

.....

"I can't believe that!" said Alice.

"Can't you?" the Queen said. "Try again, draw a long breath, and shut your eyes."

Alice laughed. "There's no use trying," she said. "One can't believe impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day.

**sometimes  
I've believed  
as many as  
six impossible  
things before  
breakfast!**

.....

AS  
MANY  
AS



A Publication  
exploring the  
importance of  
reading for kids,  
featuring work  
by Kerry Mallan  
+ Steve McCurry

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# FOREWARD

Children's literature is important for the development of children. It includes stories, books, magazines, and poems that are enjoyed by children. Modern children's literature is classified in two different ways: genre or the intended age of the reader.

Children's literature can be traced to stories and songs, part of a wider oral tradition, that adults shared with children before publishing existed. The development of early children's literature, before printing was invented, is difficult to trace. Even after printing became widespread, many classic "children's" tales were originally created for adults and later adapted for a younger audience. Since the fifteenth century much literature has been aimed specifically at children, often with a moral or religious message. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is known as the "Golden Age of Children's Literature", because many classic children's books were published then.

There is no single or widely used definition of children's literature. It can be broadly defined as anything that children read or more specifically defined as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, or drama intended for and used by children and young people.



# WHAT MAKES A \* GREAT KID'S BOOK?

WITH THE TEAM \* AT KID'S BOOK REVIEW



# WHAT MAKES A GOOD CHILDREN'S BOOK?

Tania: Something that first entertains, then enlightens, enchants and educates; perhaps in that order.

Dimity: Emotion. It's what kids naturally exhibit and respond to, without thinking.

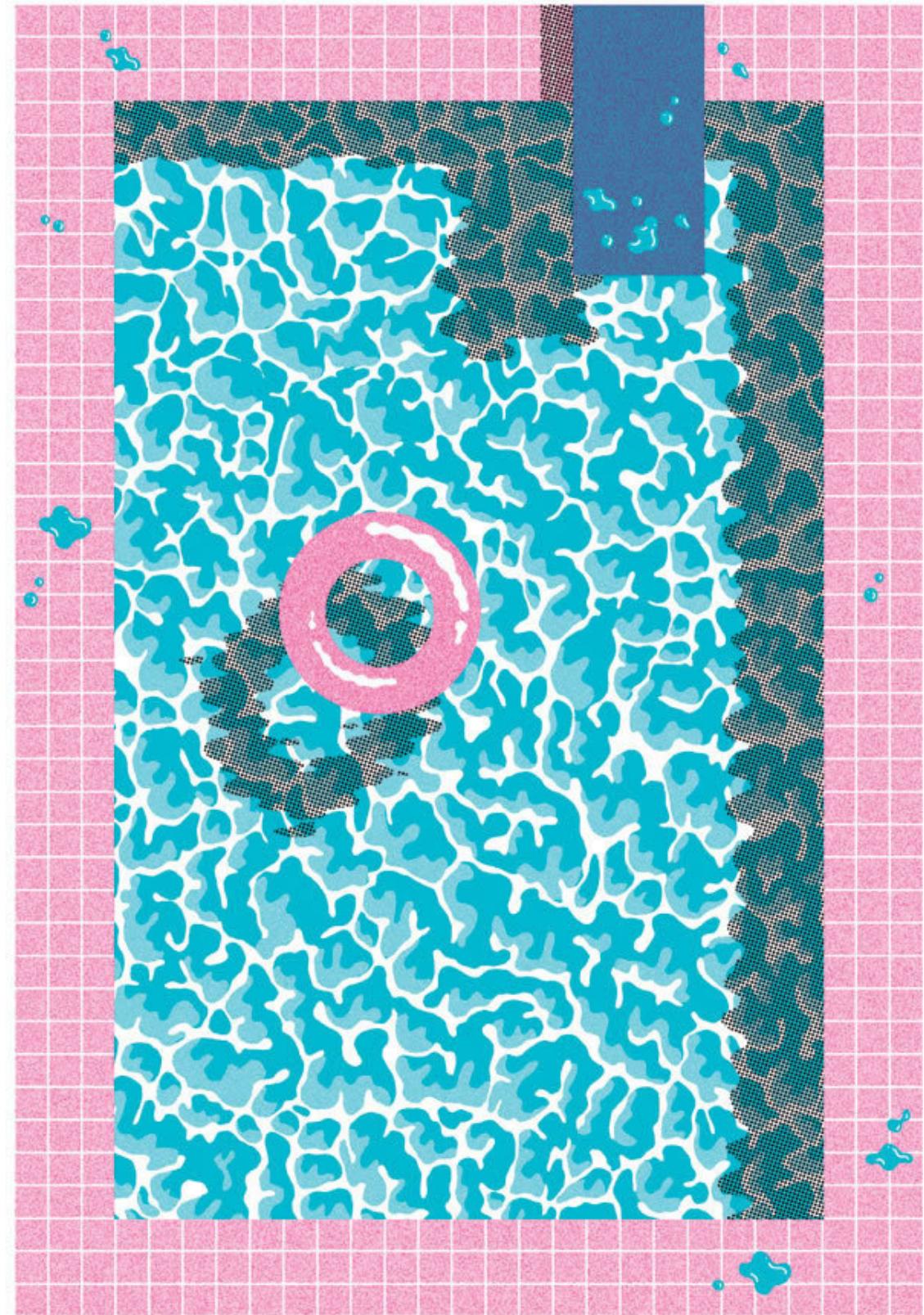
Jo: A strong emotional core that pulls the heart through every moment, to a satisfying end.

Anastasia: Any book that makes a child reach for another.

Penny: Language and illustrations that sparkle with humour, emotion and imagination.

Sarah W: Engaging story. Relatable characters children can connect to.

