

1993

Family Structure and Listener Response to The Jazz Man

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how seventh grade students responded to the oral reading of *The Jazz Man* (Weik). The researcher attended the four seventh grade language arts' classes in the Marion Independent School District, Marion, Iowa, and the twelve seventh grade language arts' classes in the Linn-Mar Community School District, Marion, Iowa, to read to and question the students. Students identified the adults with whom they live at home (their family structure) and then answered the question, "What do you think happened to Zeke (the main character in the story)?" This study determined what difference, if any, the listeners' family structures had on their responses. Through the results of the questionnaire, it was found that family structure plays no statistically significant role at the .05 level in these seventh graders' responses.

Family Structure
and Listener Response to
The Jazz Man

A Graduate Research Paper
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

Deborah Ann Sabotta

July 19, 1993

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This Research Paper by: Deborah Ann Sabotta

Titled: Family Structure and Listener Response to The Jazz Man

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

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Reading aloud to children brings about a variety of responses.

Charlie, a third grader, would sit as far from the group as possible and act as disinterested as he could, refusing to acknowledge that listening to stories was a good idea. Persisting, the teacher would find books that the rest of the class could enjoy: from Are You My Mother? (Eastman) to The Plant That Ate Dirty Socks (McArthur). Gradually, the days turning to weeks and the weeks to months, Charlie edged closer, until the day when he would have been at the teacher's knee had he not been taller than half the class. After that, he had a book at his desk reading whenever possible and he never missed hearing a new story. Charlie: nine years old, with frequent headaches, often crying, caring for his Fetal Alcohol Syndrome six-year-old sister, loving stories.

Kenneth and Eric, fifth and seventh graders, respectively, have listened to stories since they were infants. Now they listen to them on car trips when the family has a chance to be together. Almost no allowance can be made for thirst-quenching breaks. "Keep reading, Mom!" through Shiloh (Naylor), Tracker (Paulsen), and Shades of Gray (Reeder). Kenneth and Eric, readers for themselves, looking for favorites and favorite authors, rapt listeners, loving stories.

First graders who are allowed to choose the books to be read by the teacher, feel in control over what they will hear. They have to contain the urge to hurry the teacher through others' stories to get to their choice. First

graders, making choices, being in control, guessing what would happen next and why, and loving stories.

This researcher believes that children need to be read to often, so that stories and books can become part of their lives. As readers, personal experiences will help them deal with the material read. Their response to the reading will show what it means to them.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine how seventh grade students responded to the oral reading of The Jazz Man (Weik). This novel begins with a boy who lives with both parents. As the story progresses, his family structure changes. The story has an ambiguous ending which served as the vehicle for observation of the variety of responses by the listeners.

This study examined whether the students' responses to the reading were based on the family structure of the seventh grade listeners. After listening to this story, the students were asked what they thought happened at the end. They were also asked about their personal family structures. This researcher determined what difference, if any, the listeners' family structures had on their responses to the oral reading of The Jazz Man (Weik). Perhaps, students who have similar family structures would have similar responses.

Hypothesis

This research measures what difference, if any, family structure has on the listener's response to an ambiguous story ending. This researcher hypothesized that there is no significant difference at the .05 level between

the students' family structures and their responses to what they think happened to Zeke.

Assumptions

This research study made three assumptions. It assumed that family structure affects lives in some way. Secondly, it assumed that students of this age level have enough personal experiences to respond to the reading of The Jazz Man (Weik). Finally, the assumption was made that upon hearing a story with an ambiguous ending, students would decide what they think happened to Zeke and would write a response.

Significance

This research study was significant in that it asked questions about the listeners' family structure to see if it made any difference in their responses as they listened and reacted to a short story. It focused on identifying with whom the listeners lived, how many listeners fit each of the categories, and what responses the listeners gave within those categories.

Many studies have been conducted on reader/listener response to literature. This research study added another dimension -- linking a listener's family structure at home to the response given to a story read to them at school. Results of this research study may add to the body of reader/listener response studies and to the body of family structure studies.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, several terms need to be defined.

"MISD" is the Marion Independent School District in Marion, Iowa.

"LMCSD" is the Linn-Mar Community School District in Marion, Iowa.

"Teachers" is used to name anyone who works with students including teachers, library media specialists, parents, and counselors.

"Family structure" is used to mean the adults with whom the student is living at the time of the research study.

