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Using children's literature to stimulate children's writing

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University of Northern Iowa

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Using children's literature to stimulate children's writing

Abstract
Writing helps children use language in new ways. The process of writing brings order to unorganized thinking. It brings to a conscious level vague realizations. Because writing can make ideas more concrete, it helps learning take place. As Cook relates, "It is only by putting pencil to paper, by sorting out what we have written, that we come to grips with what we know and believe."
USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
TO STIMULATE CHILDREN'S WRITING

A Research Paper
Submitted to
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Lois Jane Auliff
July 22, 1981
This Research Paper by: Lois Jane Auliff
Entitled: USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO STIMULATE CHILDREN'S WRITING

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Jeanne McLain Harms

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Director of Research Paper

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7/22/81
Date Received

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7/22/81
Date Received

Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Writing helps children use language in new ways. The process of writing brings order to unorganized thinking. It brings to a conscious level vague realizations. Because writing can make ideas more concrete, it helps learning take place. As Cook relates, "It is only by putting pencil to paper, by sorting out what we have written, that we come to grips with what we know and believe."  

Even though authorities agree that writing is important, very little writing is actually being done in the elementary school. Graves reports that the provision of more than thirty minutes per week for writing is an above average accommodation for children's writing. What may be more shocking is the fact that in all of the school years,

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4 Donald H. Graves, "Research Update--We Won't Let Them Write," Language Arts, 55, No. 5 (1978), 638.
K-12, most of the writing experiences are provided in the primary years, and proportionately decline with each successive grade level.\(^5\)

Several factors seem to contribute to the lack of students' involvement in the writing process. First, finding time to teach writing in an already crowded curriculum is a major problem for elementary teachers. Units on career education, drug awareness, sex education, ecology, and nutrition have been added in recent years; rarely has an "old" unit been discarded.

Second, reading has been emphasized in the language arts. For every two hours spent on teaching reading, only five minutes are spent on teaching writing.\(^6\) Based on public school spending on textbooks, personnel, and materials related to reading and writing, for every three thousand dollars spent on children's ability to receive information only one dollar was spent on their power to send it in writing.\(^7\) The growing insistence that students be solely proficient in receiving information, rather than in sending it, not only hurts writing, but reading as well.\(^8\)

\(^5\)Graves, op. cit., 638.
\(^6\)Graves, op. cit., 636.
\(^7\)Donald H. Graves, "Research Update--A New Look at Writing Research," Language Arts, 57, No. 8 (1980), 913.
\(^8\)Graves, op. cit., (1978), 636.
Third, lack of teacher preparation in the writing process contributes to the lack of writing instruction. In a random survey of thirty-six universities, Graves found that one hundred sixty-nine methods courses were offered in reading, thirty in children's literature, twenty-one in language arts, and only two in the teaching of writing. 9

Fourth, research in the total area of composition is lacking. As recently as the 1960's research was described as "meager" 10 and "raising more problems than it solved." 11 Braddock compared research in composition to "chemical research as it emerged from the period of alchemy." 12 In the past twenty-five years, only one hundred fifty-six studies on writing in the elementary grades, or an average of six annually, have been done in the United States. 13

Lack of time, financial support, teacher preparation, and research have contributed to the problems of writing in the elementary school. The situation is changing in the field of research; more than half of all research on children's writing in the last twenty-five years was done in the last

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seven years. More studies, carefully planned and executed, should provide information that will improve instruction.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine ways of integrating children's literature and written composition, to develop a program of children's literature that will encourage children to write, and to observe the effects of using children's literature to stimulate children's written composition.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Lowe questioned thirteen professional writers, including Pearl Buck, Aldous Huxley, and James Michener, concerning how they learned to write. When asked "What has been the greatest influence on your writing ability?" six responded, "Reading." All thirteen authors agreed that reading had had a "profound" effect on their interest in writing.15

While making professional writers of children is not a goal of elementary teachers, it is important for teachers to provide experiences that will stimulate growth in composition. Reading fine literature to children stimulates thought and


helps to improve writing style by offering models of language. Through hearing literature read aloud, children have extended experiences with vocabulary and can become more conscious of different sentence patterns, ways to organize ideas, and writing styles.\textsuperscript{16} After a piece of literature is read aloud, children benefit from opportunities to discuss it. These discussions can help children become more inventive, concise, flexible, and clear in expressing their ideas through writing.\textsuperscript{17}

Teachers have an abundance of excellent children's literature available to read to their students. Too often this reading is merely a listening experience for children, involving little thought or interaction. By making only a few changes, story time can be expanded to involve all of the language arts. If teachers can go beyond merely reading and use literature to stimulate writing, they can enhance the literary experience and produce better writers.

PROCEDURE

After surveying the professional literature concerning using literature to encourage children's writing, the writer will develop a program of literature and correlated

\textsuperscript{16} Howard E. Blake, "Written Composition in English Primary Schools," \textit{Elementary English}, \textbf{45}, No. 6 (1971), 610.

\textsuperscript{17} Mary Montebello, \textit{Children's Literature in the Curriculum} (Dubuque: William C. Brown Publishers, 1972), p. 47.
writing activities for second grade children. The children reside in a small town and are from middle-class families.

SUMMARY

This paper is organized into four chapters. Chapter Two presents the review of professional literature and research concerning the use of children's literature to stimulate children's written composition. Chapter Three describes the literature supported composition program implemented in the author's second grade classroom. Specific books and poems used to encourage writing and examples of the stories written by children are included. Chapter Four provides a summary and conclusions.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents research studies and professional literature in these three areas: (1) the interrelationship of the language arts, (2) uses of literature to encourage writing, and (3) studies of programs that used literature to promote growth in writing.

Interrelationships of the Language Arts

The idea that children's written expression is closely related to the development of the other aspects of the language arts (listening, speaking, and reading) is neither new nor original. This conclusion has been corroborated by the work of researchers, including Pooley¹ and Hildreth². Each aspect of the language arts can be taught more effectively and efficiently by using the existing interrelationships.³ Mason, McDaniel, and Callaway found that first graders whose reading instruction served as a focus


³Hildreth, op. cit., 41.
for instruction in oral and written composition outperformed children whose instruction was not coordinated with their reading.  

Perhaps the simplest way to express the interrelationships between the language arts is this chart:  

```
What a child thinks
   ↑
What a child hears ←→ the basis ←→ What a child speaks for
What a child writes ←→ What a child reads
```

Rather than ignoring these existing interrelationships, teachers must capitalize upon them to improve instruction. The unique relationship between reading and writing must be recognized and used.  

