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A Narrative poem of Iowa's immigrants

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A Narrative Poem of Iowa's Immigrants

A Graduate Research Project

Submitted to the

Division of Library Science

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Ann Gumz

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The purpose of this research project was to create a narrative poem for children in kindergarten through fifth grade about the immigrants to Iowa. The author began with a literature review of: children's poetry preferences, children's attitudes about poetry, and the integration of poetry into the classroom. A bibliography of source material was created using selections from Basic Iowa Materials and the web site, The Ultimate Collection of News Links. The author also used five classic narrative poems as models and the elements of good book design recommended by experts as guidelines. A narrative poem was produced using rhythm and rhyme to help Iowa children begin to understand their connection to Iowa history and culture. The poem began with a description of pre-historic peoples and ended with an invitation to the readers/listeners to explore their own family histories. Sketches were added to enhance the visual imagery of the poem.

Table of Contents

Chapter One	Page
Introduction	1
Purpose Statement.....	5
Significance of the Project.....	7
Assumptions.....	8
Limitations.....	8
Definitions.....	9
Chapter Two	
Review of Related Literature.....	10
Curriculum Related Reading Interests of Children.....	10
Children’s Poetry Preferences.....	11
Childrens’ Attitudes Toward Poetry.....	16
Guidelines for Writing Poetry for Children.....	18
Elements of Good Book Design.....	22
Procedures.....	27
Chapter Three	
Project Description.....	30
Chapter Four	
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	31
Bibliography.....	34
Appendix A: Iowa Immigrants Source Books.....	38
Appendix B: Online Newspaper Articles.....	40
Appendix C: Classic Narrative Poems.....	42

Chapter One

Introduction

Curriculum guides and education reform reports have been calling for a renewed emphasis on history in the K-12 curriculum for the past decade (Bradley Commission on History in Schools and Gagnon, 1989). Advocates for history in the curriculum believe history can unite all the other fields—language arts, math, social studies, science, and art—through a study of social history. This change in emphasis from a predominately political, military, western European male viewpoint to a history that includes the contributions from all members of our society—workers, women, immigrants and minorities—offers students an opportunity to acquire a more balanced multicultural perspective of historical events. By introducing a variety of literature in the school curriculum—historical fiction, stories, poetry, and songs—students gain insights into the everyday life of men, women, and children of many different cultures, both past and present (Risinger, 1992). For example, by reading autobiographies, students can develop an understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of individuals who lived in another time and place.

In a recent study Smith, Monson, and Dobson (1992) compared the use of historical fiction in teaching social studies to fifth grade students to the use of traditional basal reader textbooks for a one year time period.

The results suggest that students using historical fiction could recall 60 percent more information than the control group using basal readers (Smith et al.). A non-traditional approach to history also develops better insight into the past, better historical reasoning abilities, and more positive attitudes toward the subject (Booth, 1980). A literature based approach to social history allows children to learn the reasons behind human actions, rather than merely memorizing historic dates, names, and places (Hoge, 1994).

Through the introduction of a variety of literature materials, teachers can help children better understand the past and how they fit into today's society. Stories have been used since the beginning of time to pass on ideas and beliefs. "...the average child entering the first grade has [already] consumed at least two thousand stories" (Stott, 1994). Both poetry and prose offer insight into other people's lives, letting us share their joys and their sorrows (Norton, 1990). Poems are especially adept at exposing the thoughts and feelings of people, rather than just their actions. Poetry also holds the listener's attention and compels him to focus because "every word matters" (Booth, 1988).

Cullinan, Scala, and Schroder (1995) recommend using poetry across the curriculum because it helps children to imagine and visualize a world they have never seen. Because it can help make connections between what children already know and something new, it is the ideal

vehicle for introducing children to new cultures and new worlds. Booth and Moore (1988) explain that poems have the advantage of affecting children both cognitively and emotionally because they are an art form with an intrinsic worth much like painting or music. “Intellect, imagination, and memory are all engaged when reading a poem” (p. 70).

The narrative poem format has advantages for both the teacher and the students. It is easy to read even if the teacher is inexperienced or hesitant about poetry reading, and it is one of the two types of poems identified by Raines and Isbell (1994) as being preferred by children. Glazer (1990) recommends the picture poetry book for adding depth to curriculum areas such as social studies because it generates a feeling for a culture that can not be achieved with a textbook. “Young children are particularly drawn to poems that are descriptive” (p. 231).