Limitations

The population of this study was limited to the students in the seventh grade language arts classes of the MISD and the LMCS D. This researcher is aware that students who have had experience writing in a journal may be more comfortable listening to a story and answering questions. No attempt was made to control whether or not students have had this experience. The four classes in the MISD had an average of 25 students per class. The twelve classes in the LMCS D had an average of 19.2 students per class. The length of class time varied from 46 - 52 minutes per class.

No attempt was made to select student listener/responders based on specific or diverse family structure. This research does not attempt to find out other influences on the students and how they answered. Only family structure and responses are discussed.

Chapter 2

Review of Research

This review covers research studies that were conducted in classroom settings dealing with reader/listener response to literature. It also has a second focus: the description of information about family demography which in this study will be referred to as family structure.

One of the most exciting and valuable things about reading is to be able to relate a book or story to one's own experience. What do people remember from their past? They remember the things that had some kind of an emotional value for them: like literature and art. According to Purves (1972b),

Literature and art are perhaps the most directly human of the humanistic disciplines. The content of literature, its origin, and its effect on readers all call for sophisticated understanding of emotional life. (p.3)

There are so many things to consider when responding to literary selections. Purves (1972b) continues, ". . . a work would have no existence at all if it were not read" (p.3).

Do readers or listeners respond to experiences when they read or listen to a story? Many researchers think so; the story has meaning in some way to the life of the reader or listener. Caroline Shrodes, as cited in Squire (1964), said, "Individuals tend to respond selectively to literature in terms of their own needs" (p. 5).

Classroom teachers have done studies with their students to determine the influences on their responses. Patricia R. Kelly (1990) in her third-grade classroom, used ideas with students that were suggested by the

work of Bleich (1978) and Petrosky (1982). She addressed three issues with her students: 1) what was noticed in the book, 2) how the students felt about the book, and 3) how the book was related to their own experiences. She wanted to see how their responses would develop over the course of a year. It is interesting to note that not only did the responses develop but, low, middle and high-ability students' responses displayed an increased fluency with greater detail, fewer spelling errors, and better sentence structure (p. 469).

Each individual brings his/her unique experiences to reading which allows for different interpretations. What does each individual think about along the way? Do the experiences shape how they will react and respond to a story as it develops? What about their homes, their personal family structures? Does what happens in a story remind them of their own lives?

Sometimes reactions and responses are filled with stereotypes. "He's like that because his family has too much money." Or, "He doesn't understand because his dad was never at home to talk to him." Teachers can help students steer away from stereotyped patterns of thinking when they are responding to situations in literature. Squire (1964) was concerned about, "Stock responses -- familiar cliches and stereotyped explanations. . ." because they, "represent the avoidance of individual thinking and may lead to considerable difficulty in understanding" (p.39).

On the other hand, there are students who always look for the happy ending no matter the events or circumstances in a story. Squire continued, ". . .they continually assume, infer, and hope for the best. They are 'happiness bound' both in their demand for fairy tale solutions and in their frequent unwillingness to face the realities of unpleasant interpretation"

(p.41). It is interesting to note that readers will, "accept improbable conclusions which conflict sharply with the facts at hand" (p.43).

Squire (1964) said, "...the curriculum in English should contain a number of literary selections which have many points of contact with readers and are thus accessible to adolescent involvement" (p.56).

Selecting a book and reading it in parts or sections can give students an opportunity to reflect on a small portion rather than an entire selection.

Mary K. Simpson (1986) described in her work how she used Johnny Tremain by Esther Forbes (1943) as an oral reading for twelve weeks in her seventh grade language arts classes. She divided the story into parts so the students could respond as the reading progressed. She wanted her classroom to become a literate community so she, "... decided that sharing literature, through oral reading, written responses, and voluntary comments, might be an important ingredient..." (p. 45).

Students want to share and write about what is meaningful to them. After practice responding to literature, students can be convinced that there are no right or wrong answers. The teacher needs to reassure them that their answers are acceptable. When students are convinced of this, they are more willing to be risk-takers. Teachers can encourage students to take risks when interpreting what they read as long as they (the students) feel safe in doing so. When students take risks, their responses can, "foster comprehension, discussion, and writing skills and promote emotional involvement with and appreciation of literature" (Kelly, 1990, p. 470).

When students respond to a selection from a reading, they can look at what is happening in that particular selection that guided them into interpreting it the way they did. Rather than waiting until the end of a book

or story, they can focus on a character's actions or thoughts as the story progresses. Squire (1964) said,

The dominant response is the interpretation: ... ultimately, understanding of literature must reside in great measure on ability to interpret the meanings of particular selections ... many young readers seek to understand the motivations of characters and the forces underlying plot and incident. (p. 30)

Having students respond to particular sections throughout a reading can have many benefits, for example, the "...most significant benefit was the communal sharing ... we were fellow learners" (Simpson, 1986, p. 47).