**Uses of Literature to Encourage Writing**

The idea that "the way to develop good writing is with good reading" may be oversimplified, but hearing and reading good literature is an important element in the

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6 Pooley, op. cit., p. 48.

writing process. Literature develops sensitivity to language, provides models, and may serve as springboards for creative activities. Literature can provide children the necessary background to allow them to be motivated to write and assist them in organizing their thinking and language.

Exposure to good literature is probably the best experience future writers can have. Books can help children explore, to feel, and to expand their imaginations. They can extend young people’s worlds and help develop their reasoning powers. Reading or hearing fine literature promotes a feeling for beautiful imagery, rhythm, figurative speech, and cadence of our language. Through good books prospective writers are introduced to form and structure which they will imitate when they begin to create their own stories and poems. Exposure to the fine writing in many children’s books can constitute the foundation for a young writer’s unique self expression.

A program that expects children to produce quantities of writing must give them much literature. The teacher must continually enrich the child’s experience by reading poetry and stories.

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8 Montebello, op. cit., p. 47.


Authorities seem to agree that exposure to literature provides a rich background of experience from which children can write. There are, however, many different viewpoints as to the most effective methods to use in presenting literature to encourage composition.

Nilsen and Greenwell relate that using books to inspire writing can give students "a boost over the hurdle of getting started which stands in the way of all writers."\textsuperscript{13} Once children are over this hurdle, they can proceed as far as their creativity takes them.

Groff suggests that teachers offer students who find writing difficult a model, such as a fairy tale, for writing a story.\textsuperscript{14}

Cramer and Cramer recommend that children write by imitating a model of good literature.\textsuperscript{15} Using the story "David Was Mad," by Bill Martin, Jr., second and third grade children followed the language pattern in that story to compose their own stories. Bill Martin's story begins:

\begin{quotation}
\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{13}Alleen Pace Nilsen and Ivie Johnson Greenwell, "Good Luck! Bad Luck!" Language Arts, 54, No. 7 (1977), 786-790.
\end{quote}
\end{quotation}

\begin{quotation}
\begin{quote}
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\end{quotation}

\begin{quotation}
\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{15}Ronald L. Cramer and Barbara B. Cramer, "Writing by Imitating Language Models," Language Arts, 52, No. 7 (1975), 1011-1014, 1018.
\end{quote}
\end{quotation}
David was mad.
MAD! MAD! MAD!
He was so angry that he kicked the wall as hard as he could.
He felt hot—all RED inside. 16

A third grade child's story begins:

David was mean.
MEAN! MEAN! MEAN!
He was so mean that he kicked the cat.
He felt all black inside.17

According to these authors, the benefits from this type of imitative activity include:

1. Children receive direct, concrete exposure to writing models with discernible language patterns and constructions.
2. Motivation for continued writing is provided.
3. Immediate, observable writing success occurs.
4. The end product of patterned writing is so pleasing to youngsters that pride of authorship is readily instilled.18

In Dinan's program, her five and six-year-old students received an extensive introduction to authors and their works to observe the author's style and technique. Use of color and the art medium were also noted in the

17Cramer and Cramer, op. cit., 1012.
illustrations. Children then created their own books using a character or setting employed by the author. For example, some children wrote another chapter to McElligot's Pool by Dr. Seuss. Others wrote further adventures of Leo Lionni's Alexander and the Wind-up Mouse. After hearing stories by Ezra Jack Keats, children used collage techniques to illustrate their own stories. Children read their books to classmates and families. A similar approach is recommended by Swynehardt and Hatlestad, who used books to promote art activity, creative writing, drama, or a combination of these activities.

Moss recommends choosing a story theme with personal meaning for primary-age children. Because children enjoyed talking about their toy animals and often brought their favorites to school, the author selected stories that had toy animals as main characters: Sherwood Walks Home by James Flora, The Winter Bear by Ruth Craft, Sniffles by Robert Larranaga, Corduroy by Don Freeman, and Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber. Stories were read, discussed, compared, and used as stimuli for stories written by children.

19 Linda L. Dinan, "By the Time I'm Ten, I'll Probably Be Famous," Language Arts, 54, No. 7 (1977), 750-755.
Because children are involved and interested during story time, Webb believes teachers should further develop this opportunity and use it as a stimulus for further work. She offers suggestions for follow-up activities, including writing experiences, for Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are*. Examples include:

Write and draw the things you do that make your mother or father angry.

Write about how you feel when you are being naughty. Do you feel like a "wild thing?"

Make a class or group tone poem of "Wild things are--," using the suggested music ("The Gnome" from Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition") in the background. Tape the poem.

You have captured a "wild thing." Draw, tell, or write about how you would tame it.  

Studies of Programs that Used Literature to Promote Growth in Writing

Wyatt, working with sixty-five sixth graders, investigated the relationship of writing ability to extensive reading. Amount of reading was determined from questionnaires completed by the children and from records of the Kansas Reading Program for Children. Each child wrote four compo-

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sitions which were analyzed and scores were determined for usage, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, vocabulary, and sentence structure. The study revealed significant correlations between extensive reading and some of the writing abilities studied, but there were no consistent relationships involving all of the children. Those were read the most material more often attempted more complex forms of writing such as extensive use of conversation.²³

Pfau conducted a two year study of first and second graders to determine the influence of a planned program of recreational reading on their reading achievement, spelling achievement, and their written and oral fluency. In addition to working in the regular basal reading program, the experimental group spent thirty minutes daily doing recreational reading and interpretive activities. No significant differences were found in spelling ability or oral fluency. Children in the experimental group visited the library more often and checked out more books than the control group did. They made significantly better scores on the Development Reading Tests on sight vocabulary and vocabulary in context. They also wrote longer sentences than did the control group. Pfau concluded that when efforts are made to supply appropriate books, time to read, and time to share with others, sight

vocabulary and the fluency of written language can be positively influenced.  

Epstein met weekly with a group of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders from an inner-city school. Literature which displayed a specific literary structure or technique was read aloud. Children dictated a group story using this type of writing and then each student wrote an example. The structures and techniques taught included descriptive writing, characterization, adventure stories and tall tales, plays, autobiography, and reporting. At the end of the year, success was seen in the increased ease with which the students wrote, their use of imagery, descriptive language, and characterization. The school librarian also observed a greater interest in reading the types of literature used as samples.  

Mills taught a series of weekly half-hour lessons to students from 1968-1972. Using the University of Georgia's A Curriculum in Written Composition K-3, lessons were expanded using children's literary models to illustrate the teaching objectives. At the first grade level there were group compositions, individually dictated stories, and independent stories. Second and third graders continued to use


literary samples to learn about sentence structure, morphology, figurative language, realism or fantasy, sequential order, paragraph development, proofreading, character descriptions, and vocabulary development. For example, in the second grade, Marcia Brown's *Cinderella* was read aloud. Nearly twenty compound words were found including "gentleman," "stepmother," and "godmother." Also at second grade, books such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, and *Umbrella*, by Taro Yashimo, were read to observe elements of realism or fantasy. In this study, the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were administered to an experimental group and a control group of fourth graders. No significant differences were found in the test results in vocabulary, reading, usage, or composite scores. The experimental group scored significantly higher on writing samples, capitalization, punctuation, and total language.

