fluttered a few feet but fell to the ground.

The owl lay on his side in the dry grass. Ernie picked him up and hurried toward the nearest tree. He quickly lifted himself up on the low branches. Carefully he placed Eerie on a sturdy branch and watched intently as the owl dug his talons into the bark. Then the owl opened his eyes a slit and seemed to stare into Ernie's eyes. He ruffled his feathers and pivoted his neck.

"Go ahead, Eerie! Fly! Fly!" Ernie pleaded. He climbed down from the tree, his eyes on the owl. For several minutes he stood beneath the tree. The owl flapped his
wings.

"Ileech!"

"Go ahead! You can do it!!"

The owl looked at Ernie for several long seconds then turned and swooped from the branch. For an instant his wings faltered and he veered toward the ground. Then his body seemed to be lifted on an air current. The owl flapped its wings steadily as it soared up toward the hickory tree at the edge of the clearing.

"Eeeech! Eeeech!" The owl called to the woods.

Ernie smiled after the owl and looked at the spot where he had disappeared into the leaves of the tree. Then he turned and whistled for Limpit.
TO CATCH A FISH

David hunched over, flashlight beamed on the ground, hunting nightcrawlers. The dark wet grass tickled his bare feet as he walked back and forth across the yard. "How many have you got, Dad?" he whispered.

"Oh, about half a can. How about you?"

"Just a minute! There's a big fat one! See his head? SSSSH. Slowly and quietly the boy inched toward the worm, eyes on the spot marked by his flashlight. He bent down carefully and in one quick motion pressed his thumb against the red neck and held the 'crawler firmly against the earth. "There! Got him! Not to see if I can pull him out." Gently the boy tugged; he felt a slight ripple in the worm as it dug deeper into the ground. The boy relaxed his hold for an instant; then when he felt the worm release its grip, he pulled it from the damp soil with skillful fingers. "There, that makes twenty-seven for me," he said proudly.

"Here, Dad, put them with yours, and let's see how many we've got!"

David help the flashlight while his father poured the 'crawlers into the large pork and beans can. Small clods of dirt fell among the slimy worms which were all tied in knots. He watched his father settle the worms in the large can by
tapping it against his palm. Then he tilted the can and poured the 'crawlers into his open hand, letting the dirt sift through his fingers.

"Wow! Look at them! Do you think we've got enough?"

"Yes, I think one big can ought to last us all afternoon. You really found a lot of nice ones, David."

"Do you think I can catch a river cat as big as this?"

He stretched his hands far apart.

"I don't know, David. We'll see tomorrow," he grinned. He scooped up a handful of loose sod from the tulip bed along the fence and sprinkled it on the 'crawlers. David added some grass. "Right now though we'd better get some shut-eye."

The two walked side by side in the darkness toward the light at the back door. Both were silent. David looked at the night sky. Millions of tiny stars blended into the band of the Milky Way. Larger stars were scattered as far as he could see. He heard the midnight breeze in the woods then felt it softly touch his body. It was warm and made him remember the balmy winds on the river. He just had to catch a "cat" bigger than all the suckers he got last time. What good were suckers anyway? You couldn't eat them and had to throw them back. But a catfish! Mmmmm! He could taste it already. His mom knew just how to fry them!

"Hey, you two, did you fill up the can?" His mother greeted them at the screen door.

"You bet, Mom. Look. Want to see?" He began to pour them into his hand halfway through the door.
"No you don't. Back outside," she laughed. "I believe you."

"Here, David, let's leave the can on the step 'til morning. It should be all right unless Skippy knocks it over."

"Oh, he won't. He likes worms, and besides he's asleep."

"And that's just where you should be, my boy. Upstairs to bed with you. Be sure to take a bath first."

"Okay, Mom. Good night. 'Night, Dad."

"Good night, David."

Golly, didn't she think he knew enough to take a bath without being told. His parents were okay, but sometimes they treated him like a baby. David lay in bed listening to the muffled talk of his parents. He rolled over, and the moon made him blink it was so bright shining through his window. He covered his head with his soft feather pillow and fell asleep.

David stirred and heard his pillow plop to the floor. He opened his eyes a crack. A beam of light fell on the alarm clock. It was 6:30 already. Quickly he dressed in jeans, sweatshirt and sneakers and tiptoed down the creaky stairs. His dad would be up at seven to do the chores, and he didn't want to wake him. Mom got to sleep a little longer, but breakfast was always ready by eight.

