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THE FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE SHARED EXPLORATION OF CHILDREN'S FICTION BY TEACHER AND PUPILS IN THE SENIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

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NOTES

1. Throughout the dissertation I have chosen to use the masculine pronoun when examining the theoretical role of the teacher.

2. It was the Headmaster's request that the identities of the boys be protected. As such their writing is identified by a single initial.

3. The pupils' writing has been reproduced as originally written by them. The lines of the poem and the song are my interpretation of what was written on the limiting lines of an exercise-book page.

THE FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

I believe that children's books constitute a veritable trove of exquisite gems providing both delight and personal profit for the reflective reader. That conviction has resulted in this dissertation investigating the potential stimulation hidden in children's fiction waiting to be discovered by guided exploration. The world of fantasy is entered voluntarily, I should imagine, less frequently by South Africa's primary school children because of the "total onslaught" by television and the wholesale homage to the video-recorder. The proposed introduction of cable T.V. can only exacerbate the situation. The lure of the pleasures associated with this country's almost permanently sunny skies is further inducement to eschew reading. In this context, the educator faces the challenge of promoting an alternative pleasure: a meaningful engagement with fiction. I suspect that the South African teacher does little to promote constructive involvement with the fiction read during the class reading lesson in the primary school. An examination of the nature of the articles published recently in Crux reveals a dearth of material relating to this area. Meanwhile overseas publications are, and have been, extolling the virtues of the class activities accompanying the reading of fiction. As a newcomer to the realm of primary education and teacher training, I have become increasingly aware of the immense value in the rich diversity of children's fiction. If books are as personally beneficial as is claimed by many educators, then more ought to be done to use available fiction more profitably.

The deficiencies of the recommendations made to Cape English teachers (both serving and aspirant) about methods have also become more apparent. The presentation of fiction is neglected in the official teachers' guide published by the Cape Education Department for the senior primary phase (Stds 2-4) 1982. Poetry, which includes choral-verse, is dealt with in a scant six pages. As far as reading is concerned, the emphasis falls on the acquisition of practical reading and comprehension skills. "Reading" does not seem to include the joint exploration of fiction by teacher and pupil. "The wise use of supplementary

reading material" is enjoined but little useful guidance is given (p 41). The following section entitled "Reading and Comprehension Activities - Higher Order Reading Skills" contributes very little enlightenment. Mention is made of "group discussion of the text and questions of an open - ended nature" (p 43). The following sentence contains a contradiction of this earlier statement. "This is where the pupils *analyse* what they have read and is followed by the *synthesis* stage, where the teacher discusses the group's answers, correcting where necessary. (p 43). The last three words "correcting where necessary" contradict the very nature of free discussion and open-ended questions. This smacks of abhorrent teacher dominance and implies that in a story there is only one correct meaning. The teacher is seen as the repository of knowledge and truth. What seemed a brief, but promising mention of opportunity for exploring the depth of the text has proved to be a disappointing return to an insistence upon comprehending the "right" answer. Official thinking in Cape education circles is incomplete and suspect. The syllabuses for the primary school also disappointingly fail to give detailed direction to work beyond the level of reading and comprehension skills.

It is hoped that this study will show the benefits of using fiction imaginatively in the primary classroom. South African teachers need to catch the vision of what has been implemented so successfully overseas. As this dissertation mirrors the process of my own enlightenment, may it also serve to improve (in some little way) the classroom practice of English method students who will have this research inflicted upon them. Ultimately, my desire is that children will benefit because they have been exposed to the thrill of an enthusiastic teacher who happily shares in exploring fiction with them.

Children's fiction can be used for a variety of purposes in the primary classroom and it becomes necessary to define clearly the focus of my proposed approach. What are the alternative uses? Frequently, some form of fiction is employed to teach basic reading skills only, to which a more enlightened teacher may add comprehension activities. This is the essential groundwork but much more can be done if children's books are viewed as literature and not only as a means of exercising mechanical skills. Prose fiction can be used in an enrichment reading programme with the emphasis on wide silent reading chiefly for personal edification. This approach is invaluable, but greater attention can be paid to the book itself. A novel (in its broadest sense) can be used to provide imaginative background reading for studies in other subjects especially the humanities - a type of literature across the curriculum. Such a programme can be rewarding, but the intrinsic value of each book needs to be recognised and not used as a means to another end. The danger exists that the reading can be done simply to gain related information. Another use - questionable for the primary school - is that of devising structured and deliberate programmes to promote literary appreciation. Articles such as "Teaching literary criticism in the elementary grades" and "Teaching irony to the third graders" have appeared in Children's Literature in Education. However, books should be seen primarily as speaking to the inner life. Delight and not analysis must dominate the child's association with books.