How much do the students think about what they have read? If they read a section from a story and are asked, "to substantiate their opinions with facts in the story or to make comparisons to their own lives," (Angeletti, 1991, p. 289) they can do so because they have fewer facts to consider than if they had to relate to the entire story.

There can be difficulties associated with interpreting entire literary selections. This is supported by Squire (1964), "Individual misinterpretations of a total story arise from a failure to keep details suspended in memory and to relate to details presented later in the story" (p.38). His work indicates, "the importance of helping students learn to evaluate their impressions and to weigh evidence in the terms presented by the author" (p.39). Sara R. Angeletti (1991) shared her experiences with her second graders. She gave them opportunities to think about and respond to what they read. She had many ideas for bringing about responses from the students. Question cards were created that the students could choose to use when they finished a reading. Angeletti noted that the students,

. . .seemed to progress from a retelling stage to a responding stage that included lots of statements about what they thought and liked to an evaluation stage in which they made inferences, drew conclusions, and discussed authors' purposes and characters' motives. (p. 290)

Squire (1964) felt the same way, that it is important to help ". . . students learn to evaluate their impressions and to weigh evidence in the terms presented by the author" (p. 39).

Can teachers help students build critical thinking skills and then express themselves coherently? Teachers do need to help students go beyond the true-false, short answer, and multiple choice tasks. Class discussions can help students organize, develop, and express their ideas. The more practice a student has, according to John Clifford, as cited in Lehr (1982), the students will go through four stages of reader-text interaction, "involvement, perception, interpretation, and evaluation ... students read and then write ... moving from abstract to concrete, from what they think to why they think it ... and compare their world to the fictional one in the story" (p. 806).

Teachers need to read aloud story parts or sections to their students to obtain interpretive responses and discussions. Squire (1964) agrees, he says, "Students need assistance in learning to interpret literature" (p.54). If they misinterpret a section, that, "can affect the reader's cumulative judgement of a story" (p.54). Squire notes that,

The purpose of studying responses during the process of responding is to help students identify their problems and develop skill in various aspects of responding as they react with whatever intellectual and emotional resources they bring to each story, change and modify their ideas, and ultimately combine their responses in a final cumulative assessment. (p.54)

Teachers could also use private conferences, to discuss literature with individuals, to recognize misinterpretations and to assess the quality of their responses. Private conferences could be valuable to the individual student and the teacher in case personal problems arise which a student may wish to discuss.

Bleich (1975) wants to help teachers, also. He feels that learning "to present literature in a way that will produce an internal motive for reading and thinking about literature" (p.3) would help teachers guide readers in understanding themselves. Teachers need to know their students and also understand the makeup of the class as a whole.

To know their students, teachers can go beyond the classroom to the home. They can recognize the variety of family structure of the students with whom they work. Rodgers (1985) notes an important detail about family structure, "The family structure should be a dynamic concept, in that a particular family will have different family structures at different points in time" (p.145). Rodgers continues by using family structure as a dependent variable in studies and he says that, "a particular family structure outcome at a particular point in time is considered to have been caused by some specifiable set of antecedents" (p.147). When family structure is seen as an independent variable, then, it "is believed to have causal effects on specifiable outcomes" (p.147). So, in some instances, the outcomes could feed back into the structure and affect it, for example, "when low income and resulting malnutrition lead to death of a child" (p. 147).

Rodgers (1985) is concerned about the need for more theory to hold the field of studies in family structure together. He feels that, "Much of the family structure literature is pretheoretical, indicating a relatively immature science" (p.151).

It was with difficulty that this researcher located information on the study of family structure. There are interesting topics that are important such as birth order, only child, marital dissolution, and aging (for example) but, studies about family structure as it relates to reading and responding were not located by this researcher. Thus, this researcher hopes that this paper would be read by other researchers who could then take further steps toward understanding how the two fields could be linked.

Readers can use literature as a way to relate an idea, a character, or an action to a personal experience. Unique experiences, determined by the reader, will allow for different interpretations of a literary selection.

Looking at a short section of a story or book allows for predicting what will happen next by a closer inspection of what the author is saying and what the characters are doing. Using short stories is also helpful because there is not so much for the reader to remember when responding.