Sally: Humor



# WHAT SHOULD BOOKS DO FOR CHILDREN?



Tania: Uplift, inspire, comfort, delight. Take them to faraway places. Impart a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Dimity: Evoke something albeit joy, wonder, excitement or curiosity.

Jo: Give them a wonderful experience and a hunger to come back for more.

Anastasia: Entertain, educate, satisfy, and inspire.

Penny: Inspire, thrill, engage, transport, delight.

Sarah W: Inspire imagination and challenge thinking.

Sally: Help them to learn about the world around them. Offer them different perspectives and give them something to think about beyond the book

# WHAT MAKES FOR STRIKING ILLUSTRATION?

- Tania: **Beauty, thoughtfulness, nuance, visual narrative.** Pro work from accomplished artists.
- Dimity: **Spontaneity and heart.** I am also a massive fan of whimsy to relay emotion.
- Jo: **That depends on the age of the child it is meant for.**
- Anastasia: **Illustrations that give a broader view of what's going on, rather than just a translation of the text.**
- Penny: **Thoughtful use of colour, expression and movement.**
- Sarah W: **Images that elicit an emotional response and spark imagination.**
- Sally: **Simple, limited colour**



# IS TRADITIONAL STORY STRUCTURE IMPORTANT?



Tania: Depends on the genre, but I love it when creators break rules. I think publishing sometimes gets too caught up in rules, and such entrenched ways can stifle a story. It's interesting that the most esteemed books often break the rules. Frankly, I love it.

Dimity: I adore the non-linear structure of postmodern picture books but enjoy stories with solid traditional structures. Beginnings, middles and ends are the natural rhythm of life, and stories mirror this.

Jo: I'm not one for following rules, so for me, no.

Anastasia: Only as a guideline for the writer.

Penny: There are some fabulous, quirky books with unique approaches.

Sarah W: Without structure, readers tend to lose interest, but there are lots of different ways to structure a story.

Sally: Not always. However, breaking with structure should be done with purpose.

# WHAT DO YOU THINK OF BOOKS WITH MORALS?

Tania: Ugh. If there's going to be any open messaging (I think all stories have some kind of inherent messaging), it should be either imperceptible or all-out-crazy and ripped-off-like-a-band-aid.

Dimity: I love a story that makes you think, question and go ahh, but if a message is rammed too forcibly and too obviously in front of me, it's an immediate turn off.

Jo: Not much. No one likes being preached at.

Anastasia: They teach children alternate ways of thinking.

Penny: They need to be done so beautifully and cleverly that you don't even realise there's a moral in there!

Sarah W: Many children's books contain morals in a subtle way but if it is too didactic children will reject it (and adults won't read it to them).

Sally: Hmmmm, I like messages in books, but I cringe at obvious moralising.



# WHAT KIND OF BOOKS DON'T WORK WELL?

- Tania: Moral- or message-driven books, for the most part. Messaging has to be almost imperceptible. 90% of rhyming books, because only a fraction do it well. Sap or schmaltz or books with ugly or substandard illustrations.
- Dimity: Didactic ones. Far too dull and dry. No one really appreciates being told what to do or how to act, least of all kids.
- Jo: Those in which characters are not developed and there is no emotional core.
- Anastasia: Books that are beautifully presented but are without substance.
- Penny: Anything too didactic or forced.
- Sarah W: Books that are too didactic and books that talk down to children and patronise them.
- Sally: Didactic, badly written rhyme and too many words. I usually do a flick through before I will read a picture book and if the pages are covered in words, I won't even bother to read it.



# WHAT KIND OF BOOKS DO WE NEED MORE OF?



Tania: **Wordless books.** A focus on visual literacy is my prediction these coming years. Cultural diversity in both authorship and themes--we can never have enough. Books that shun tradition, think outside the square and surprise us.

Dimity: **Picture books.** They can and will save the world.

Jo: **Well-written tales with strong female characters.**

Anastasia: **Books for middle grade readers, particularly boys.**

Penny: **Children's books with diverse characters.**

Sarah W: **Those willing to challenge traditional thinking.**

Sally: **Engaging early readers.**

A PICTURE  
BOOK IS A  
**SMALL  
DOOR**  
TO AN  
**ENORMOUS  
WORLD**

SOCIAL VALUES  
IN CHILDREN'S  
LITERATURE

BY KERRY MALLAN



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## WHAT IS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE?

In simple terms, children's literature comprises texts (novels, short stories, picture books, fairy tales, myths, poems) produced in various formats (print, digital, film, games) for children and young people (0–18 years, approximately). A problem with simple definitions, however, is that, invariably, they are proven to be inadequate. The popularity of the Harry Potter and Hunger Games series of books and films with adults shows that, while some books may have been intended for child readers (or young adult readers), adults too are also readers—not just as co-readers with children, but as voluntary readers in their own right who choose to read a children's book. This crossover phenomenon also works in the other direction—books originally intended for adult readers often find an appreciative child or young adult readership (e.g., *The Book Thief*,



by Marcus Zusak).

In *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), Jacqueline Rose questions the endless production and dissemination of children's books, contending that children's literature is an "impossibility" in that adults write, edit, publish, and critique these works. In defining children's literature, David Rudd (2010) suggests that, rather than focus on the age of the reader, we should instead consider the qualities or characteristics of the texts themselves. However, this also proves to be a difficult undertaking as children's literature is a varied and evolving textual field. While books intended for very young children often use illustration in conjunction with a small number of words, length or illustration is not a necessary criterion for a children's book. There are numerous examples of children's books that have a considerable number of pages (e.g., *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* has over 800 pages; *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, an illustrated "novel" at 533 pages, won the prestigious Caldecott Medal for the most distinguished American "picture book" in 2008 from the American Library Association).