He slipped out the back door. "Whew!" he breathed. "They're still here." Just then Skippy bounded around the corner whinning happily and wagging his tail. "Hi, fella! You didn't hear me open the door, did you? Look, Skip. Did you see our 'crawlers?" The dog sniffed the can and turned
his head. "Oh, they aren't that bad!" He hugged the toy collie close to him.

David dumped the can upside down on the cement step. The cylinder of worms slowly sprawled in all directions. Big nightcrawlers disentangled themselves and darted across the step searching for dirt. The boy turned them around and aimed them back toward the center lump of worms. Skippy barked and touched them with his wet nose then dashed across the yard in wild circles. Carefully David picked up the small mass of worms and put them back in the can. The more lively ones were tumbling off the step and onto the porch floor.

"Hey, Skip. Come and help me!"

The dog sniffed the last worm and David let it crawl in his palm for a few seconds. It felt damp and cool as it wiggled and twisted. The boy raised his hand to his nose and watched the 'crawler closely. The tiny segments in its body moved in perfect rhythm.

The back door slammed.

"Oh, Dad. I didn't hear you. Just been looking at our 'crawlers."

"None of them got away, I hope."

"Oh, no." He put the worm back with the others and closed the lid. "Come on, Skip. Let's go help with the chores. Can we feed the chickens first, Dad?" At his nod David and Skip raced toward the broiler house. They were easy to feed now that they had installed the new automatic feeders. All they had to do was refill the bins every other day.
David liked Saturdays. It was the only day he got to help with the chores when he was in school. Soon summer vacation would start, and he'd be up early every morning. However, now Saturdays were special.

Father and son turned toward the barn. In an hour the cattle were watered and let out to pasture. The boy and his father leaned on the gate and watched the broad backs of the Black Angus herd. There were thirty head now, and next year on his eleventh birthday David would get a calf for his very own. His father didn't think he was old enough or big enough yet to handle the responsibility, but David felt ready. He knew he would have to get up before school and feed his calf and go out to the barn on cold wintry evenings to see if he were all right. He knew he could do it, but he would wait until his Dad thought he could, too.

"Son, I don't know about you, but my stomach says it's time for breakfast."

"I'm with you. Hope we have ham and eggs. I'm starved!"

David whistled for Skip. In a few seconds he appeared from the woods panting. "Come on, fella. Let's go." Halfway to the house David sniffed the air. "Yippee! Ham and eggs! Hurry up, Dad," he called over his shoulder. At the back door David lifted the lid on the can of 'crawlers. "Just checking," he grinned at his father behind him.

They were almost finished with breakfast. "Pass the jelly please, Mom. Hey, Dad, what time are we leaving for the river?"
"I thought we'd go about two. We've got to mend that fence back by the woods this morning. I'm afraid the cattle might break through any time."

"How long will it take?"

'It'll take all morning, and that's if we work fast."

"What time do you want dinner then, dear?"

"We'll try to be back between 12:30 and 1:00."

The morning went fast for David. He held the fence in place while his dad nailed it securely. The barbed wire pricked him when he wasn't careful. "How much more, Dad?"

"Oh, another twenty feet ought to do it."

Soon they were finished, and David drove the tractor back to the barn. After dinner he hurried out to the shed to get the fishing tackle. He checked the hooks and sinkers on the poles and tested the lines. There were enough extra bobbers and hooks in the tackle box. He laid the poles and tackle box in the back of the pick-up and returned to the house.

"All set, Dad," he called from the screen door.

"Okay, be right out."

David picked up the can of 'crawlers and called to Skip. They waited patiently in the truck for several minutes. Soon his father got in the cab, and they were on their way.

It was five miles to Little Buck River, and David knew the road well. The trees were almost all bushy with their new green leaves. The narrow black-top followed the
fence along the fields. Tiny shoots of corn were filed in neat rows. Farmers were disking the soil for soy beans. The crossroads was just ahead. They turned off on a gravel road which became a lane. It ended abruptly at a wire fence. Mr. Miller was nice to let them fish on his land any time they wanted thought David.

The pick-up eased to a stop, and David and Skip hopped out. His father closed his door, and they all met at the back of the truck. "Here, David, you carry the bait, and I'll get the tackle." They climbed over the fence that Skip had already crawled under and started across the pasture. The river flowed on the other side of the thicket. Really it wasn't quite a river, not as big as the Ohio anyway, but they still liked to call it a river. In some places it was as shallow as Willow Creek, but their favorite fishing hole was a gentle deep bend where the big river cats liked to laze in the sun.