Harms and Lettow (1993) suggest a number of reasons for using picture books for studying social history:

- (a) Picture books with historical settings can provide vicarious visual images that make the long ago and the far away more concrete.
- (b) Picture books can extend the human element in historical events by offering various points of view and cultural perspectives
- (c) The text and illustrations of picture books can convey details of how people lived in a particular historical period.
- (d) Through the collaboration of text and illustration in picture

books, the strands of the social studies can portray the wholeness of life in a particular era and the factors that affect people's lives (Harms and Lettow).

Single picture book editions of poetry are an especially useful format for adding depth to a particular topic (Glazer, 1990). The illustrated picture book with poem as text combines the power of poetry and art. When Sepura (1994) asked her second grade students what kind of poetry they would use if they were the teacher, many of the children suggested adding visual representations by drawing pictures and using color. One eight year old girl said she would like to add more pictures to make the poems more beautiful and to help in understanding the poems. It is no wonder that the illustrated poetry book for children has become increasingly popular (Chatton, 1993).

As the cultural diversity of our country's population continues to grow and new immigrants move into all parts of the country, it is especially important to help children understand and accept people of different ethnic backgrounds. One key to understanding and accepting the differences in the people who inhabit our land today is an understanding of the immigrants of the past. Stories about the immigrants, whether in poetry or prose, bring a human dimension to a complex issue (Banks, 1997). Poetry has the power to help children develop new insights and new ways of sensing the world. It can

illuminate, clarify, and deepen even an everyday occurrence (Huck et al., 1997). By presenting descriptive narratives that connect a child's own experiences to someone else's feelings and experiences, poetry can help children accept the differences that exist among all people.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research project is to create a picture book in a narrative poem format about the many different peoples who have immigrated to the state of Iowa, past and present. Even before the earliest Europeans arrived in the United States, Iowa was home to several Native American tribes. In 1850, only 22,000 of Iowa's residents were born outside the United States. However, only ten years later close to one-sixth of the state's 674,000 population were foreign-born. These new immigrants came from Germany, Ireland, England, Norway, Canada, Sweden, Bohemia, Denmark and Scotland (Kueter, 1996).

Since the 1990 census, Iowa has gained more than 15,300 new immigrants, increasing the state's population to 2,852,423 residents ("North Iowa," 1998). According to Willis Goudy, head on ISU Census Services ("Changing Population," 1998) "...if Iowa is going to continue to grow, it's going to be through migration and minority groups should be anticipated." Although the Census Bureau predicts Iowa's Hispanic and African American residents will increase to 5.1 percent of the population by the year 2025, Goudy advises that this is an under-representation, nor

did the prediction take into account the 2,500 Bosnian immigrants now living in Iowa (Vásconez, 1998).

The illustrated poetry book that is the focus of this project is targeted at an audience of children aged five to ten years. The narrative poetry format has the advantage of appealing to a listener's ear, as well as to his imagination. Children respond with pleasure to the rhythms and rhymes of poetry. Many narrative poems such as Henry Wadesworth Longfellow's The Song of Hiawatha (Longfellow, 1982) were intended to be read aloud or recited to an audience (Huck et al., 1997).

The primary focus of this book will be to introduce children to the cultural diversity of the people who have chosen to make their home in Iowa. It will encourage readers and listeners to learn more about their own heritage. Because many different peoples have lived in Iowa and new immigrants continue to move to Iowa, this book will help children develop a deeper understanding of the people within their own state. It is important that children learn early that there are many different cultures and heritages living side by side in Iowa. History books have traditionally presented the story of our nation's past with a strong euro-centric bias, downplaying the part played by native inhabitants and other ethnic groups. This narrative poem will instead reinforce the social history perspective which acknowledges the importance of all people in

developing our nation. In order to feel pride in one's heritage, it is important that all cultures be given equal weight.

Significance of the Project

One goal of the elementary school curriculum is to provide children with an understanding of life in the past. Fine picture books with historical settings can enrich the social studies program through its text and illustrations (Harms and Lettow, 1994).

“The study of social history provides an effective direction for ensuring a multicultural social studies curriculum. It focuses on the people who built our country—workers, women, ethnic minorities, and immigrants.” (Singer, 1992, 84).

Unfortunately a keyword search of the Cedar Valley Library Consortium via the UNISTAR online catalog quickly revealed the paucity of literature currently available to teach the social history of Iowa to children in Kindergarten through the Fifth grade. Of the 9,572 books identified using the keyword IOWA, only a few books were located in the UNI youth collection of the Rod Library. When the keyword search was narrowed by adding the term HISTORY, only 1045 entries were identified. Of those 1045 entries, fifty entries were located in the UNI Youth collection and eleven entries were located in the Cedar Falls Youth collection. However only twenty-two of the fifty UNI Youth collection entries and only two of the eleven CF Youth entries could be classified as picture books (approximately 32 pages in length). None of the 24 picture books that

related to both IOWA and HISTORY were located in the poetry section of the libraries.