A similar study, conducted by Pinkham, involved one hundred eighty fifth graders from four schools in urban and suburban districts. The series of fourteen weekly lessons was based on models of literature and consisted of these steps:

1. Listening to the selections
2. Discussing writing techniques as reflected by the selections
3. Reading and discussing pertinent portions of

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of the selections which illustrated the specific aims of the lesson

4. Participating in creative writing experiences

5. Evaluating and rewriting in a later period after correction of the exercise.

The lessons were constructed so that all areas of the language arts were used to enrich the writing effort and so that other recognized approaches to the improvement of composition (actual and vicarious experiences, practice in writing, and rewriting following evaluation) were utilized for the experimental group. Equal time for listening to literature and for writing through a less structured pattern was provided to the control group.

Pinkham found that in areas measured by the STEP Writing Test significant differences were found in favor of all experimental groups: total, urban, suburban. In areas measured by the STEP Essay Test (quality of thought and style), significant differences were found only in the suburban group.27

In summary, the review of literature indicated that children’s understanding of the writing process can be

facilitated by using the common aspects of the other language arts in the instructional situation. Authorities relate that the use of children's literature can assist children in developing writing abilities by providing a rich background of experiences, by providing models of language, and by motivating children to become involved in the process of writing and other expressive activities. Research studies indicated primary-age children who were exposed to recreational reading experiences wrote longer sentences. Intermediate-age children who read extensively produced more complex forms of writing. When the teacher read aloud to students in the intermediate grade levels, children used imagery, descriptive language, and characterization with increased ease. Children's growth in written composition is facilitated by presentations of literature as a model of language.
Chapter 3

This chapter will describe how literature was used to support a writing program for second grade children. Literature enhanced the development of concepts and vocabulary, served as a model of language, and provided springboards to writing activities. The other language arts (listening, speaking, and reading) were an integral part of the writing process. In this chapter the writer offers her observations of the children's responses to specific activities.

In presenting literature, the writer found that a piece of literature may be used in more than one way to strengthen language knowledge. For example, in Eric Carle's *All about Arthur*, children can find words used in interesting ways, a patterned plot arrangement, repetition, and alliteration, and may be motivated to write riddles or a letter to the author/illustrator.

**Concept and Vocabulary Development**

Literature extends vocabulary and concept development that children are in the process of learning. Literary experiences can make vague and abstract ideas more specific and concrete. Because children's direct experiences are limited to their environment, literature can provide vicarious experiences that enrich their background and stimulate their thinking.
**Concept of Treasure.** At the beginning of the year, children were asked what the word "treasure" meant. They responded, "Gold," "silver," "jewelry," "money," and "stuff that pirates take." Then the teacher read Rebecca Caudill's haiku.

Come along, children!  
We'll roam meadow and mountain  
And bring home treasure.

After discussing the meanings of the word "roam" and "meadow," children thought of treasures that might be found in meadow and mountain and recalled treasures of their own: rocks, sea shells, and arrowheads. One child used the word "souvenir" to describe his find.

These poems further developed the concept of treasure.

**Pebbles**

Pebbles belong to no one  
Until you pick them up—  
Then they are yours.

But which, of all the world's  
Mountains of little broken stones  
Will you choose to keep?

The smooth black, the white,  
The rough gray with sparks  
Shining in its cracks?

Somewhere the best pebble must  
Lie hidden, meant for you  
If you can find it.

by Valerie Worth
If You Find a Little Feather

If you find a little feather,
a little white feather,
a soft and tickly feather,
it's for you.

A feather is a letter
from a bird,
and it says,
"Think of me.
Do not forget me.
Remember me always.
Remember me forever.
Or remember me
at least
until
the little feather
is lost."

So...

...if you find a little feather
a little white feather,
a soft and tickly feather,
it's for you.
    Pick it up
and
    put it in your pocket!

by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers

Reading A Pocketful of Cricket, by Rebecca Caudill, continued to build the understanding of "treasure." This story is about six-year-old Jay, who fills his pockets with treasures from his farm. The treasures are a gray goose feather, a rock with the print of a fern on one side, an arrowhead, striped beans, and most important, a cricket. The chirping cricket disrupts Jay's first day of school. The teacher, realizing the cricket is Jay's special friend, allows it to stay at school.
In *A Pocketful of Cricket*, the idea that the cricket "fiddled" only at night, or in the darkness of Jay's pocket, led to a discussion of the word "nocturnal." This experience led very naturally to the reading of *The Great Hamster Hunt* by Lenore Blegvad. This book is about a boy, Nicholas, who cares for his friend's hamster. The friend tells Nicholas that the hamster is nocturnal, but does not explain what "nocturnal" means. By observing the hamster's behavior, Nicholas gradually understands the meaning of the word.

The children noted that *A Pocketful of Cricket* and the book of haiku *Come Along!* were written by the same author. They began to understand that an author can write different forms of literature.

Another book, *One Morning in Maine*, by Robert McCloskey, tells of a little girl finding a gray gull's feather on the beach and keeping it for her treasure.

After these literature experiences were presented, the children were given an opportunity to find treasures in a wooded area and stream bordering the school grounds. The children collected grasses, flowers, wood chips from trees chewed by beavers, leaves, snail shells, and pebbles. Short stories were written, including these examples.

We went for a walk.  
I got some beaver chips.  
It was fun to look for treasure.

We went down to the creek to hunt for treasure but I found a worm.
The combination of vicarious experiences through literary and actual experiences, and the discussion of those experiences, gave the children the background necessary for them to have something to write.

Throughout the year many treasures were brought to school to be displayed, discussed, and written about. Colored autumn leaves, milkweed pods, buckeyes, and bittersweet were fall treasures. Different areas of study brought samples of lava, geodes, and floating pumice. A class of Colorado pen pals mailed samples of oil shale and marble. In May a child's grandmother, visiting from Florida, came to class to share her collection of shells and coral. Included were several pieces of colored glass worn smooth by the ocean waves. The guest explained that she liked to find chunks of blue glass the best. "Is it worth money?" the children asked. "No," she answered, "But it is valuable because it is rare and because it is so pretty. I just like it." They nodded knowingly and said, "We know all about treasure."