Authors and illustrators have been experimenting with the form and content of children's literature for a long time. The relatively recent emergence of tablet technologies, e-books, apps, and other interactive media complements the substantial children's book publishing output. Interactive children's texts, however, can be traced back to the late 18th-early 19th century, a time when so called "movable books" were produced. As Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2015) explains, "these are texts in codex form in which some of the words and/or illustrations are presented in the format of a mechanical device such as a wheel, tab, slat, or flap" (p. 212). As paper engineering has become more sophisticated, the popularity of movable children's books continues today. Reid-Walsh considers how the design of early movable books afforded a set of implied interactions for the child reader.

Other affordances or action possibilities are offered through more recent changes in children's literature made possible by digital technologies and especially tablet computers. These new forms of interactive children's fiction demonstrate the multimodal environment in which education and reading occur. These texts exemplify how children's literature continues to change with the times, while reinforcing the significance of reading. Erica Hazeley (2013) argues that the affordances for picture book texts such as Apple's iPads (its size and mimicking of a hand movement turning

the pages of a book) offer “a physical experience for the reader that is not necessarily different from the ways in which the body interacts with a codex” (p. 7). While the experience of reading either a print-based children’s book or a digital adaptation or hypertext is both different and similar, Rose’s point regarding the adult control over children’s publishing and its applications is inevitable in terms of the cultural, educational, and economic milieus in which children’s books are created, disseminated, and consumed.

Rather than focus on the “impossibility” of children’s literature, Wu, Mallan, and McGillis (2013) offer a different perspective by drawing attention to the imaginative possibilities of children’s literature: “Literature does not so much reflect the world as it constructs possible worlds: it gives us models of possibility” (p. xi). These models of possibility are often not so far from the lived realities that children experience. A significant purpose of children’s literature is to model for children “socially sanctioned ways of understanding their world” (Bradford, 2001, p. 20). In this respect, both children’s literature and education share a socializing agenda.

In writing for children, adult writers either attempt to perpetuate certain socio-cultural values that a society deems desirable, or they present alternative viewpoints to dominant values and ideologies. The ideological positions offered to readers through children’s books can be either explicit or implicit. For example, the information picture book *Putting Your Carbon Foot in It!* and its subtitle, ALL ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL MELTDOWN—WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT! (Mason & Gordon, 2010) uses upper case, bolding, and exclamation marks to ensure that readers do not miss its overt message. By contrast, the picture book *Odd Bird Out* (Bansch, 2008) offers young readers a more implicit ideology about marginalization based on difference. In this story, a raven called Robert likes to dress up, wear bright colors, dance, tell jokes, and sing, all of which sets him apart from the other black-clad, somber ravens in his community. The story values inclusion, acceptance, tolerance, family, and community. These positive socio-cultural values and ethical conduct are also promoted through a society’s educational system. However, Robert is also a cross-dresser, and his outwardly “queer” performance may strike a discordant note for some adult readers, thereby implying that inclusion is good, but there are limits.

The examples of *Putting Your Carbon Foot in It!* and *Odd Bird Out* demonstrate

that children’s literature embodies the ideologies of their authors and illustrators (sometimes unintentionally) and, as such, texts are never innocent. This does not mean that readers will always accept these ideologies (values, worldviews, positions), as they may actively resist them while still enjoying the way a text is written or illustrated. The ideologies that children’s literature promotes are often conservative, others offer “quirky or critical or alternative visions [...] designed to provoke that ultimate response of childhood, ‘Why?’ ‘Why are things as they are?’ ‘Why can’t they be different?’” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 3). In provoking these and other questions, children’s literature finds its place in education as a stimulus for critical thinking and reflection.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE?

In considering the connection of children’s literature to education, and indeed its role or place in education, Elisabeth Gruner (2011) highlights the tension between vocational (learning to read) and liberal (a cultivated appreciation of the arts) education, which can be traced back to the 17th century (even to classical antiquity): similar tensions are evident in contemporary arguments about the aims or purposes of education (see Davies, Gregory, & McGuinn, 2002). As noted at the beginning of this article, children’s literature can also be about education, which is often expressed through “the school story.” Gruner notes the emergence of the school story in the 19th century, whereby the school setting provides the theme, structure, and plot. The school story in all its complexity of institutional practices, peer groups, student-teacher relationships, taboos, and educational values continues to be a recurring trope from picture books.

Alongside the school story genre, other children’s books offer a counter narrative to formal education, such as the children’s novel, *Skellig* (Almond, 2009), which offers a way to engage with disparate views about evolution, creationism, and home schooling. Children’s stories about schools and schooling—the micropolitics, social relations, and competing views of appropriate curriculum, complement other kinds of school stories that are based on empirical research. Together, the different interpretations mediate story and experience, thereby offering insights that can bridge the gap between the “real” and the “imagined” school—its teachers, students, and curriculum.

With school and national curricula advocating literature for supporting literacy, literary and language development as well as for values education and other purposes, children's literature is given a specific (mandated) function in education. While many teachers and children's literature scholars may welcome this recognition of children's literature and the part it can play in the curriculum, others are more ambivalent. David Beagley (2009) sees a potential paradox between a teacher's purpose and a reader's private pleasure that this might cause.

Peter Hunt (1999) considers a similar paradox: "whether or not children's books are seen as valuable in themselves, or as stepping stones to higher things ('adult' or 'great' literature)" (p. 3). One argument could be that once children's books are used in education they lose any independent status as an object in their own right. However, a counter-argument could ask: What makes "literature" something special, having intrinsic value, and thereby more important compared with other cultural/aesthetic artifacts that are readily used in classrooms to enhance learning?

How adults respond to children's literature is often captured by their assessment of what is "a good book" for children. The judgment that critics, reviewers, academics, teachers, librarians, and lay people pass on whether a book is "good" and therefore worthy to be purchased, read, or studied suggests its moral content is an important part of the process.