This illustrated narrative poem will provide a source of information about the state of Iowa through the lives of its immigrants. It will help Iowa children understand their connection to the past and how they and their families fit into the story of Iowa. This book will provide the children of Iowa with an important story that will act as one more piece of the history quilt that will someday include the story of their own lives.

Assumptions

A narrative poem written about the immigrants to Iowa will find a receptive audience among elementary grade students and their teachers in Iowa. It will help them develop a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage and an appreciation of the cultures of all Iowans, past and present. The words and pictures of this book will provide an important link to the other stories these children have learned in school and at home. Together the stories will provide a basis for understanding the wonderful diversity and similarities in the heritage of Iowa's people.

Limitations

Since this poem is written for children in kindergarten through fifth grade, the words and phrases of the narrative must be accessible to their level of understanding. At the same time the writer must maintain

high expectations of children's reading, listening, and thinking skills in order to help them achieve their highest accomplishments.

The writer is limited in the length of the narrative by the number of pages that are appropriate to a picture book format. The writer is also limited in the number of images that can accompany the narrative by the space available in a picture book format. The images must be authentic and complementary to the story.

Definitions

For purposes of effective communication between the writer and the reader, the following terms are defined:

Social History—the history of ordinary people, their cultures, and their contributions to the development of societies (Singer, 1992).

Narrative Poem—a story told in verse form. This form includes ballads and epics. It has a beginning, middle, and an end, and an underlying theme (Russel, 1997, p. 161).

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

This review will discuss research related to children's curriculum related reading interests. This review will also examine childrens' poetry preferences, children's attitudes about poetry, and the way poetry can be integrated successfully in the classroom to enhance the curriculum. This chapter will also review the elements necessary for good book design (including text illustration) and suggested guidelines for writing good poems.

Curriculum Related Reading Interests of Children

The story of Iowa's immigrants is a social history topic that is usually found in the social studies classroom. A survey conducted by Monson and Howe (1993) attempted to find out what children want to learn about other people and places. A list of nine questions was compiled from those created by more than two hundred U.S. school children, ages nine to eleven. General information about the topic selected, the country of Australia, could be found in the social studies textbooks. However the descriptions found in novels provided far greater detail and depth, and allowed the children to experience the country of Australia through the eyes of the storybook characters.

A study conducted by Howe (1990) using two groups of fifth graders also indicated that when teachers read selections of historical fiction to their students, the student's academic achievement improved. Teachers read aloud selections from historical fiction books to their students. The treatment group heard selections that related to the curriculum topic, but the control group heard selections that were unrelated. . Students who heard stories directly related to the curriculum topic were more likely to seek out and read additional historical fiction on their own. This method of teaching had the additional benefit of encouraging independent reading. Odland (1980) contends that all genre of children's literature (folktales, tall tales, myths and legends, fantasy, poetry, realistic and historical fiction, as well as biography and informational books) are appropriate for teaching social studies.

Children's Poetry Preferences

In order to create an illustrated narrative poetry book of high quality for children, several elements need to be considered. The first step in writing a book is to consider the target audience and what type of poem will appeal to it. An early study was conducted by King (1922) using 4800 children from ten cities across the United States sought to find out which poems are most loved by children. The top four elements the children preferred in poems were: (a) nature (b) humor (c) patriotism (d)

familiar experience, with rhyme and rhythm were listed ninth, and pictures tenth.

Eckert (1928) conducted a study of first, second, and third graders to find out if the poems selected by adults for inclusion in textbooks appealed to children as much as anthologies of child verse. The results of the study found that in eight of the nine groups of poems the children preferred the non-textbook poems, indicating the adult poetry choices seldom coincided with children's actual poetry preferences.

Mackintosh (1924) conducted a study of children's poetry interests using 100 poems selected from recognized anthologies using fifth graders. The children heard and ranked ten poems each day using a six point scale. The elements found in the preferred poems were rhythm and rhyme, good storyline, excitement, adventure, dramatic interest, seriousness, humor, and dialect. The types of poem that the children preferred were ballad, lyric, and narrative. The results of the study also indicate children enjoy poetry more when they are not asked to analyze or memorize it.

Mackintosh (1932) conducted a second study of fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in Green Bay, Wisconsin using 50 of the preferred poems from the first study and 50 additional poems. She wanted to find out if poetry preferences overlap grade levels and how the original 50 poems would be ranked. The results of the study found there is overlap in

preferred poems over grade levels and seventeen of the original poems were also preferred by this sample. Common elements of preferred poems from both studies were humor, dialect, and patriotic. The most encouraging result was that almost every poem appealed to one of the children. A third study by Mackintosh (1932) using 400 poems and 187 third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders confirmed the earlier findings. It also found that preferred poems had a combination of the elements previously identified, as well as familiar experience, sadness, and repetition.