Concept of Apples. The concept of "apples" was extended by focusing on literature that involved this favorite fruit. After hearing the familiar story of Johnny Appleseed, by Eva Moore, children recalled other stories that involved apples: "Snow White," The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle, and The Biggest Bear, by Lynd Ward. Factual information about growing apples was also presented.
Using a semantic webbing or mapping procedure, children "brainstormed" words that were related in some way to the word "apple." These words were put into categories, titled, and copied on apple-shaped charts which were displayed in the classroom. The semantic map included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stories We Know</th>
<th>Colors of Apples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Biggest Bear</td>
<td>red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Appleseed</td>
<td>yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow White</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</td>
<td>white inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam and Eve</td>
<td>greenish yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>brown and rotten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How an Apple Looks</th>
<th>How an Apple Tastes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>round</td>
<td>sweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oval</td>
<td>juicy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circle</td>
<td>chewy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big</td>
<td>ripe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small</td>
<td>sour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>medium</td>
<td>tart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How an Apple Feels</th>
<th>What You Can Make from Apples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hard</td>
<td>caramel apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crunchy</td>
<td>candied apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rotten</td>
<td>applesauce</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>apple crisp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>juice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cider</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>apple butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>baked apples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>jelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dip in chocolate fondue</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parts of an Apple Tree</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>roots</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>branches</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>stem</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>flower</td>
<td></td>
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<td>bud</td>
<td></td>
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<td>fruit</td>
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<th>Kinds of Apples</th>
<th>Things that Help Apples</th>
<th>Hurt Apples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonathon</td>
<td>spray</td>
<td>worms</td>
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<td>MacIntosh</td>
<td>bees</td>
<td>bugs</td>
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<td>Wealthy</td>
<td>rain</td>
<td>not enough</td>
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<td>Delicious</td>
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<td>Golden Delicious</td>
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<td>Crabapple</td>
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This list was later expanded when one student brought a list of twenty-eight varieties.

The children studied seed catalogues to find and list more words to describe apples. Children learned that one company's Jonathan apples were "medium-sized, bright red fruits, sweet, crisp, juicy, and delicious." An Ozark Gold was described as "golden, tart, rich flavor, with waxy skin." A Rome Beauty was "cherry-red and good for baking." Then the children were encouraged to sample several varieties of apples, taste apple cider and apple butter, and make applesauce. A group experience chart was written and individual poems about apples were composed, copied on apple shapes, and displayed:
Concept of "Snow." A change of season provides opportunities for children to have direct experiences with a concept and to extend related vocabulary. The first snowfall prompted the reading of Ezra Jack Keat's *The Snowy Day*. Beautifully illustrated with collage, this book describes Peter's adventures as he walks through the snow, makes a snowman and snow angels, and enjoys the beauty and wonder of the snow. Visually stimulating, the story also appeals to the ear.

Another book, *Katy and the Big Snow*, by Virginia Lee Burton, presented another experience with snow and introduced the children to the concept of personification. Katy is a red crawler tractor who plows out the city of Geopolis after it is "covered with a thick blanket of snow." Phrases are repeated. People ask Katy for help; her reply is consistently, "Sure," said Katy, "Follow me."

Alvin Tresselt's *White Snow, Bright Snow* offered the children vivid vicarious experiences with snow. He uses much imagery and figurative language to tell about the town after a snowstorm.

Poetry about winter provided additional experiences with the concept of snow, word awareness, and enjoyment. "Snow on the Sidewalk," by Mary Ann Hoberman, was one of the favorite poems, probably because of its rhythm, rhyme, and repetition which made it easy to recall.
Snow
Snow
Lots of snow
Everywhere we look
and everywhere we go

Snow in the sandbox
Snow on the slide
Snow on the bicycle
left outside

Snow on the steps
Snow on my feet
Snow on the sidewalk
Snow on the sidewalk
Snow on the sidewalk
down the street.

"I could eat it," a haiku by Issa, was also enjoyed
by the children.

I could eat it!
This snow that falls
So softly, so softly.

Poetry offers a unique way to see things in a new
and different way. Children enjoyed the images in "Snow" by
Dorothy Aldis:

The fenceposts wear marshmallow hats
On a snowy day;
Bushes in their nightgowns
Are kneeling down to pray--
And all the trees have silver skirts
And want to dance away.

When the children returned from the playground they often
quoted parts of "Dragon Smoke" by Lilian Moore:
Breathe and blow
white clouds
    with every puff.
It's cold today,
cold enough
to see your breath.
Huff!
    Breathe dragon smoke
today!

Concurrent with the reading of books and poems about
snow and winter, children made a semantic web or map for the
word "snow."

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinds of Snow</th>
<th>How Snow Looks</th>
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<tr>
<td>snowflake</td>
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<td>fluffy</td>
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<td>like clouds</td>
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<td>snowbank</td>
<td>like ice cream</td>
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<th>How Snow Feels</th>
<th>How Snow Sounds</th>
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<tr>
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<th>Things to Make</th>
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<td>snowfort</td>
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<td>sledding</td>
<td>snowhouse</td>
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<td>snowmobile riding</td>
<td>snowballs</td>
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<td>ice fishing</td>
<td>igloo</td>
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<td>ice boating</td>
<td>snow angel</td>
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<td>snow cones</td>
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<tr>
<th>Things that Help Us</th>
<th>What Lives in the Snow</th>
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<tr>
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<td>polar bears</td>
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<tr>
<td>snowblower</td>
<td>Eskimo</td>
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<tr>
<td>snowshovel</td>
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Books about Snow

Katy and the Big Snow
The Snowy Day
White Snow, Bright Snow

Animals in Iowa

snowbird
snowshoe rabbit
snowy owl
cardinal

During this time the children were enjoying their own activities in the snow, including a winter walk. With the background provided by stories and poems and the accompanying discussions, experience, and vocabulary development, children were ready to write. These pieces are examples of their compositions.

The snow fall

The snow whispers to the tree
and to the ground
and all over the world too.

The Snow

The soft snow that falls
is so pretty
that I could play in it
for a year
and not stop.

At School

Our class went for a walk. I saw a feathery weed. I watched it. The wind blowed it away but I caught it. It was beautiful because when I found it there was snow on it. The snow felt cold. It looked pretty. I think it was so peaceful outside. The trees was wareing silver skirts.
Other Experiences with Vocabulary. E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* stimulated a discussion about words to describe Wilbur. Just as the characters in the story discarded Templeton's offers of "crunchy" and "pre-shrunken," children were particular in their selections. Searching through magazines, they found appropriate descriptive words, cut them out, and pasted them on silvery-painted webs.