Closer to the truth, projects use a number of books to provide reading material on a specific theme ranging from the factual to the more emotive e.g. Horses or Friendship. If the theme is ill chosen, it can avoid the main concerns of each of the novels used. In addition, the books may be read only with the selected theme in mind and other relevant experiences may be submerged in the conscious response. Care must be exercised lest the book be made subsidiary to the pre-selected theme.

The most appropriate approach to using fiction is one that, with judicious use, does no violence to the book seen as literature. The book needs to be read for its own sake and not used merely as a means to an end. The correct mode of operation (in addition to building silent reading skills) includes activities that will deepen and extend the reader's response to the meaning of the story.

Some might feel that any book ought to be read for enjoyment only and that further analysis would vitiate the basic delight of encountering and responding personally and imaginatively to the experience of others. I would contend that any further exploration through meaningful activities can illuminate the book for a child and enhance his response. The value of reading surely lies in the nature and quality of this response. The teacher's task is to elicit, emphasize and enrich the experience of life revealed in literature, allowing for the articulation thereof through purposeful talking, writing, dramatic and artistic activities.

Others might allege that each book has its own intrinsic reward for the reader and does not need support from supplementary activities to bolster its value. This is true, but any education aims at maximum value and this can be attained through judiciously selected activities. It needs to be remembered that each child will read during his school career many other books in addition to those chosen for a close encounter of a literary kind. The full joy of literature need not be lost merely by a little probing by teacher and pupil together. More than adequate justification for this approach can be provided as my own growing excitement is shared by eminently qualified children's literature critics, librarians and educators.

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CHAPTER ONE: JUSTIFICATION OF THE APPROACH FROM EXPERIENCE, THEORY AND RESEARCH

I. CLEARING THE GROUND

This dissertation contends that reading in the primary school should be a fellowship affair with the teacher and pupils alike participating in the joint exploration of fiction by means of interesting, enjoyable and profitable activities. Various questions arise. Why should the teacher be included? How should the exploration be conducted? What is the extent of teacher guidance in relation to pupil activity either in groups or individually? Why include activities to support the book? Does reading not have sufficient value in itself thus making activities superfluous? I hope to answer these questions in this investigation as well as justifying the shared experience.

Acceptable activities are those which will enable the pupils to think more clearly about the book and give opportunity for the public sharing of their thoughts and feelings. Where it is acknowledged that an individual response to a text is important, activities will enrich and extend the response. The pupil will emerge with greater insight into certain, not necessarily all, of the truths of the book because his imagination has continued to operate (through various activities) upon the thoughts proferred by the author. Discussion will feature prominently. Activities to be avoided are those concentrating on gleaning factual knowledge from fiction, sometimes under the guise of themework. Those too which follow issues peripheral to the main concerns of the story are anathema. Activities are a means of educating - in the widest and best sense of the word - and should not be mindless time-fillers or mere entertainment. The exploratory enterprise will not plunder the text seeking to remove the last profitable thought.

The exploration by these helpful means will be conducted in a spirit of freedom. There should be no teacher domination but a searching together for new vistas

in the imagination. Guidance and some structure will be present, but never restriction. Formal literary terminology will be absent from the classrooms. Enjoyment will be paramount. The teacher needs a vision of the journey as Columbus had in order to inspire his fellow travellers to continue rather than resorting to compulsion when mutiny threatens. A spirit of adventure should pervade the whole enterprise. At the end of the exploration, the camaraderie created between captain and crew will be appreciated by all.

The major British reports on the teaching of English agree that personal reading is of the utmost significance and ought to be actively promoted. In 1921 the Newbolt Report emphasized "the importance of wide and varied reading" (p82). The Plowden Report (1966)" is convinced of the value of stories for children" (p216). "One of the most important tasks" of the teacher of older juniors says the Bullock Report (1975) is "to increase the amount and range of voluntary reading" because of the accompanying benefits. Reading is worthwhile for a child and as such should be extensive and diverse. Promoting the child's private reading is therefore the teacher's first priority and the basis of any reading/literature programme in the primary school. This approach which emphazizes the exploration and sharing of books through group activities is a complementary feature employed to enhance response to fiction.

Many different claims can be made concerning the impact of fiction upon children and its value for them. Teachers would agree unanimously that literature has value, although there would be less agreement concerning the extent of that benefit. Many would be hard pressed to define with any accuracy the detailed facets of the worth of a story for a reader. It is even more difficult to prove conclusively any claims that are made. It needs to be accepted that in the field of value judgements one operates in the realm of learned opinion gleaned from experience. The conclusions are often subjective impressions. While objective evidence may be lacking, the considered opinions of educators can be respected because these are based upon practical observations.

II. THE FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY

Why a shared experience? K. Calthrop's (1973) investigation of literature teaching in secondary schools in Britain supports unequivocally the benefit derived from reading a common book. The extensive investigation with more than 600 questionnaires being returned from different areas was backed up by personal observation and interviews. His comments are illuminating.