Bradshaw (1937) conducted a study of 500 first graders in Iowa and Illinois using 60 poems. The results of the study confirmed Mackintosh's study results concerning the lack of correlation between adult poetry selections for children and the poetry children selected as preferred. Her study also found that more than half of the children liked all 60 poems and 80 percent liked at least half of the poems. Her results also found that preferred poems contained a combination of elements—singing quality and rhythm, animals and nature, childhood experiences, rhymes, humor, and imagination.

Kyte (1947) conducted a study of third through eighth graders using 50 poems and a three point rating scale. The results confirmed both Eckert, Mackintosh, and Bradshaw's earlier study results concerning the inability of specialists to predict which poems children would like. Four of

the most popular poems contained narrative and humor (Kyte). The length of the poem was unimportant. Other important elements were rhythm, rhyme, familiar experience, and dramatic action.

Avengno (1956) studied 1200 fourth, fifth and sixth graders in New York City and their preferences in poetry, comparing old (pre 1900) poems to new (after 1920) poems. For a ten week period the teacher read aloud five poems each day. The children rated the poems using a five point scale and gave reasons for their preferences. The most frequent reason given for not liking a poem was that they did not understand it. The elements of preferred poems confirmed the elements identified in earlier poetry preference studies. The old and new poems received a balanced rating with 30 old poems and 30 new poems receiving the highest rating.

Both Bridge (1966) studying fourth, fifth and sixth graders and Nelson (1966) studying first, second, and third graders concluded that children prefer poems related to their own experiences and poetry that is humorous. Nelson compared poems intended to be read aloud to children, not to textbook poems that are usually read silently. Her study results confirmed Eckert, Mackintosh, Bradshaw, and Kyte's findings that children are the best source for finding out children's poetry preferences. Vocabulary was not a crucial factor in children's liking of poems that were

read aloud to them. Nelson also found that boys and girls in first, second and third grader had similar poetry preferences.

A study conducted by Pitman (1966) using third graders found that children enjoyed poems relating to their own experiences. Pitman initially conducted a 26 week study using 16 boys and 16 girls from a high socio-economic background to determine general reading interests. She then used the same subjects to conduct a study of their poetry interests using 50 poems that covered a range of subjects, rhythms, moods, and styles. Four poems were read at the beginning of the school day and the children then completed an evaluation form. The results indicated that the children preferred prose when reading alone, but also enjoyed listening to poetry when read aloud. Poems about animals were the favorite subject. The children also preferred poems that dealt with familiar experiences. Poems that combined both animals and familiar experiences were ranked highest.

According to a national survey of children's poetry preferences (Terry, 1974), narrative poems and limericks were children's favorite poetry forms. This national survey of 422 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students also found that children's poetry choices are influenced by the poetry form, certain poetic elements, and the poem's content. The students listened to 113 professionally recorded poems during the 10-day survey and then ranked them using a five point scale. The most popular

forms of poetry were narrative poems and limericks. The most popular content included humorous poems, poems about animals, and poems about familiar experiences (Terry). Rhythm and sound were the most liked poetic elements, and modern poetry categorized as modern was preferred over traditional.

Fisher and Natarella (1982) conducted research on poetry preferences of first, second, and third graders using the same schools used in Terry's previous national survey. They chose and categorized 64 poems according to form, topic, poetic elements, and style (traditional or modern). The children's responses were gathered by letting them rate each poem listened to by selecting one of three possible responses. The classroom teachers listed comments made by the children and completed their own preference questionnaire. The results of this study were consistent with Terry's survey and with other earlier studies. The conclusions drawn from the data revealed two new aspects about children's poetry preferences. The younger children preferred traditional poetry over modern, and strange and fantastic content over realistic.

Children's Attitudes Toward Poetry

A study of kindergarten through third grade elementary students was conducted by Ford (1987) over a four week period. The purpose of the study was to examine children's poetry concepts and attitudes and to

determine how to develop an effective poetry program for teachers to follow. The results indicated the children had a positive attitude and definite concepts about poetry (Ford). The success of a poetry program is dependent on several variables (a) selection of poetry that children like, (b) frequent use of poetry in the classroom, (c) an enthusiastic teacher, and (d) an aesthetic approach to teaching poetry.

McCauley's (1948) study of first graders interests in poetry in seven elementary schools introduced children to ten poems over a period of several weeks. She found that children's interest were not static and that the more often a child heard a poem, the more he or she liked it. Poetry interests were also affected by the teacher, the parent, and the libraries to which the child had access.