Responding to literature can improve interpretation, comprehension and writing skills. A reader's awareness of how literature can relate to everyone's lives can make reading a more important part of life.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This research study was conducted in the seventh grade language arts classes of the Marion Independent School District and the Linn-Mar Community School District in Marion, Iowa. Each principal was contacted to obtain permission for the researcher to attend all of the seventh grade language arts' classes. This study took place from May 12 through May 26, 1993.

Upon arriving in each classroom, the researcher introduced herself and explained her purpose in attending each class. Following the introduction, the students each received a copy of the questionnaire found in the Appendix and were asked to fill it out. The questionnaires were anonymous. The researcher answered any questions that arose. The question asked most often was, "What belongs in the 'other' space?" The researcher explained that that was for any student who lived with someone other than those in the categories listed: grandparents, aunts and uncles, for example. After the students completed the first part of the questionnaire, the researcher read aloud The Jazz Man (Weik, 1966).

Zeke, the nine-year-old boy in The Jazz Man, lives on the topmost floor of a big, old brownstone house. His mother goes down five, long flights of stairs to work every day and then trudges up the same five, long flights home again. She is tired and sad. His father goes to work also, but always to short term, part-time jobs. He is happy sounding but uncomfortable.

Zeke rarely goes downstairs. He does not attend school. With one leg shorter than the other, he would rather hide in the apartment and watch

out his window than be teased by other children. He is very observant about what happens outside.

Across the court from his window is a room with warm, yellow painted walls. Zeke watches that room as though it was his job. He eats his meals at the window while he watches and waits. The Jazz Man comes to that room and Zeke feels that everything will be fine. And, for awhile, things are fine. He and his parents relax together in front of the window in the evenings to listen to the Jazz Man play his fine piano and their troubles seem to disappear.

But their troubles do not disappear. Zeke's mother, unhappily, leaves home, not to return. Zeke and his dad do all right for awhile until his dad's absences grow and grow and he does not return either. Zeke, with food from his neighbors, manages for a short time. But, one night, he realizes that even the Jazz Man has gone.

Cold, hungry, thin, small, and sick at heart, Zeke refuses any more food from the neighbors. He climbs into his cold bed and falls asleep. He dreams a marvelous dream: his parents have returned and he can hear the Jazz Man playing his golden piano. He is fine and everything is all right.

Was he all right? Did his parents return? Is he dead? Why did the pain go away?

This researcher read to and gathered data from all of the seventh grade students who were in attendance in both the Marion and Linn-Mar School Districts on the day of the reading to their class. No attempt was made to obtain data from absent students.

The story, The Jazz Man, is about a black American family. This researcher wanted there to be no opportunity for listeners' responses to be affected by race, so all references to race were intentionally left out of the

reading. The cover of the book was removed and the students were not allowed to see the illustrations.

Following the reading, the students were asked to write what they believed happened to Zeke. When the writing was completed, the papers were collected and because there was time, the researcher entertained a discussion on the students' ideas about the story. Anyone who cared to share did so. Some classes had several students who chose to share ideas, some had few.

Since this data collecting occurred 16 times, a videotape of each session was made to help ensure that the same procedure was followed every time. The camcorder was set up in the rear of the classroom so as not to disrupt the students' attention. It was focused on the researcher. Once the students were comfortable with the situation, there was no concern about the camcorder.

The data-gathering instrument was one two-sided form. The first side was the questionnaire. The questionnaire asked: Who do you live with? (circle one)

- 1) both parents 2) mother only 3) father only
- 4) mother and stepfather 5) father and stepmother
- 6) mother and boyfriend 7) father and girlfriend
- 8) other (please explain)_____

Comments:_____

The other side was blank and was used for the answer to the question: What do you think happened to Zeke?

Chapter 4

Analysis of the Data

One hundred eight seventh graders attend the MISD. Of that group, 100 responded to the questionnaire and answered the question. Six students were absent and two students' sheets had no responses. Table 1 shows the family structure of the MISD seventh graders.

Table 1
MISD Seventh Graders' Family Structures
N = 100

	No.	%
Students living with:		
Both parents	69	69
Mother only	4	4
Father only	3	3
Mother & Stepfather	11	11
Father & Stepmother	4	4
Mother & Boyfriend	7	7
Father & Girlfriend	0	0
Other	2	2
Totals	100	100

Two hundred sixty-five seventh graders attend the LMCS D. Of that group, 27 students were absent and eight students' sheets had no responses, which means 230 students responded to the questionnaire and answered the question. The family structure for the LMCS D seventh graders is shown in Table 2.