## WHY DO BOOKS GET BANNED?

The censoring of children's books because they have been deemed inappropriate or unsuitable based on subject matter, language, or other criteria also says something about children—the targeted reading audience for these books. Hunt (1999) asks the question: "if books are withdrawn from classrooms, as they have often been, is that being protective or restrictive?" (p. 6). The issue of censorship of children's books has a long history in education, librarianship, and book publishing. How censorship is carried out depends on the gatekeepers (professional and lay) and their capacity to influence decisions.

An article by Mary Renck Jalogo and Anne Drolett Creany (1991), published in *Childhood Education*, has the rather warning title: "Censorship in Children's

Literature: What Every Educator Should Know." Jalogo and Creany see censorship as distinct from selection and cite three elements that are central to both processes: "the child, the book, and the society at large" (p. 143). Their explanation is that censors want to protect children from what they consider to be offensive or inappropriate books—their ideas, images, language, and content—because children are innocent, pure, and easily influenced. The selection argument supports children's intellectual freedom but nevertheless endorses and uses professional standards (e.g., American Library Association) for judging "quality" literature.

A different argument to the "censorship versus selection" one is made by Kenneth Kidd (2009, p. 198), who offers a rethinking of this dialectic, by considering censorship through the process of prizing. As he explains, prizing makes a positive judgment about the quality of a text, and censoring makes a negative judgment. Selection, nevertheless, remains at the heart of both censorship and prizing, as book awards (Newbery Medal, Caldecott, Kate Greenaway, and numerous others) are made based on the decision of a panel of "experts" according to selection criteria. In an inverted way to the role of awards panels, censors (individuals, groups) similarly select books that they argue should be banned or removed from libraries and classrooms because of certain subjective criteria of their own devising. Both processes, Kidd argues, have a "regulatory and restrictive function in that the ostensibly best books for kids aren't merely celebrated but deemed good for you" (p. 200), and by reverse logic, "bad" books are harmful.

In addition to the role performed by librarians and book award judges, teachers, too, face challenges in terms of not only how to use children's literature in the classroom but which books can be used. In their busy professional lives, teachers need to rely on books awards, best books blogs, and other endorsements to select texts for classroom use. However, they may also have to defend their decisions if certain books meet with objection from the school community or school administration. In some school districts in the United States and possibly in other countries, teachers need to propose the books they wish to have in their classrooms to "a book adoption committee to gain approval" (Graff, 2013, p. 80). Thus, as Graff points out: "teachers' levels of autonomy regarding book selections for both the curriculum and classroom libraries may vary" (p. 80).

A further consideration that Kidd raises is the increasing number of



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**children's literature is a social practice. reading children's literature can tell us something about our world.**

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banned/best books lists. Every year the American Library Association (ALA) publishes Banned and Challenged Books. Titles and their reasons for being banned include, the Harry Potter series for endorsing witchcraft and the occult, and the picture book *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson, Parnell, & Cole, 2005) for homosexual overtones—the story tells of how two male penguins successfully hatch an adopted egg and share the parenting of the female chick named Tango. While some books, like *And Tango Makes Three* are challenged or banned because of one key concern, *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993)—a Newbery Medal Winner—has been challenged on several grounds: unsuitable for age group; violent; sexually explicit; religious viewpoint; and suicide.

The debates over the best books for children have been going on for decades and will continue given that, as Bradford, Mallan, Stephens, and McCallum (2008) note, children's literature is "highly responsive to social change and to global politics, and crucially implicated in shaping the values of children and young people" (p. 2). One feature of the censorship debates that is worth considering is that so-called "issues" or social realities regarding gender, sexualities, racism, death, war, asylum seeking, and so forth, are a necessary and inevitable part of the wide range of subjects in children's literature. To shield children from reading about these issues is to deny them their status as social actors in these realities. We no longer think of children as *tabulae rasae* (blank or empty slates). Rather, we acknowledge that readers bring their own experiences, values, languages, and cultures to the dialogic act of reading that characterizes the relationship between a reader and a text and the meaning making that is negotiated between the two.

The following sections consider the different ways in which research in children's literature provides teachers, academics, and others who draw on children's literature in their professional lives working with children with insights into the different ways of reading these various negotiations.

## HOW DO YOU READ CHILDREN'S LITERATURE?

In his account of children's literature criticism, Stephens (2015) contends that critical content analysis is the most prevalent approach, as it "seeks answers to the question, What is this text about?" (Stephens, p. v, emphasis original). In posing this question, Stephens is not advocating a descrip-

tive account of a text's plot. Rather, his point is that the question prompts answers that take an account of "content, theme and larger significances such as underlying ideas or patterns or ideological positionings" (Stephens, p. v). While the question—What is this text about?—may be a key driver to textual analysis, it also leads to other questions that may be just as important depending on the particular approach of the researcher. For instance, reception theory draws attention to the way readers engage with texts.

Researchers who apply the principles of reception theory (also known as reader response theory) to their research into the educational applications of children's literature, may ask questions something like: "What do readers think this text is about?" or "how do readers read this text?" In *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, reception theorist, Wolfgang Iser (1978), explains the strategies a text uses and the many activities (or repertoires) that readers undertake to make sense of a text. Research into children's reading of picture books provides further insights into the various negotiations and interactions that unfold as children engage with this medium.

In their study of emergent reading strategies of a six-year-old child ("Maya") as she reads a wordless picture book, Lysaker and Hopper (2015) found that as Maya attempts to make meaning, she uses similar strategies that are used in early print reading, namely, monitoring, searching and cross-checking, rereading, and self-correcting. The impetus for their research was not children's literature as a thing in its own right but how it could be used to gain insight (or evidence) of early reading practices. The researchers locate their study within the debates over the "pushdown" of academic curriculum into kindergartens. Their concern is with "what is being pushed" as they contend that "print processing and reading sub-skills may crowd out opportunities for children to develop more broadly as meaning makers" (Lysaker & Hopper, 2015, p. 649, emphasis original). The researchers are both from a university Department of Curriculum and Instruction; therefore, their expertise in reading education means that their interest is not about answering the question, "What is this text about?" Rather their interest is in discovering how a child who is not yet reading print makes meaning from a wordless picture book.