McClure (1990) conducted a year long ethnographic study of a combined fifth and sixth grade classroom. The two classroom teachers surrounded the children with books of a variety of genres, including poetry. The purpose of the study was to find out how these teachers were able to create an environment where children were reading, discussing, writing and revising poems and thoroughly enjoying the entire process. The results of the study indicate that the key to the teachers' success was in the way poetry was treated. Poetry was used as an integral part of the entire curriculum, not as a separate unit concerned only with the mechanics of poetry. According to McClure (p. 35)

“ A poem is a living thing, given first breath by its creator, the poet. Although it owes its creation to the poet, it owes continued life to its readers and listeners: those who hear its song and are touched by the ideas and messages it presents. It not only tells about experience but also invites participation in that experience (McClure).”

Guidelines for Writing Poetry for Children

An illustrated storybook whether written in poetry or prose must place equal emphasis on language and art so that these two elements can combine to form an artistic unit that is stronger than either element alone (Stewig, 1995). Together the elements of language and art in a picture book “stimulate the visual and verbal fluency of children” (p. 17).

However, not all picture books achieve the necessary balance of evocative language and imaginative pictures. In order to evaluate a picture book Stewig (1995, p. 19-20) suggests asking the following questions:

- (a) Is there a variety of words that will challenge children’s understanding?
- (b) Is there a variety of sentence structures?
- (c) Does the author use literary devices to intrigue the reader?
- (d) Does the artist make us see something in a new way?
- (e) Does the art intrigue the reader by its placement,

sequence, or medium? (f) Does the art enhance or extend words (Stewig)?

When evaluating the artwork in a picture book, it is helpful to consider the following visual elements—shape, line, color, proportion, detail, and space. A successful picture book must combine most or all of these visual elements into a unified composition. Stewig (1995) suggests examining the picture books which have received the Caldecott Award, given to the illustrator in honor of distinguished pictorial art. By considering how the artist has combined certain elements, the novice author can develop an eye for a well illustrated book.

Kiefer (1993, p. 69) conducted an ethnographic study of elementary students to determine “... to what kind of picture books do children respond most deeply?” The results of her study found that children respond to the small details that illustrators include in their pictures. Also with sufficient time and opportunity to interact with picture books, children develop an aesthetic awareness. For example, a fourth grade student was asked to compare the illustrations of two different versions of a folktale. She explained that the illustrator who used simple shapes and watercolors was preferable because those forms fit the story better. Kiefer (1993, p. 77) concludes that

“Although a book illustrator must be guided by the necessity of interpreting a narrative or a concept, in the best picture books the illustrator creates an art form that involves as much as it informs, and transforms as much as it tells.”

Day (1996) conducted a research project using sixty elementary students. After reading picture books to students, she questioned them about what they had learned. She found that "...the style of art and text influenced the meaning that the students perceived." Children are able to use the pictures to expand their own understanding and imagination, but they also understand that each artist uses a different style to illustrate the story (Day, 1996).

In order to create a quality illustrated poem, the author also needs to know how to write an effective poem that will accommodate the picture book format. According to Huck et al. (1997) there are several elements a poet can use in a poem—rhythm, rhyme and sound, imagery, figurative language, shape, and emotional force.

- a) Rhythm comes to us from chants, songs, dances, and the pulse of our own hearts. Through rhythm a poet can set the mood or movement of the narrative. A change in rhythm alerts the reader to a new element in the poem, a change in mood, a warning, a new voice, or something new.
- b) Rhyme and sound provide the musical quality of the poem. Alliteration (the repetition of initial consonant sounds), assonance (the repetition of vowel sounds), and repetition can all be used to create a mood or tone in a poem. Sound can also be created by use of a coined word (a word made up by the writer) to add an element of humor or nonsense to a poem.
- c) Imagery uses words to evoke images of sight, sound, touch, smell, or taste. This element has special appeal for children since they

naturally use these senses to explore their own world. Children still have a very acute senses and are quick to respond to smells or tastes that adults scarcely notice.

- d) Figurative language (the comparing or contrasting of two objects or ideas using simile or metaphor) and personification (a method for talking about inanimate objects and animals as if they were human) are additional elements a poet can use to communicate to his audience. Even the physical shape of a poem such as a poem shaped like a Christmas tree, can complements the poem.
- e) One key element of poetry, emotional force, is the result of whatever combination of elements the poet has chosen to provoke a reaction from the reader (Huck et al.).

Following all the rules for writing poetry does not guarantee a good poem. So how do we recognize a good poem? A eulogy written by poet, John Ciardi for William Carlos William offers this definition:

A good poem celebrates life and quickens us to it... The good poet cannot fail to shame us, for he proves instantly that we have never learned to touch, smell, taste, hear, and see (1963, p. 18).