In *Charlotte's Web*, Templeton's discovery of the phrase "With New Radiant Action" on a package of soap flakes and Charlotte's attempt to learn what "radiant" means creates a memorable scene. That scene must have impressed a second grader who, when studying later about Hawaii, wrote:

```
Hawaii
radiant flowers
luau shopping surfing
people coconut sugarcane
SPLENDID
```

Unfamiliar words are frequently defined within the context of the story. *Make Way for Ducklings*, by Robert McCloskey, describes the mallard parents preparing to build their nest:

So they chose a cozy spot among the bushes near the water and settled down to build their nest. And only just in time, for now they were beginning to molt. All their old wing feathers started to drop out, and they would not be able to fly again until the new ones grew in.

The meaning of the word "molt" is very clear.

In William Steig's *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, the donkey Sylvester finds a rock, "flaming red, shiny, and perfectly round, like a marble." When he wishes for it to stop raining,

To his great surprise the rain stopped. It didn't stop gradually as rains usually do. It CEASED. The drops vanished on the way down, the clouds disappeared, everything was dry, and the sun was shining as if rain had never existed.

There is no question as to what "ceased" means.

Literature can help children understand words that have similar meanings. While hearing several of the Paddington books, children noticed that instead of using the word "said," author Michael Bond used other, more precise, words: repeated, announced, explained, began, called, shouted, exclaimed, asked, cried. Discussion of the meanings of these words prompted the making of a list of "Words that Mean 'Said.'" Words were continually added during the year, and the list was used as a reference when children wrote.
Figurative Language

Reading stories that contain examples of certain figurative language helps children become familiar and comfortable enough with those forms to use them in their writing. They become aware that associating one idea with another can make the message more clear and vivid. Similes and metaphors are found in many stories and poems. A simile is a type of comparison which uses the word "like" or "as" and leads the reader to see the resemblance of one object to another.

*Amigo*, by Byrd Baylor Schweitzer, abounds with similes. This story, written in verse, tells of Francisco's desire to own a dog. Because his family cannot afford a pet, Francisco attempts to tame a prairie dog. Meanwhile, the prairie dog Amigo is determined to tame himself a boy.

Amigo sits,
Quiet as a stone

...all the grass
was sweet as honey
and tall enough to hide in.

The boy would lie down
quiet as a field mouse in its nest.

(Francisco)
jumped over rocks like an antelope.

he seemed to Amigo
to reach the sky
Tall as a mountain

Francisco's song
was carried by the wind,
Light as a feather.
The parallel plot and the theme of friendship can be studied in addition to the many examples of similes in this story.

Mr. Picklepaw's Popcorn, by Ruth Adams, describes Mr. Picklepaw's garden as having "giant sunflowers as big as your daddy's head" and "pink and blue flowers running wild as a bag full of stray cats." After harvesting his popcorn crop,

The next morning the sun popped up like a hot kernal of corn. The day grew warmer and warmer as days sometimes do in the early fall. By noon it was hot as a day in July. Oh, much hotter than that.

His iron shed became "as hot as a popcorn popper" and the kernals began to pop, making a mountain of popcorn. In addition to having many similes, this story contains the elements of exaggeration and humor.

The Bigger Giant, retold by Nancy Green, tells about Fin McCool, who was "as big as a house, and his ears were as big as pancakes." However, the giant Cucullan was even bigger and was "as mad as a bear with a bee in his ear."

After Templeton in Charlotte's Web spends a night at the fairgrounds eating the remains of discarded lunch boxes, candied apples, ice cream cones, and popcorn, he was "swollen to twice his normal size. His stomach was as big around as a jelly jar."

"The Smell of Thanksgiving," a poem by Mary Ann Magnan, provided the stimulus for children to write similes in a group poem.
The Smell of Thanksgiving

Salty
Sour
Spicy
Sweet
Buttery
Roasty
Crispy
Toasty
Gingery
Sharp
Peppery
Tart
Candied
Sugary
Fresh
Mmmmm Good!

by Mary Ann Magnan

Second grade children wrote:

The Smell of Thanksgiving Is

as salty as green olives
as sour as sour cream on baked potatoes
as spicy as pumpkin pie
as sweet as sweet corn
as buttery as squash
as roasty as a butterball turkey
as crispy as a red Jonathan apple
as toasty as marshmallows toasted over the fire in the fireplace
as gingery as warm gingerbread
as sharp as burning leaves
as peppery as the projector when you show old slides of when you were little
as tart as cranberries
as candied as sweet potatoes
as sugary as thin white sugar cookies
as fresh as hot apple pie
Mmmmm Good!

Individual children shared these similes:

as quiet as tiptoeing in a haunted house
as quiet as a fish going to sleep
as quiet as a person at the public library
as fast as a fox when he's chasing his pray  
as fast as a eagle chasing a worm  
as fast as billy goats being chaste to get milked  
as slowly as a boy or girl going to the doctor to get a shot  
as slowly as a turtle crawling up the hills

Throughout the year, similes were included naturally in children's writing.

My Dragon

My dragon has a long tail and 5 eyes. My dragon is as colorful as a peacock and has a big hat. My dragon's name is Bow. He's name bow because he is the color of the rainbow. Bow is very wild and breaths fire.

Haiku

The Rock just sits there  
So lifeless and so lonely  
As if it were dead.

Love makes me feel as soft as a blanket.

Love is as warm as sitting on my Mommy's lap.

...She asked her mom if she could have the little white rabbit. Her mom said yes. Oh he's so cuddly as a teddy bear.

Why the moon is in the sky

Why is the moon in the sky? The moon is in the sky to help people see at night. It is to help us children win. We come from our friends house. I like the moon because it looks like a dimend sparkeling.
In addition to developing concepts, building vocabulary, and encouraging figurative language, literature serves as a model for children in constructing stories that will appeal to their audiences. Literature experiences for second graders can begin to help them organize their thoughts and use literary devices, or elements, such as characterization, plot development, and theme or idea development.

Characterization. In children's writing the development of characters is often limited. After having experiences with carefully developed characters in books, children need time to discuss and opportunity to reread to become more acquainted with the characters. For example, the study of the Chinese New Year, with its fireworks, dragon parades, and festivities, prompted the reading of several books about dragons. Children could easily imagine these imaginary characters from the vivid descriptions in Jay Williams' *Everyone Knows What a Dragon Looks Like*.

---

He sprang up into the air and his form changed. He grew taller than the tallest tree, taller than the tallest tower. He was the color of sunset shining through rain. Scales covered him, scattering light. His claws and teeth glittered like diamonds. His eyes were noble like those of a proud horse. He was more beautiful and more frightening than Han had ever seen.

He flew high, roaring, and vanished into the deep sky.

Lilian Moore's humorous poem, "Lost and Found," also presents an interesting view of dragons.

Lost:
A Wizard's loving pet.
Rather longish.
Somewhat scaly.
May be hungry or upset.
Please feed daily.