Another example of children's interactions with texts is provided by Sylvia Pantaleo (2012), whose article makes an explicit connection

between reader response and children's literature: "Exploring Grade 7 students' responses to Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree*." Pantaleo makes key statements about how she positions her work: (a) embraces Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, which considers how reading is a transaction between reader, text, and context; (b) draws on socio-cultural theory of writing to frame the students' writing practices; (c) instructs the students on various literary and artistic concepts as part of the research process; and (d) regards the picture book as an aesthetic object (Pantaleo, 2012, pp. 53, 55). With these theoretical and methodological frames, Pantaleo's aim was to see how students' knowledge of the literary and visual elements of picture books and graphic novels affects their understanding and interpretation, and subsequent creation of their own creative texts.

In her own analysis of *The Red Tree*, Pantaleo can be seen as answering the question Stephens poses—What is this text about?—with respect to content, theme, and significance. She notes: "Allegorical in nature, Shaun Tan's *The Red Tree* is a sophisticated picturebook. The evocatively surreal artwork and minimal text capture and convey the power of depression" (p. 57). In these opening sentences, Pantaleo gives her sense of the story and what it is about, the theme of depression, and the significance of visual symbols as a way of communicating in allegorical terms a real-life experience or mental condition.

The function of *The Red Tree* (or we could say its purpose) is to convey to readers, in a highly symbolic way, how depression can affect people's moods and feelings. Pantaleo's ability to read the aesthetic and figurative strategies that the text employs are demonstrated when she explains the re-reading that is necessary to understand and interpret the illustrations—their style and complexity: "The intricate detail in the complex and collage-like illustrations necessitates both multiple viewings and close analysis as much of the artwork encapsulates subtle symbolism" (p. 58). Furthermore, she makes an educated guess about the metonymic function of the red leaf and what it comes to stand for: "However, a red leaf depicted in each of Tan's mixed-media visual compositions seems to represent hope, even in the darkest moments of gloominess and loneliness" (p. 58). Pantaleo complements her own analysis of *The Red Tree* with explicit teaching about the ways the words and visuals work in picture books. She

considers this prior instruction was important to "informing their [students'] visual analysis of and responses to *The Red Tree*, and contributed to their understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the modes of text and image in the picturebook" (Pantaleo, 2012, p. 67).

Like the previous example, this kind of explicit account of children's literature in education is underscored by a number of important considerations—the research includes a kindergarten/school site for the empirical component, and the theoretical framing relies on either a knowledge of children's literature (Pantaleo, 2012) or early reading practices (Lysaker & Hopper, 2015). However, both accounts demonstrate a deep understanding of literacy and reading and the research that contributes to these processes. In recalling the earlier comment by Hunt, they can also be seen as using children's literature "as stepping stones to higher things," as a means to an end, rather than something



valuable in itself.

I turn now to consider other kinds of research in children's literature where the educative purpose or possibility is understood in broad terms, rather than in terms of school-level pedagogy and curriculum. As children's literature research is diverse, I will limit my examples to consider how this field of criticism can inform key issues regarding access to knowledge and information in a digital age and emerging research on cognition and emotion with respect to literature.

### WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM CHILDREN'S LITERATURE?

As many teachers know from experience, children's literature can be an effective vehicle for knowledge and for offering insights about the world in all its complexity. In turn, children's literature also draws on readers' existing knowledge as part of its dialogic function. While the previous section considered research that examined readers' responses in educational contexts, the focus now shifts to the literary texts themselves and how they perform as knowledge sources; in so doing, the texts also model and critique the information practices of the fictional world and by extension the world of the readers. Rather than regard fiction's status as an unreliable information or knowledge source, Peter Lamarque (2007) suggests that it is the quality of "imaginative storytelling, namely that 'made up' stories must perforce rest on a factual or experiential base" (p. 14) that gives it its power.

Children may discover facts or information drawn from the background against which fic-





tion is set, such as “real” settings or places, time periods, and historical events, or from the representation of human atrocities and crises. In her examination of Holocaust literature written for children, Kokkola (2003) examines how this act of genocide, often considered “unrepresentable,” is represented in her selection of children’s literature. As these are creative works that blend imagination, conjecture, and fact, Kokkola says her fear is “that children will not recognise the factuality of what they read” (p. 17). She argues that unlike historical fiction per se, Holocaust literature for children has a “greater moral obligation to be historically accurate” (p. 18), and yet she acknowledges that writers face a difficult challenge in trying to engage readers in a subject matter that many would prefer not to read about. Furthermore, Holocaust children’s literature has met with divided opinion about its appropriateness for children from both educators and literary critics. Many children would have little or no knowledge of the Holocaust. Some would know about it through family members who survived or who had relatives who did not. Others, like Kokkola, would have acquired their knowledge from what they have read.

In a related way, Jo Lampert’s (2010) study of children’s literature written in the two years following 9/11 concerns an event that many

children today would have similar kinds of knowledge as Kokkola notes—either handed down stories of what happened to family and friends, or gained through what they have read. However, both Lampert and Kokkola consider the challenges of representation and the various narrative strategies (anthropomorphism, metaphor, analogy, first person narration) writers employ to re-present facts, and to reveal and withhold information. Paratexts also function to fill in the gaps in a reader’s knowledge, providing background to the event. For instance, Kokkola is critical of the publisher’s insert (paratext) for the North American version of the Australian picture book about the Holocaust, *Let the Celebrations Begin!* (Wild & Vivas, 1991) published as *A Time for Toys* which states: “An adult reading *A Time for Toys* to a child can go beyond the story and provide whatever historical detail the child would like.” Kokkola raises the ethics of passing responsibility over to the parent/teacher, noting that, “when a book is so utterly dependent on the adult mediator it cannot be understood alone, the narrative strategy can be deemed irresponsible” (p. 80).