Some of the guidelines suggested by Huck et al. (1997, p. 399) for identifying good poetry for children ask the following questions:

- (a) How does the rhythm of the poem reinforce and create the meaning of the poem? (b) Do the poem's rhymes sound natural? (c) How does the sound of the poem add to the meaning of the story? (d) Does the poem create sensory images of sight, touch, smell, or taste? (e) What is the quality of imagination in the poem? (f) Does the poem

make the child see something in a fresh, new way? (g) Is the figurative language appropriate to children's lives (Huck et al.)?

Hopkins (1987) believes good poetry for children must appeal to them and meet their emotional needs. Glazer and Lamme (1990) advise that although there are no universally accepted standards for good poetry, there are some questions that can guide us (Glazer and Lamme, 1990, p. 103):

- (a) Does the poem reflect a careful selection of words so that the sound, rhythm, and imagery within the poem delight the ear and stimulate the mind?
- (b) Does the poem represent freshness and originality, and does it stimulate an honest expression of emotion?
- (c) Would the poem stand on its own without any illustrations at all?

Elements of Good Book Design

Once the author has considered both the language of the text and the illustrations to accompany them, book design elements need to be examined. The design elements which influence the final look of a picture book are—shape, size, binding, endpapers, paper, typefaces, and page layout. Stewig (1995) advises considering the following elements (a) shape—books can be square, a tall rectangle, a wide rectangle, or anything in between. Page shape—pages in a book can be half pages split

either horizontally or vertically, trimmed so that each succeeding page is larger than the previous one, cut outs to call attention to something in the next page, variation in page thickness; (b) size—the physical size of the book can range from less than 6” X 6” up to 10 ½” X 14 ½”; (c) binding—the cover should be both attractive and durable- hardbound, clothbound or a combination, paper-over-board; (d) endpapers—the first and last spreads of the book, usually heavier paper than the interior pages, can be illustrated by the artist to complement the story line; (e) paper—the feel of the paper can be shinny and smooth, or dull matte finish on heavy stock; (f) typefaces—text face or display face; either serif or sans serif; print, hand lettered, or script; type size (point); (g) page layout—location of the type on the page- always on the same place of the left or right page; on alternate pages; location of the illustration; using a border to frame the illustration; double spread illustration. Each of these design elements should be considered in relation to how it will enhance the appeal of the final product. Another way to get a feel for the infinite possibilities available in book design is to examine several different versions of a popular classic such as *Little Red Riding Hood* to see how different they are (Stewig, 1995).

Once the authors have determined what genre they will use to communicate with the reader, they must find out how to write the text portion of the book. Giblin (1990) offers several suggestions for novice

writers of children's picture books. Giblin cautions would-be authors that ninety-nine percent of the manuscripts for children's books are never published because the authors do not understand the picture book form and its rigid requirements. The primary key to writing a publishable picture book is to think visually. Although it is the illustrator's responsibility to convey the colors of the story, the author must "concentrate on the essentials of action and dialogue" (Giblin, p. 90). The author should make a dummy storybook and then mark which narrative passages should appear on each page. Although most picture books are 32 pages in length, the text and illustrations will appear on only 28 of the pages. Because the text usually begins on page five, "skilled picture book authors will often start their stories with a brief, intriguing paragraph of no more than two or three typewritten lines...And they make sure that the paragraph contains the sort of action or emotion that will inspire a vivid illustration" (p. 91).

The secondary key to creating a picture book as identified by Giblin (1990) is to build suspense into the story by taking advantage of the page turns. By using a dummy storybook format, the author can pace the story to achieve the maximum effect. The dummy format allows the author to heighten the drama in a story line at the point where the reader must turn the page to find out what happens. Practiced authors

use this technique at key points to hold the reader's interest throughout the story (Giblin).

Giblin (1990) cautions that the most important page of any picture book is the last page, and the most crucial page turn of all is from page 31 to page 32. This is where “ideally, every picture book should end with a final twist or surprise” (p. 93). The twist can be as simple as the classic ending—they lived happily ever after, or as complicated as the solution to a picture book mystery. It is essential that the author have the twist in mind from the beginning of the story writing process.

When considering whether to write a picture book in prose or verse format, Giblin (1990, p. 97) cautions would-be authors that “writing good poetry in any form is extremely difficult, and writing a complete story in verse is probably the most difficult task of all.” Verse form requires the author to master the elements of poetry in order to take advantage of the compressed and economical style a good poem achieves. Just as in prose format picture books, the author must create a text that offers opportunities for vivid illustrations by the artist.