P.S. Reward

Found:
A dragon
breathing fire
Flails his scaly tail
in ire.
Would eat twenty LARGE meals daily
if we let him.
PLEASE
Come and get him.

P.S. No reward necessary.

The children responded with these stories about dragons.

My Friend

My Friend has shiny teeth! He's sunset color with a shiny horn on his nose. He roars! and lives in the hills. He's huge like a tall arormint (apartment). But he's nice. He eats frot (fruit). He tickles birds and gets bread for them. Yep he's my pet! He's a dragon!
My Dragon

My dragon's body flashes like lightning, his face shins like red apples. His tail is like gold in the sunshine. His teeth glisten and glitter like stars. His tail is longer than a alligators and stronger than an elephant. He is gigantic!

My Dragon

My dragon is bigger than a building. The dragon eats people and animals and he trys to eat me and if he smells me he sneezes achoo! fire comes out of his nose. you can see all diferint colors.

Stories about teddy bears provided the basis for several experiences with personified characters. Corduroy and A Pocket for Corduroy, by Don Freeman; Alfred Goes House Hunting, by Bill Binzen; The Bear's Bicycle, by Emilie W. McLeod; Ira Sleeps Over, by Bernard Waber; several Paddington stories, by Michael Bond; and several Winnie-the-Pooh stories, by A. A. Milne were read to the children. Children brought their teddy bears to school to introduce to their classmates. They planned a "bear party" complete with games (Simon the Bear Says, Bear Tag, and I Spy the Bear) and refreshments of apple slices, toast with honey, and honeycomb. They organized a television program using their bears as the "stars." They acted out "The Three Bears" during playtime. They talked and wrote enthusiastically about bears.

After discussing the personified characters in these various stories, children studied their own bears and wrote stories.
My bear is littel. His mom is big. He has brown eyes. He has white feet. He has a black nose. He is furry. He is soft he has white ears.

My bear is fat. His name is Fouzzy bear. He likes honny. He climes trees. He is soft He made a movey.

My bear is yellow. My bear has a stripide shrt. He has black eyes. My bear likes pizza and he likes honey. He is 7 years old like I am. He is little for a bear.

Writing a sequel to a story allows children to use their imaginations while relying securely on what is already known about the character and his/her previous actions. The two books about Corduroy prompted children to write a third. They decided that although Corduroy was not really naughty, he did get into trouble. He often used the phrase, "This must be a ___. I've always wanted a ___." After much discussion and several votes on what to include in the story, the children dictated this story to the teacher.

Corduroy Comes to School

Lisa brought Corduroy to school for show and tell. The teacher said, "While we are doing the timed test for math, you go play."

Corduroy ran to the record player. He turned the button to 33. He hopped on and whizzed around.

"This must be a merry-go-round," said Corduroy. "I've always wanted to ride on a merry-go-round."

Then he put the knob on 78 and whirled off and landed in the garbage can.

"Help! Help! Let me out of this cave!"

Lisa came to rescue him. "How did you get in there?" she asked.

Just then the bell rang to go out for recess. Lisa took Corduroy to the slide. Corduroy started to climb. "This must be a mountain," he thought. He got to the top. "Maybe this is a skyscraper!"

Suddenly Corduroy slipped and tumbled down head first.
"This must be a roller coaster. I've NEVER wanted to ride a roller coaster!"
Lisa was at the bottom of the slide and caught Corduroy just in time. "Silly old bear," she said.

Lorna Balian's illustrations enhance the understanding of her delightful leprechaun character in Leprechauns Never Lie. The wee man outwits his captors, saves his gold, and tricks them into finishing some long-procrastinated jobs. Using a leprechaun as the main character, one child wrote:

Leprechaun Land

Way back in the 18100 (eighteen-hundreds) there lived a little fat green bearded leprechaun who had two problems. One was, he had too long of shoes and he always tripped over them. But the biggest problem was he had a green beard and the rest of his leprechaun friends had red. The leprechaun's name was Jim. Jim did not have a pot of gold either.

One night when Jim was fast asleep a good fairy came and woke him up! She said, "Go back to sleep and in the morning you will find tiny new shoes just right for your feet." and then she vanished. So Jim went back to sleep. In the morning he found pretty shoes but they were too big for little Jim.

2 months past the fairy came back and whispered, Did you like your new shoes wondered the fairy. "Yes they were verey shinny, and beautiful but they were to, to big" said the leprechaun. So the fairy said, "it will take me a long time. "Do you have any more problems." asked the fairy. Yes I have said Jim, I have two more. What is your first one? I have a red beard and all the leprechauns make fun of me. What is your second problem asked the fairy. I can't find a pot of gold. I'll take care of that, whispered the fairy. And in a secent she was gone.

5 months past and the fairy came back and said, "follow me." He followed her and he went into another world and saw a pot of gold under a rainbow he got it! He went to the shoemakers and got the most beautiful shoes in the world. What about my beard asked Jim. Oh! I almost forgot and she raised up her hands and poited
them at the leprechaun's beard and it suddenly turned red. How happy he was and he lived there for the rest of his life.

Plot Development

The relationship of the ideas, events, and characters in stories can be more fully understood by comparing and contrasting similar stories and different versions of stories. Children may be motivated to write their own versions. For example, after reading *The Glerp*, a Ginn enrichment book about a creature who gobbles each character he encounters, children recalled *The Fat Cat*, a story they had heard earlier in the year. This Danish folktale, translated and illustrated by Jack Kent, involves a greedy cat who eats an old woman's gruel, her cooking pot, and even the old woman. Illustrations show the cat growing larger and larger as he proceeds to eat the rest of the characters he meets. A refrain is repeated with each encounter:

"I ate the gruel
and the pot
and the old woman, too.
And now I am going
to also eat YOU."

Children compared these two stories with the song "I Know an Old Lady," by Rose Bonne. The song begins:

I know an old lady who swallowed a fly.
I don't know why she swallowed a fly!
I guess she'll die.

With each verse, the old lady swallows something else to help her catch the fly—a spider, bird, cat, dog, goat, cow, and finally, a horse. "She's dead, of course."
Children used their imaginations to create other creatures that swallowed many things.

The Glerp

One day the Glerp was stalking down main street. And said if anything gets in my way I'll eat it up. He walk down the street and saw a spider. Glerp went the Glerp.

And one thing that is unugool (unusual) about the Glerp. Because when ever he ate something small he would grow big. And if he ate something big he would grow small. The Glerp saw a bird. Glerp went the Glerp. And he was as big as the impier state building.

Then he saw a dog. Glerp went the Glerp. He grew a little bigger. Then he saw a car and said Should I eat it? Yes, I should. And he did.

The man in the car said to the spider and the dog, Get in the car and I'll get us out of this plase. And he startid the car and droove out of the Glerp's mouth. And the Glerp never no never ate something that did not belong to him.