In her discussion of texts about 9/11, Lampert asks: “How do they contribute to the process of ‘educating’ young readers about themselves,



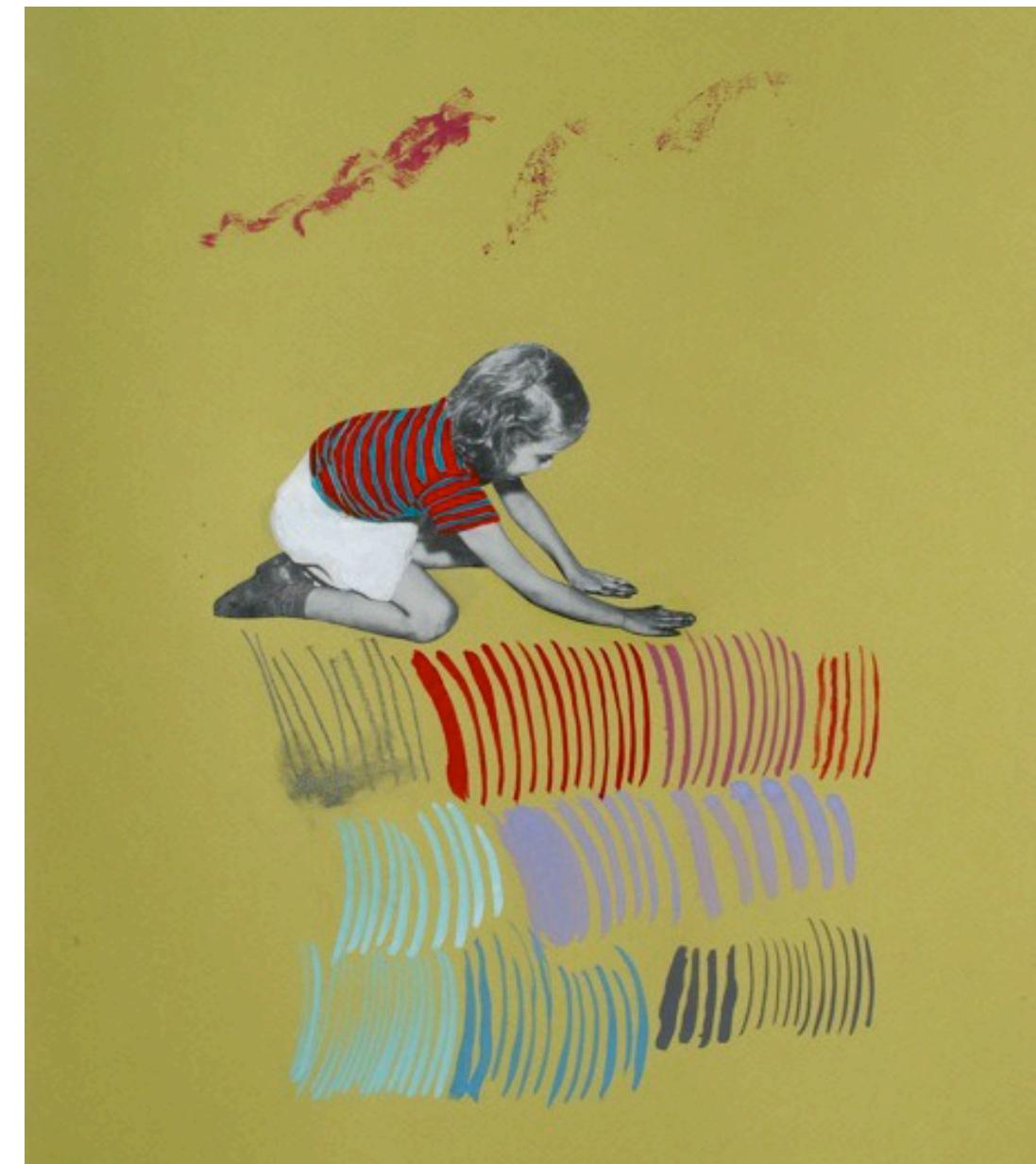
others, and the world in which we live?" (Lampert, 2010, p. 3). In asking this question, Lampert is interested in the beliefs and values that these texts might expect readers to accept. Several of the stories use animals or non-humans as analogous figures to heroic, suffering, frightened humans. For example, in her discussion of two picture books, Bravemole (Jonell, 2002) and Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey (Kalman, 2002), Lampert argues that these texts are "instructional tales" as they promote a belief that everyone can be a hero, "even an average mole who finds his molehill destroyed by evil dragons" (Lampert, 2010, p. 137); even a tugboat can be given heroic attributes.

A consequence of 9/11 and other terrorist attacks is that new forms of surveillance and security technologies have been developed. How technology impacts the lives of characters is not a new phenomenon in children's literature as early science fiction texts included robots, advanced weaponry, and mind control machines and drugs. However, since 9/11 and the emergence of social media, many fictions for young people include technologies as an accepted element of their textual worlds.

#### Digital Technologies and Children's Literature

Over the past decade, the digital environment is more than a backdrop to a story as it often is a pivotal part of the plot. Young people's participation — savviness and naivety — in online communities through social media, the Internet, texting, and email are commonplace. Meaning making is increasingly multimodal, but knowing how to navigate the shifting digital knowledge landscape is often presented in the literature as a challenge at the very least, or in some extreme cases, a matter of survival. Many texts announce their digital credentials in their titles (for example: the young adult novel, *ttyl* by Lauren Myracle, 2004; and the graphic novel, *Hacker-teen: Volume 1: Internet Blackout* by Marcelo Marques, 2008); others, such as the Hunger Games series (Collins, 2008), show how information literacies can be powerful tools of resistance and for developing agency.