Table 2
LMCSD Seventh Graders' Family Structures
N = 230

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Students living with:		
Both parents	167	72.61
Mother only	15	6.52
Father only	2	0.87
Mother & Stepfather	23	10.00
Father & Stepmother	5	2.17
Mother & Boyfriend	6	2.61
Father & Girlfriend	1	0.43
Other	11	4.78
Totals	230	99.99

Note: Percent total below 100 due to rounding

Three hundred thirty students out of 373 total, or 88.5% of the seventh grade student population in the MISD and the LMCSD together, completed the questionnaire and answered the question, "What do you think happened to Zeke?" Table 3 represents the totals for the combined districts.

Table 3
Seventh Graders' (Both Districts) Family Structures
N = 330

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Students living with:		
Both parents	236	71.52
Mother only	19	5.76
Father only	5	1.52
Mother & Stepfather	34	10.30
Father & Stepmother	9	2.73
Mother & Boyfriend	13	3.94
Father & Girlfriend	1	0.30
Other	13	3.94
Totals	330	100.01

Note: Percent total over 100 due to rounding

To the question, "What do you think happened to Zeke," 212 students, or 64.2%, stated that Zeke lived. One hundred eighteen students, or 35.8%, stated that Zeke died. Table 4 represents the students by their family structure and their response about Zeke.

Table 4
Students' Decisions about Zeke
N = 330

	<u>Zeke Lived</u>		<u>Zeke Died</u>		<u>Totals</u>
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>
Students living with:					
Both parents	148	62.7	88	37.3	236
Mother only	16	84.2	3	15.8	19
Father only	2	40.0	3	60.0	5
Mother & Stepfather	20	58.8	14	41.2	34
Father & Stepmother	5	55.6	4	44.4	9
Mother & Boyfriend	11	84.6	2	15.4	13
Father & Girlfriend	0	0.0	1	1.0	1
Other	10	76.9	3	23.1	13
Totals	212	64.2	118	35.8	330

This research was undertaken to measure what difference, if any, family structure has on a listener's response to an ambiguous story ending. The hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference at the .05 level between the listeners' family structures and their responses to what they think happened to Zeke.

Chi-square can be used to test whether nominal data collected in a study is statistically different than the data expected. Applying the Chi-square test with Yates correction to the response numbers, the result was 5.45, $df = 7$. The result was not significant at the $p = .05$ level. The hypothesis is confirmed. Family structure plays no statistically significant role in these seventh graders' responses.

Although the students were not requested to comment on their personal family structure settings, many did so and some of the comments have been included here. These comments have been edited for spelling only.

"I like my step-dad better than my real dad."

"My mom is cool! My dad is awesome!"

"I love my parents."

"I like living with both parents."

"I never see my father."

"Live with father and see mother on weekends."

"I am supposed to go with my dad every other weekend and every Wednesday, but I don't, only my brother and sister do."

"Mother and stepfather weeks, weekends Dad and stepmother. I hate my stepfather dearly."

"Mother weeks. Father every other weekend, it's tough."

"I will always live with my mom and dad! They will never get a divorce! They love each other too much!"

"I go to my dad's every other weekend. Me and my father don't get along."

When asked, "What do you think happened to Zeke," several students responded with their answer plus reasons for their choice. Here are some of the responses (edited for spelling only) followed by the family structure of the student:

"I think Zeke is alive, but will die because he hasn't had enough food, and he won't get enough food." (dad one week, mother the next)

"I think that Zeke really did go through all that the book said. Like other books, it probably ended Happily Ever After." (mother and stepfather one week, father and stepmother the next)

"I think he has died because it doesn't seem real at all."
(Mom Wednesday - Sunday; Dad, Sunday - Wednesday)

"I think Zeke died and went to Heaven because he starved to death and he saw his father and mother there because they died too." (father week; mother weekends)

"His mom came back and his dad got a new job and they lived happily ever after." (both parents)

"I think he is alive because I don't think his parents would abandon him." (both parents)

"I think Zeke is dead and gone to Heaven. Because, why would his mother just decide to come back after that long time? And back to the stairs she hated, the man and child she left to find a new life? Besides, I don't think Zeke could live for very long without food and he was so miserable. It's kind of a confusing story. Although it sounds farfetched, maybe the jazz man died, too. (both parents)

"I think he died in his sleep and when he woke he was together with his parents some other place. He was cold and had no food and I think he wanted to die to find out who the jazz man was -- if he was really God." (both parents)