The Glerp

Once upon a time there was a Glerp who whent for a walk. And he said if anything comes along I will eat it.

And so came a gray mouse. He asked the Glerp where is some cheez. GLERP! He was gone. The Glerp grew a little bit bigger.

Along came a white rabbit he said hello. GLERP! He was gone.

And along came a blak cow. he said where is the farmer? GLERP! he disapered (disappeared).

The Glerp coht (coughed) and the mouse came out and the rabbit came out and fanly (finally) the cow came out of his mouth. They asked for another ride in a year. And the Glerp did not eat any more. Because he was ill.
Once upon a time there lived a yellow and black tiger named Tiger that lived in the forest. Tiger decided to go for a swim and Tiger explained if anything gets in my way I'll eat it. He started to swim the backstroke and ran into a little black and white dog.

The dog cried out, Where are you going. Gulp sighed Tiger licking his chops. That was delices. He hered (hurried) on and met a big fery bear. The bear cried do you have any honeycomb I'm starved. Gulp went Tiger and the bear was gone.

The dog said, let's get out of this creapy place I'm tired. So the bear hit Tiger and Tiger coughed up the bear and the dog.

Tiger was very sad. Then the dog had a good idea. he invited bear and Tiger over for supper. And do you know what hapened at supper? Well Tiger ate bear and dog and felt much better.

Each book and cassette tape in Bill Martin Jr. 's Little Woodland Series tells a story of an animal, including a skunk, deer, turkey, and bear. In The Rabbit and the Cat, a rabbit and her babies are nibbling in a garden when a cat suddenly appears. The mother rabbit saves her babies by leading the cat on a midnight chase. Children used the elements of character and plot to write similar stories:

The Bobcat and the Rabbit

Once upon a time there lived a mother rabbit and her one bunny. She smelled carrots and where there's carrots, there's a garden. The little bunny ate and ate.

Suddenly the bobcat approached! The mother sees the bobcat and warns her child. It was a startling race! Zig zag bobbing up and down! At the last minute the mother rabbit leaped in the air and attacked the bobcat. The mother rabbit tried to bite the bobcat but the bobcat bit the rabbit and killed the rabbit.
The Cat and the Mouse

Once upon a time a mouse was running on a little skinny path. The mouse sniffed the wind. She smelled something. She smelled an enemy. She was in danger. She must hide!

The cat heard something. She sniffed. She smelled a mouse. She ran to find her. She ran and ran. She caught the track the mouse was on! The mouse hid in a little blueberry patch. The cat sniffed until he found the mouse. The cat didn't make a noise. THEN! The cat jumped in the blueberry patch and caught the mouse and ate her for supper!

Children can incorporate patterns from books into the organization of their ideas. For example, All about Arthur (an absolutely absurd ape), by Eric Carle, contains a repeated pattern of a letter of the alphabet, a town, an animal, its name, and an activity.

In Atlanta one autumn day
an absolutely absurd
accordion-playing ape named
Arthur felt all alone.

In Baltimore Arthur befriended
a bashful banjo-playing bear
named Ben. Ben was bored
beyond belief.

In Cincinnati he came across a cool
calico cat selling cotton candy on a corner.
The cat was called Cindy.

Second graders created their own version of All about
Andy, an alligator who lived in Africa and was always angry.

In Davenport he met a dog named Dopey
who danced in the dining room.

At East Elementary Andy the Alligator
met an elephant named Ed. Ed went to
the equator and met an eel.
In Galveston he met a giraffe named Gary.  
Gary played the guitar.

In Independence, Iowa he met Ivan and Isabel.  
They were insects.  They ate ice.

In Japan he met Julie the joey.  She liked to jump and she worked at John Deere's.

By the time Andy meets a zebra named Zack who likes to eat zucchini, Andy has many friends and is not angry anymore.

The **Very Hungry Caterpillar**, by Eric Carle, tells of a caterpillar who hatches and searches for food.

On Monday he ate through one apple.  
But he was still hungry.

With each successive day of the week, the caterpillar eats another item, but is still hungry.  Finally he forms a chrysalis and hatches into a beautiful butterfly.  This book involves days of the week and counting and is especially fun for children because an actual hole has been cut in the pages where the caterpillar eats.

Children worked in a group to make their own "Very Hungry Caterpillar."

In the dark dark night a little egg lay on a leaf.

On Sunday morning the bright sun came up and--POP--out of the little egg came a little and very hungry caterpillar.

He began to look for some food.

On Monday he ate through one jack-o-lantern.  
But he was still hungry.

On Tuesday he ate through two tomatoes.  
But he was still hungry.
On Wednesday he ate through three ears of corn. But he was still hungry.

On Thursday he ate through four orange carrots. But he was still hungry.

On Friday he ate through five round cabbages. But he was still hungry.

On Saturday he ate through one hot dog, one red raspberry, a caramel apple, one juicy pineapple, one peppermint candy, one red apple, an ice cream cone, a piece of French toast, and a purple eggplant.

That night he had a stomachache!

The next day was Sunday again. He ate through a green leaf. He felt much better.

Now he wasn't hungry anymore. He wasn't little either. He was a chubby fat caterpillar.

He made a cocoon on Monday and he stayed there for two weeks. Then he pushed his way out and........

He was a beautiful butterfly!

Written as a letter, Love from Uncle Clyde, by Nancy Winslow Parker, gives instructions to a boy who receives a hippopotamus for his birthday. After listening to the story, each child chose an animal to have "Uncle Clyde" mail to him with instructions for its care. The stories were typed, illustrated, read and enjoyed.

Happy Birthday, Todd. I am sending you a big brown buffalo. It eats five rattlesnakes a day. He likes to go for a walk in the rain. Brush his teeth three times a day. Comb his fuzzy hair three times a day. Love from Uncle Clyde
Happy Birthday, Shawn.
I am sending you a big saber-toothed tiger.
Rake his long hair four times a day.
Feed him fourteen soft chicken bones a day.
Take him for a walk for ten hours.
Be careful when you brush his whiskers
or he might bite you.
You will find that he likes doughnuts too.
He likes milk.
Love from Uncle Clyde

Happy Birthday, Kelly, from your lovable Uncle Clyde.
When you open the package hurry up and feed him
because he is a vole. I found him in my tent.
Brush his teeth with a little toothbrush.
Feed him seeds two times a day and give him baths
three times a day. Do not let him drown.
He likes milk and water.
You will see that he is brown and little.
And you will see that he likes to sit by the fire.
Love from Uncle Clyde

Some books are especially appropriate for writing a
sequel. The Crocodile under Louis K. Finneberg’s Bed, by
Nancy Winslow Parker, is written in the style of two news­
paper accounts. One notes that the Finnebergs have donated
a talking crocodile to the Zoological Gardens in memory of
their son who has disappeared. The second states that the
crocodile has been returned at their request. Examples of a
third news article written by the children are presented
below.