Alice Curry (2013) suggests that given the importance placed on information literacy in education, and in society in general, children's literature's participation in this area is not surprising. However, it goes beyond participation to instruction, often offering cautionary tales. Myracle's *ttyl* (2004) shows how cyber-bullying can cause harm to individuals, but it also offers strategies for regaining agency. Anderson's



*Feed* (2004) offers a futuristic scenario that speaks to the part that the Internet and consumer advertising play in creating the post-human condition: an Internet "feed" is implanted in people's brains so that all knowledge is a property of the human brain and mediated by advertising. As Curry (2013) says of *Feed*: "the functioning (post)human in this primarily illiterate society is not one who knows more than anyone else but one who is able to access information more efficiently" (p. 16, emphasis

original). Curry draws a parallel between the concerns (or warnings) in Feed with educational practices that are less concerned about "knowledge" than for "equipping students with the skills to contend with the increasing pressures of information exposure" (p. 17). The sheer volume of knowledge that the characters in Feed have to deal with is analogous to today's burgeoning digital technologies. This phenomenon highlights that access to information is not so much the issue, but knowing how to access what we need to know among all the excess of what is available, and knowing whether what we find is reliable, are the more pressing concerns.

While these fictions speak to the restrictions on individuals' rights and freedoms and the actions of the protagonists and antagonists are extreme, they nevertheless resonate with educational agendas to help students develop the "ability to access, evaluate, use, and manage information" (Latham & Hollister, 2014, p. 35). As these authors and Curry note, educators and professional teachers' organizations increasingly see the importance of these skills for the 21st century. A further dimension that is often integral to fictions about technology is the cognitive and emotional impact that decisions and actions have on self and others.

## THINKING AND FEELING?

Cognition and emotion have, until recently, been studied separately by researchers from education and psychological sciences. One of the enduring interests has been on the causal relationship between the two processes. In their review of research literature in this area, Pons, de Rosnay, and Cuisinier (2010) conclude that, rather than be seen as separate, cognition and emotion "may be thought of as two different languages, to represent and communicate about the world (ourselves, others, the physical world, etc.) that co-exist within all typical individuals: Every person is emotionally and cognitively bilingual" (p. 83). However, research in the diverse field of psychology (including educational psychology) often relies on short linguistic stimulus, rather than extended narratives, to examine readers' thought processes and emotional responses to texts. Children's literature criticism is making a contribution in the area of cognition and emotion from an interdisciplinary approach.

Increasingly children's literature criticism has responded to what is known as the "cognitive turn" in literary criticism. Working in this area of cognitive





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narratology, or cognitive poetics, children's literature critics are examining how readers construct or bring to a text mental functions (systems, schemas, scripts, processes), which make knowledge (symbolic, sensory, conscious, unconscious, true or false) possible. Such knowledge and mental functions are formed through the interrelated processes of the mind, the body, and the culture of the individual. Emotions are about feelings directed towards persons, objects, and situations, both real and imagined. How children respond to any text will depend on how the text connects their pre-existing knowledge about the world, their experiences with literature, and the affective resources they bring to the text to make sense of the storyworlds that are depicted.

Empathy and its relationship to children's literature is an emerging area of research into cognition and emotion. While educators would most likely agree that "reading children's literature is important for developing (among other things) children's ethical and empathetic understandings of society and its people," there is no firm evidence to show that literature can, in fact, make readers "more empathetic, tolerant, and better people" (Mallan, 2013b, p. 105). From a psychological perspective, the idea of "similarity bias" is seen as the "inability or unwillingness to empathise with others who are not like ourselves" (Mallan, 2013b, p. 105). However, by drawing on the cognitive functions of schema and script<sup>2</sup> for representing cultural difference in children's literature, there is the potential for transforming readers' knowledge and understanding of cultural difference, and thereby encouraging readerly empathy.

In his discussion of the picture book *Ziba Came on a Boat* (Lofthouse & Ingpen, 2007), Stephens (2013) considers how this text activates the empathetic imagination by narrating the thoughts and memories of a refugee child (Ziba) on her boat journey to Australia. As Stephens explains, the illustrations and text "mediate relations between familiarity and otherness, especially in the way the book embeds a major schema [childhood belonging] in its narrative script [conflict]" (p. 31). While the visual representation of the setting of aspects of the schema may be different for Western readers, it is the normative content of everydayness that forms the connection between text and reader. However, living in a war zone disrupts the normal childhood schema, and the memories of life before the family had to flee by boat are woven into the text through Ziba's reflection on her mother weaving. As Stephens explains (p. 32), the memory is figuratively and imaginatively vivified through the boat's movement:

up and down went the wool, in and out,  
like the boat weaving through the murky sea.

This incident in the story corresponds to empirical work undertaken in cognitive studies, which shows that children between the ages of 4 and 5 years begin to understand the effect of memories on emotions (Pons et al., 2010). Furthermore, as children develop (8 years of age onwards) they begin to understand how feelings can be regulated by the use of cognitive strategies and by re-orienting their attention to think about something else (Pons et al., 2010, p. 81). Sustaining the metaphor of weaving to the boat's movement, and the memory of her mother's own weaving during a more peaceful time, shows how Ziba uses her pleasant memory and reorients this thought process to the rhythmic movement of the boat. Stephens asserts that *Ziba Came on a Boat* uses cognitive instruments such as schema and script to enhance readers' understanding of relationships between self and cultural others, and to transform how we think about these normative schemas of everyday childhood.