"I think that Zeke was dreaming the whole time! I think that he lives in such a troubled family that he has to have a family in his imagination to keep him happy." (both parents)

"I think Zeke died and is thinking of all the happy times he had because all of his problems couldn't have gone away like that." (both parents)

"I think Zeke is still alive but so sick he is hallucinating. Maybe from neglect. His parents and the Jazz Man seem to be there but really aren't. That's what he wants to believe. I think it is so sad that someone is so unwanted like that when there are so many couples in the world glad to have Zeke." (both parents)

"I think that Zeke was dreaming. He would not have survived that long without food or water. He is a very joyous (happy) person with a strong will. But he was too afraid of life outside his room to leave. He was a strange boy to understand. (both parents)

"I think that in Zeke's sleep, he died, but as he died, he had remembered the Jazz Man, and his mother, and his father, and he wanted them all back, so when he went to Heaven, he had a nice dream about them."
(father only)

"Dead - real life doesn't work that way." (both parents)

"He died because he had no happiness left in his life because he had to create it himself." (both parents)

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations and Summary

This research study investigated the possibility that family structure would make a difference in a listener's response to a story with an ambiguous ending. All of the seventh grade students in attendance at the Marion Independent School District and the Linn-Mar Community School District, at the time of the study, were read to and asked, "What do you think happened to Zeke?" Also revealed was each of the student's family structure.

In the Marion Independent School District and the Linn-Mar Community School District, a majority of the students live with both parents, 69% and 72.61%, respectively. Thirty-one percent of the students in the MISD live with someone other than both parents and in the LMCS, 27.29% live with someone other than both parents.

The data collected revealed that 212/330, or 64.2% of the total number of students decided that Zeke had lived and 118/330, or 35.8%, decided that Zeke had died. Comparing the observed and expected values for whether Zeke lived or died, showed that the data collected was not significantly different from what was expected. And so, it can be seen that family structure played no significant role in these MISD and LMCS seventh graders' responses.

Many of the students indicated that they were not used to responding to orally read short stories. For some of them, listening to a twenty minute story appeared to be difficult. At the end of the reading, two students in two different classrooms asked who the story was about and one asked several times what was supposed to be written on the paper.

The problem statement of this study was, "Would students who have similar family structures have similar responses?" According to the data, 94, or 28.5% of the total student population live with someone other than both parents. Of those, 64, or 68.1%, decided that Zeke had lived and 30, or 31.9%, decided that Zeke had died. Also, the data shows that 236, or 71.5% of the total student population live with both parents. Of those, 148, or 62.7%, decided that Zeke had lived and 88, or 37.3%, decided that Zeke had died. This data shows, then, that students having similar family structures did not have similar responses.

Because of the variety of responses the students wrote that were unsolicited, this researcher would request all students to comment on their choice for Zeke if another study were conducted. The students were more willing to share in writing what they did not want to say out loud. They revealed more of their thinking through their writing.

Recommendations

It would be interesting to do a comparison study in another school district using seventh graders as the subjects again. Another grade level of students with comparable numbers could also be used.

School library media specialists could be encouraged to look for other books which have ambiguous endings. Teachers at all grade levels could read stories to their students to elicit responses.

Because of the complexity of extended student responses, a comparison study of positive and negative responses could be made. A positive response might be one that says Zeke died and went to Heaven and a negative response might be one that says Zeke died because he starved to death. There are any number of choices a listener could make.

This researcher recommends that students be requested to write comments about their choice. Many are reticent about speaking in class in front of their peers and this would give many more the task of thinking about reading.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how seventh grade students responded to the oral reading of The Jazz Man (Weik). The researcher attended the four language arts' classes in the MISD and the twelve language arts' classes in the LMCS D to read to and question the students. Students identified with whom they live at home (their family structure) and then answered the question, "What do you think happened to Zeke?"

Would their family structure make a difference in their response to the story? Through results of the questionnaire, it was found that family structure plays no statistically significant role at the .05 level in these seventh graders' responses. Chi-square was used to test the data. The Chi-square result was 5.45, $df = 7$.

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Appendix

Seventh Grade Student Questionnaire

Who do you live with? (Circle one)

- 1) Both parents
- 2) Mother only
- 3) Father only
- 4) Mother and stepfather
- 5) Father and stepmother
- 6) Mother and boyfriend
- 7) Father and girlfriend
- 8) Other (please explain) _____

Comments: _____