Gene Fehler (1994), author and poet, offers a different five step plan for aspiring poets who expect poems to just come to them. He advises that the would-be poet must go looking for poems by (a) searching for poems... by looking at the world around you for ideas; (b) beginning the poem...with a single word, phrase, or image—and writing it

down; (c) exploring and experimenting with your initial lines, words and thoughts; (d) expanding...work on a single idea from start to finish; (e) experimenting with form...exploring possibilities.

Once you have written a poem, Giblin (1990) suggests five ways to analyze and improve your writing technique: (a) analyze recommended children's poetry picture books to see how successful authors achieve their effects. (b) take a course in poetry writing at your local college or university. (c) use the poetic form to tell your story more dramatically or humorously. (d) look critically at the images you have used in your text—are they fresh? (e) reread your story—does it flow smoothly with breaks in the rhythm for exciting events?

One final piece of advice offered by Giblin (1990) concerns the question of illustrations. When asked whether the author should find an artist friend to submit sample illustrations, Giblin answers emphatically—“No...Unless your [artist] friend is a professional illustrator and you've worked jointly on the project from its inception, you'll be far better off letting your story speak for itself” (p. 94).

There are many things to consider when preparing to write a picture book for children even after the format and topic have been determined. The poetry, art, and design elements identified by the experts will all provide valuable guidance in the book project endeavor. However, creating a poetry picture book requires more than just following

the rules. It is still up to the writer to create something original that will both enlighten and engage the reader (Giblin).

Procedures

Although narrative poetry can appeal to all ages, it is especially appropriate for sharing with groups of school age children. When a narrative poem is read aloud, it captures the attention and engages the thoughts and feelings of children of all reading levels. The intent of the writer is to create a poem which will open the hearts and minds of children aged six to ten years to the value of all immigrants to Iowa, past and present. The completed poem will be based on factual historical information about the people of Iowa, and will encompass all the peoples of Iowa beginning with the earliest native peoples. This poem will also offer teachers and students an enlightened perspective of their own place in the story of Iowa. Because children depend on visual information, as well as auditory information, this narrative poem will be accompanied by descriptive drawings in a woodcut style.

The first step for creating this narrative poem is to create a bibliography of Iowa history books which includes factual information about the people who have lived in Iowa. The writer will develop a bibliography by selecting appropriate history books from Basic Iowa Materials (see Appendix A), making sure that the selection represents the history of all Iowans—men, women, and children from all cultural and

ethnic backgrounds. The writer will read the books selected and take notes about the people described and their lives as Iowans.

The second step for creating the book is to create a bibliography of newspaper and journal articles that describe the immigrant experience in the United States today. The writer will use the Internet Web site titled the Ultimate Collection of News Links (<http://pppp.net/links/news/>)—a collection of online Iowa newspapers—to locate articles for Appendix B. The author will focus on the issues immigrant people to Iowa face today when moving into an unfamiliar country with unfamiliar cultures.

The third step of the writer will be to compare and contrast the issues that confront the early peoples of Iowa with the issues faced by present day peoples. The writer will incorporate these issues into the narrative poem so that the reader will gain an understanding and appreciation of the challenges that “new” people encounter in a “new” country.

The fourth step is to locate books on how to write narrative poetry and create a bibliography of narrative poems that appeal to children and that have withstood the test of time (Appendix C). The writer will read and analyze “proven” narrative poems and use them as models for creating an original narrative poem that will be of lasting significance to the children of Iowa. Then the writer will begin writing a narrative poem

using the instructions given in the poetry writing books, while also comparing it with the proven models.

Step five after the narrative poem is completed the writer will create a list of drawings that will enhance and enrich the poem. The drawings will be rough sketches that will help a publisher understand the vision of the writer. These sketches will be created by the writer with the understanding that a publisher will prefer to use a proven artist to illustrate a new writer's narrative poem. The writer will create the crude sketches in order that the readers of this paper can visualize the finished book envisioned by the writer. If the writer is given a choice, she will ask the professional artist to create original woodcuts from the writer's rough sketches using vivid colors that will appeal to children.

Chapter Three

Project Description

A Narrative Poem of Iowa's Immigrants uses rhythm and rhyme to introduce the history of Iowa's many people. It is accompanied by sketches the writer felt would enhance the reader's/listener's understanding of the text. The narrative begins two billion years in the past, long before any people lived in the place that is now called Iowa. It was the writer's intention that children understand that we are all relative newcomers to this land.

The writer selected representative immigrant groups to include in this narrative, beginning with pre-historic peoples and ending with some of the most recent immigrants to the state of Iowa. This poem is designed to help children understand and begin to appreciate the wonderful diversity of people and cultures that make up Iowa today. The last stanza of the poem invites the reader/listener to begin exploring his/her own family history.