David's steps quickened as they neared the thicket. The warm river wind smelled muddy. He could hear the stillness beyond the trees. They followed a narrow path through the thicket and broke through the underbrush on the riverbank. He smiled as he looked down the river. It was deep after the spring rains, but the current was perfect for fishing. He could see their clearing downstream at the broad bend. They walked among the sycamores along the bank until they were at the fishing hole. Skip was barking at birds in the woods and
wouldn't be back until they were ready to leave.

"Where do you think the big ones will be today, Dad?"

"Just about anywhere you want to fish. Let's bait up and have some fun."

David took his pole, unfastened the hook from the reel, and let out a little line. He snapped on a red and white plastic bobber about five feet from the sinker. His father had just finished the same motions. He reached for the bait, dumped the 'crawlers onto his palm, and chose two long dangly ones. "Here, David. See if you can bait your own hook."

David took the can and turned it upside down in his hand, imitating his father. He held the bottom of the can against his stomach so he could find a good 'crawler with his free hand. He set the can on the ground and held the worm in his right hand. It felt funny crawling inside his loose fist. He picked up his hook and opened his fingers. The wiggly worm felt cool and slimy and left a wet trail on his palm.

He brought the hook close to the head of the 'crawler. The worm touched the hook and turned aside. David stood motionless. He stared at the 'crawler. From the woods he heard Skippy bark. His thoughts returned to early morning. Skippy and he had had such fun playing with them. He remembered how they had all crawled so fast to find dirt and how Skippy had touched them with his wet nose. He looked at the 'crawler now in his hand. It's body moved in perfect rhythm.
"Come on, David; hurry up. I thought you wanted to catch a big river cat."

What's the matter with me thought David. I've seen Dad do this hundreds of times. He's always baited my hook for me. But I--I can't do it! I can't do it! The trawler squirmed in his palm as he closed his fist over it.

"David are you ready?" He heard no reply and turned.

"What's the matter, son?"

"Nothing. I," his voice cracked. Slowly the boy stretched his arms toward his father. "Dad, could you?" he began.

The father looked at his son. He seemed so small. He stood there in front of him, expectant, unsmiling, his eyes searching.

Gradually he reached for the hook and worm. He touched his son's warm hands and looked into his eyes.

"Sure, David."

The boy was silent. He took the pole from his father.

"Thanks, Dad. I--I don't know what happened. I just somehow couldn't do it. Maybe next time."

"Yes, David, maybe next time." He looked past his son and far down the river. Skippy barked. "Well, son, think you can catch that big one?"

"Just wait and see," David smiled as they cast their lines into the river.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO GUIDE PUPIL REACTIONS

1. How did the children react in general to the story?

2. How well did they like the characters?

3. Did they seem to identify in any way with the characters?

4. How did the children react to this type of story?
   a. Was it too or too young for the children?
   b. Other.

5. How did they react to the style of writing?

6. To what extent did the lack of pictures or illustrations affect the children's like or dislike of the story?

7. Was the length about right, too long, or too short for the attention span of this class?

8. Did the class have any other reactions or comments about the story?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Reaction</td>
<td>F-G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G-E</td>
<td>G-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentiveness</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G-E</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Identification</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F-G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suitability to Age Group</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G-E</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F-G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to Writing Style</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F-G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to Conversation</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G-F</td>
<td>F-G</td>
<td>F-G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>G-F</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to Lack of Illustrations</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G-F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>G-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Visualize Story</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F-G</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F-P</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A--BILLY BUMPKIN
B--THE DAY BEFORE EASTER
C--BERID THE OWL
D--TO CATCH A FISH

P--Poor
F--Fair
G--Good
E--Excellent
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Upon completion of this creative project the author feels the intended purposes have been achieved well. Through the survey paper the author learned much about present-day children, their habits and hobbies, and how these and other cultural factors influence reading.

The reactions of the children indicate their acceptance of the stories in varying degrees. A certain age group seems to prefer each story. Their comments show some identification with characters and pupil participation in the plot development.

The creative project in itself was most rewarding. The author's desire for self-expression was both satisfied and increased. This experience was more than just a creative expression. The author now understands and appreciates the attitudes of children toward her work and is encouraged to write more stories.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