The Return of Louis K. Finneberg

Southampton, Long Island
September 3, 1913

Louis K. Finneberg has been found in a crocodile.
The crocodile is missing now. But Louis K. Finne­
berg is bigger.
Louis K. Finneberg Returns

Southampton, Long Island
September 3, 1913

Louis K. Finneberg was gone 4 months. He was in the crocodile 4 months. Louis got owt whan the crocodile burpt. everybody is happy now. Louis K. Finneberg staes away from the crocodile. But the crocodile is hungry still for him.

THE RETURN OF LOUIS K. FINNEBERG

Southampton, Long Island
September 15, 1913

Louis K. Finneberg has returned to Mr. Judge and Mrs. Julius K. Finneberg. He has been locket up in the crocodile for four months and he hardly ate anything or drank anything. The only thing he cold (could) do is talk and fly a kite. After four months in a crocodile he was very homesick and after he got home he felt better.

BOY RETURNS HOME

Southampton, Long Island
September 4, 1913

Louis K. Finneberg who disappeared April 15, 1913 now is back home. The family said it was just a mystery. Louis K. Finneberg told the family he was hideing in the addick (attic).

Theme or Idea Development

Books that contain a similar theme can be used together to develop a more keen awareness, a better understanding, and appreciation of that theme. Stories dealing with friendship, such as Charlotte's Web, by E. B. White; Mousewife, by Rumer Godden; and Macaroon, by Julia Cunningham can be compared and contrasted to Rosie and Michael, by Judith
Viorst; or *Corduroy*, by Don Freeman. Even if the books are not read together as a unit, reference could still be made to the stories and their related ideas in order to review and reinforce what had been learned.

Four books with related themes stimulated children to discuss the idea that love makes things real. Marjery Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit* is aptly subtitled *Or How Toys Become Real*. The Velveteen Rabbit is a Christmas gift to a boy, who learns to love him deeply. After the boy recovers from scarlet fever, the germ-filled Rabbit is set out to be burned. But because he has been so loved, the nursery magic Fairy turns him into a living rabbit. In a similar manner, Brinton Turkle tells the story of *The Sky Dog*. All during the summer vacation a small boy sees the shape of a dog in the clouds and wishes that the dog belonged to him. A shaggy white dog appears on the beach one day and the boy is convinced that this is the dog for which he has longed. No one claims the dog so the boy is allowed to keep him. "And Cloudy went along with the boy and was his dog because they belonged together." In *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*, Leo Lionni tells the story of friendship between a real mouse, Alexander, and Willy, the wind-up mouse. Alexander longs to be a wind-up mouse, cuddled and loved as Willy is, and he asks help from a magic lizard. For the price of a purple pebble, the lizard will change one animal into another. While
Alexander searches for the pebble, Willy gets older and is
tossed away. When Alexander finds the pebble, he asks not
to become a toy, but for Willy to become real. Alexander
hurries home to find a live Willy and the two friends dance
until dawn. The Perfect Crane, by Anne Laurin, tells of the
lonely magician, Gami, whose only companions are the folded-
paper birds and butterflies he creates. After he makes a
perfect crane from rice paper, the crane magically comes
alive. The townspeople are curious; soon Gami has many friends.
When fall comes, the crane wants to fly with the other cranes
and Gami must decide if he will let his friend go free.

While children may not fully comprehend the magnitude
of the idea that love changes people or causes miracles or
that only love can create life, they are certainly aware that
what they love becomes real to them. The children wrote
these stories after having experiences with the theme "love
makes things real."

I have a dog it's name is Fluffy. His hair is allmost
off. I have loved him a lot. He has a bllck nose and
blue eyes. Its color is gray and white. I have never
stop sleeping with it. It sits on my bed when I am at
school. I play house when I am home from school. He
is the oley (only) one I love.

My Stuffed Dog

My Dog is white with a black nose and he is real fluffy.
I ride my dog around the room. He is so fluffy that you
could use him for a pillow. His name is Rocky the fly-
ing dog. He ways about 3 pounds and his eyes are black
buttons. And I got him from my grandma.
My real animal

I have a real animal! Her name is Piglit. Her stuffing is comming out, because I had her when I was 1 years old. My mom and dad got Piglit for me. But I still play with it, because I still love it. When I was 2 I played house and made it dance, talk, and walk. We went up town with Piglit. Sometimes Piglit and me had fites! But she never got hurt. I would take Piglit for a long walk. Sometimes mom would take Piglit and me to the park. She is my friend.

A Favorite Mouse of Mine

The nursery magic that happened to my mouse was that she got a heart of her own. But when she was little she didn't have a heart. She has a special heart because it has the specialist love in her heart. The kind of love my mouse had was mousen love. What is mousen love? It's between kids and a mouse.

The observations of these second grade children's responses to the writing program supported by literature experiences will be summarized in Chapter Four.
CHILDREN'S BOOKS


**POETRY**


Chapter 4

Hearing and reading good literature is an important element in the writing process. As described in this paper, it can be used with beginning writers to provide a rich background of experience, to extend concepts and vocabulary, to provide models of language, and to serve as a natural springboard for their creative ideas.

Writing stories following the language pattern of another piece of literature appears to be especially effective for beginning writers. They experience immediate success and can see themselves as writers. They are proud of a product that can be shared with others. Writing their stories in book form seems to encourage both the authors and the readers to write more stories.

In this project children continued to be enthusiastic and willing to write throughout the year. Children seemed to be more aware of how they were learning and that in itself increased the potential for growth. A positive attitude was evident as children wrote stories at home, read each other's stories, and reflected on the value of relating literature to writing. Several children reported, "It helps you remember the story better." "It helps you be a good writer." "It helps you read and write."
Evaluating children's writing can be a vague, subjective process. Writing cannot be broken into isolated skills that can be precisely measured. Children kept folders of their stories during the year. Growth was apparent as the children had additional experiences with literature and writing. Stories became longer, more developed, and more interesting. This progress was shared with parents several times during the year. More documentation of progress was needed. The author will continue to search for information to determine growth in writing.

"Learning to comprehend and produce written language is a longtime, cumulative process which requires continued exposure, practice, and guidance."¹ Not every book that is read to children should be followed by a writing activity, nor should writing be limited to experiences with literature. Only when the reading of the book and the follow-up writing activity are mutually enhanced should this approach be used.

¹Joy F. Moss, "Learning to Write by Listening to Literature," Language Arts, 54, No. 5 (1977), 541.
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Books