Chapter Four

Conclusions and Recommendations

This narrative poem project was created by the writer to fulfill the Master of Arts graduate research requirement. An original poem was created rather than conducting field research, because as a graduate student it seemed more appropriate to create an original written document to gain a greater understanding of the feelings of K-12 children when they write papers for their teachers.

After reviewing several classic narrative poems (see Appendix C) to observe their format, the writer decided on a six line stanza with ending rhyme pattern of aabaab. The length of the poem was determined by the standard 32 page picture book format that was followed by the previously listed narrative poems. Fifteen stanzas and fifteen accompanying sketches, plus the cover and titles pages brought the total number of pages for this narrative poem to 32 pages. The lines of each couplet were broken into shorter segments on the page in order to help the reader use the optimal phrasing and to allow a larger font size to fit onto each page.

The sketches that accompany the poem are suggestive of what illustrations could help the reader better understand each stanza. These are only rough sketches created by the writer to fulfill the project

requirements. Most publishers prefer to select a proven illustrator for publication. The use of colored wood cuts to illustrate the poem is strongly recommended. Color would enhance the appeal of the poem, and the wood cut format would set a natural, earthy, and historic tone that would compliment the narrative.

In conclusion the writer found this to be a very challenging and enlightening project. One of the challenges was to decide how to present a concise story of Iowa's immigrants using a narrative poem format. Decisions had to be made about which historic details to include and which to leave out. By reviewing a number of Iowa history books, a timeline of events was developed along with a list of 15 sub topics, one for each of the 15 stanzas. Given the limitations of space and text, not every immigrant group was included.

A list of key words and key ideas were developed for each of the 15 stanzas. Using these key words and ideas, the writer then began experimenting with words to see what word combinations could be formed into a rhythmic line and what lines could be made to rhyme with each other. This required numerous rewrites and revisions. Each stanza was read aloud to see if the rhythm was acceptable and to see if the stanza made sense to other listeners. When all fifteen stanzas were completed id some rearranging was done to make sure the dates of the immigrant group arrivals were in order of their appearance in the poem stanzas.

In looking over the original purpose of this poem, it becomes apparent that additional narrative poems need to be written in order to include more of the feelings and experiences of immigrant children and their families. This would require reading and research of documents such as diaries and family histories, and interviews with today's immigrant family members. Reading history books about other people from other countries just scratched the surface of the possibilities in determining a direction for a poem about Iowa's immigrants. In the future another poem could be written that would help children understand what it feels like to be an immigrant arriving in a new country where people, customs, institutions and languages are new and strange.

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Appendix A

Iowa Immigrant Source Books

Anderson, D. (1981). Eastern Iowa prehistory. Ames : Iowa State University Press.

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Bataille, G.M., Gradwohl, D.M., Charles, L.P. (1987). The Worlds between two rivers : perspectives on American Indians in Iowa. (2nd ed). Ames : Iowa State University Press.

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Appendix B

Online Newspaper Articles

The Ultimate Collection of News Links is available at: <http://pppp.net/links/news/> It is a collection of online Iowa newspapers, some of which have archived their articles. It includes the following towns in Iowa:

Bedford Times-Press

Cedar Rapids Gazette

Clear Lake Mirror Reporter

Clinton Herald

Creston News Advertiser

Daily Gate City (Keokuk)

Des Moines Register

Fort Madison Daily Democrat

Globe-Gazette (Mason City)

Humboldt Independent Icon

Smart News & Entertainment (Iowa City)

Ida County Courier-Reminder (Ida Grove)

Marion Times

Monticello Express

Oskaloosa Herald

Ottumwa Courier

Quad City Times

River Cities' Reader (Davenport)

Sigourney News-Review

Sioux City Journal Online

Storm Lake Times

Telegraph Herald (Dubuque)

The Bloomfield Democrat

The Daily Tribune (Ames)

The Hawk Eye (Burlington)

The Kalona Times

The Leader (Davenport)

The Messenger (Fort Dodge)

Times-Citizen (Iowa Falls)

Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier

Appendix C

Classic Narrative Poems

Longfellow, H.W. (1983). Hiawatha. New York : Dial Books for Young Readers.

Longfellow, H. W. (1990). Paul Revere's ride. New York : Dutton Children's Books.

Holden, R. (1998). The pied piper of Hamelin. Boston : Houghton Mifflin.

Moore, C.C. (1995). The night before Christmas. New York : North-South Books.

Service, R.W. (1986). The cremation of Sam McGee. New York : Greenwillow Books.