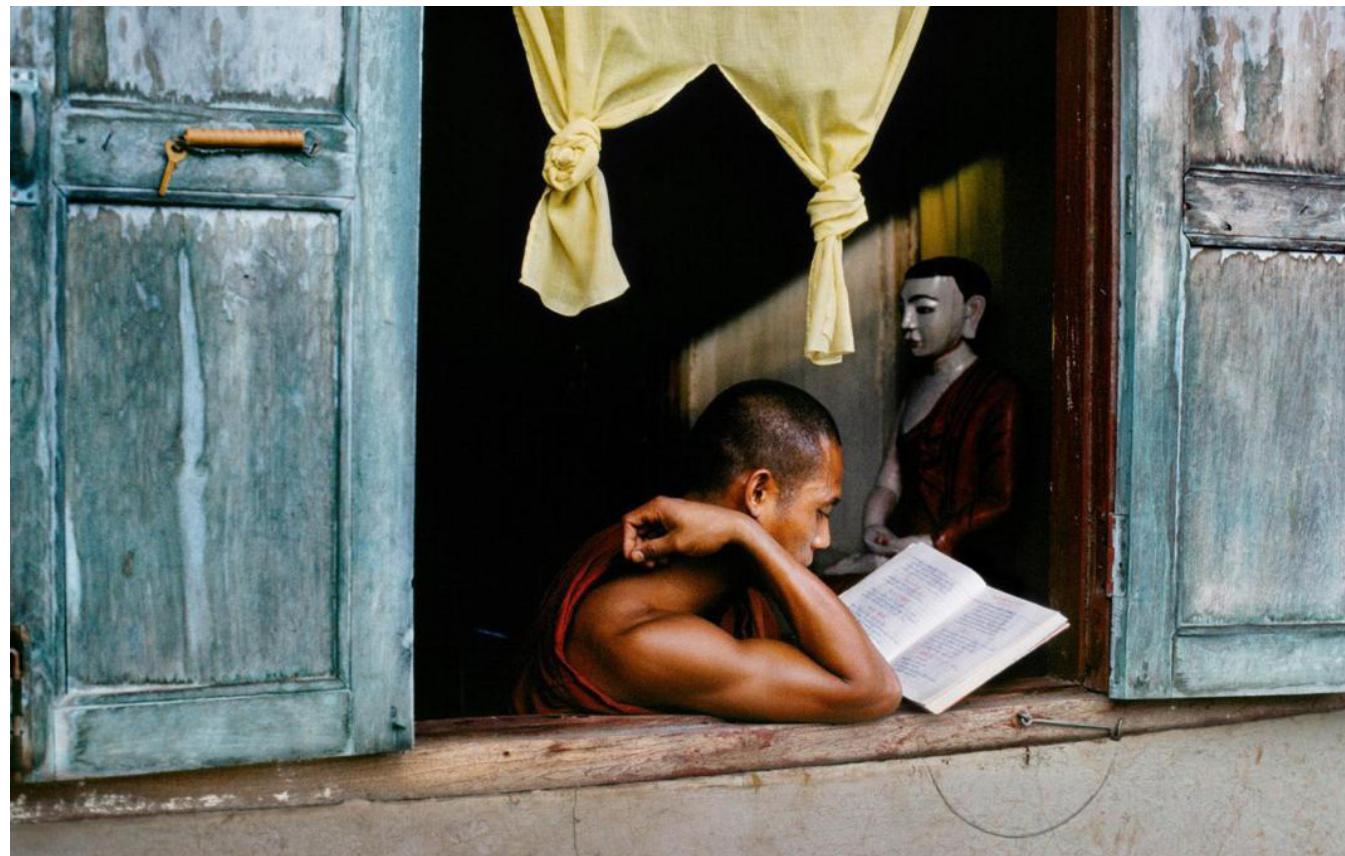
Until quite recently pedagogy and learning have focused attention almost exclusively on the cognitive dimension of the mind, for pupil and teachers, through lab experiments and other scientific approaches. Cognitive poetics offers approaches to children's literature as a form of cognition and emotional response, with potential for thinking about (and perhaps differently) human adversity and social reality. While the example discussed here does not consider how "real" readers construct mental representations (schema and scripts), it does offer a way to understand how texts draw on familiar mental constructs to both support and disrupt existing knowledge. As the plight of refugees is becoming more urgent across the globe, the responses by governments and the general public are not always supportive and welcoming, often voicing fears and concerns about taking in asylum seekers and refugees. Children's literature contributes to these public debates and often transforms existing refugee schemas in an attempt to nurture empathetic responses to the characters and their circumstances.

STEVE  
McCURRY      ON  
                        READING

Steve McCurry's photos of readers, spanning 30 countries. From a steelworks in Serbia to a classroom in Kashmir, they reveal the power of the printed word. Young or old, rich or poor, engaged in the sacred or the secular, people everywhere read. This homage to the beauty and seductiveness of reading brings together a collection of photographs taken by Steve McCurry over his nearly four decades of travel. McCurry's mesmerizing images of the universal human act of reading are an acknowledgement of - and a tribute to - the overwhelming power of the written word.







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I look for the unguarded moment, the essential soul peeking out, experience etched on a person's face.

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**The photograph is an undeniably powerful medium.  
Free from the constraints of language, and harnessing  
the unique qualities of a single moment frozen in time.**







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A picture can express a universal humanism, or simply reveal a delicate and poignant truth by exposing a slice of life that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

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**Once things disappear, they can  
be lost forever. Having memory of  
how we were is really important.**







**There are certain, inescapable images, forever part of our collective consciousness, that influence who we are, whether we are cognizant of it or not.**







01. Hazaras, Afghanistan
02. MKS Steelworks, Serbia,  
w Yugoslavia, 1989
03. Tibet
04. Tibet
05. Tibet
06. Tibet
07. Sri Lanka, 1995
08. Myanmar, 1994
09. Suri Tribe, Tulget, Omo  
Valley, Ethiopia, 2013
10. Kashmir, 1998
11. Chiang Mai, Thailand,  
w 2010
12. Italy
13. Afghanistan
14. Pakistan
15. Afghanistan
16. Yemen