> All the teachers I interviewed felt that the shared experience of reading a common book was something of great value to themselves and to their classes. They regarded it as something quite different from the pleasure to be gained from individual reading and took the view that the feeling of sharing something worthwhile, the common sense of enjoyment, and the resulting sense of community was a deeply educative process. It is ... very much a reciprocal process, i.e. an atmosphere in which the children respond to the teacher and the teacher responds to the class (Calthrop, K., 1973, pp2-3).

The emphasis on the "reciprocal process" suggests that the teacher cannot easily be removed without the quality of the educative experience being impaired.

Teacher assessment of the extent of the benefit varied, but at the heart of the matter there remained the fellowship principle. Even when the teachers regarded the study of a book as similar to a theatrical production their comments pinpoint the interaction necessary for full enjoyment through involvement. Some of the teachers saw the process after teacher input as including "a collective but enjoyed and shared, response from the audience together with a fair amount of audience participation" (Calthrop, K., 1973, p3). Reading is not always a solitary experience. Educative value emerged, other teachers felt, because the "initiative" in the response came from the pupils.

At the bottom end of the value scale teachers felt that "a shared experience... makes them [the pupils] happier, even where they don't fully understand it". Calthrop. K., p4). The sharing of a common class reader has value, admittedly minimal in the last instance, but nevertheless providing some source of satisfaction whether intellectual or emotive for some pupil. Can education hope

to do more than this? If this is true for secondary education, then it is even more applicable to the primary sphere where children are very responsive and classes constitute a closer community because of there being usually one class teacher rather than subject specialists.

Jill Baber (1972) reports on an approach to fiction at a British middle school where the pupils studied books through worksheets and discussion, with teacher assistance. Her conclusion after two years of using this method once again confirms how satisfying the sense of community can be.

> I cannot imagine teaching English in a more rewarding way either for child or teacher. It gives one a common ground with the children... It gives them a common ground with one another and the books are widely discussed outside the classroom (Baber, J., 1972, p114).

The significant factor for the teachers - and for me - is the spirit of voluntary sharing which was promoted by the programme as evidenced by the extra - mural discussion. In addition, the pupils requested that they be allowed to forego the book study and just talk to the teacher about it upon completion. This sense of sharing weighs heavily as an advantage with one of the boys who maintained that discussion "lets us talk to them more civilised!" (Baber, J., 1972, p113).

Another teacher, Anne Reyersbach, working on the Inner London Education Authority's myths and legends project focusses on sharing once again. The sharing occurred firstly through the class having a class reader and secondly, because "groups presented their work to the rest of the class, so that all knowledge was *shared*" (Hoffman, M., 1982, p82). Once again the experience and opinion of teachers busily innovating in teaching literature endorse sharing.

Further strong commendation is expressed by the influential Bullock Report. The committee suggests the "most favourable conditions" for literature teaching are "when teacher and taught approach it in a common spirit of exploration"

(Bullock, A., 1975, p131). The teacher guides but does not dominate in enabling pupils to develop personal insight. They continue that it is necessary to read in depth and to allow for group response to a text and conclude that "some of the best and most lasting effects of English teaching have come from the simultaneous encounter of teacher, pupil, and text" (p134). This is the trinity which, in my opinion, gives life to literature study. Experience and learned opinion have been consulted and have convincingly supported the shared experience. The theorists of English provide further justification.

The Anglo-American conference (1966) brought together some of the most competent English educators from both sides of the Atlantic to consider the nature and teaching of English. The reports of the seminar groups should thus be authoritative and informed. The committee investigating response to literature (chaired by D.W. Harding) distinguished three modes of teaching literature, one of which was classified as a "group experience".

> In such group experiences, the child (whether five or fifteen) relates his own response to the response of other children. What the teacher strives to achieve is far more than a cosy feeling of group 'togetherness'; rather he attempts to promote a communal response which is at the same time affective and intellectual, personal and 'other directed' (Meek, M., 1977, p384).

The focus remains on the reciprocal nature of learning from literature as pupils interact in formulating perceptions. Also of significance is the aside "whether five or fifteen". While it may have been included for the sake of rhetoric or the effect of the alliteration, I feel that it lends support to the idea that a primary school child should also be involved in experiencing literature in increasingly appropriate depth.

III. THE LINKPIN

Why involve the teacher? It has already been stressed above that the teacher has a vital role to play in promoting the shared experience. Pupil group activities are worthwhile and any literature exploration ought to utilize such methods with one proviso: the teacher must not be excluded. He is ignored only at great risk. It is insufficient to allow sharing to be between the pupils only. Robertson (1981) suggests two reasons for including the teacher. Firstly, the teacher is unable to know in advance the detailed questions which will promote the greatest insight for each group. Secondly, group work is inadequate because progress can only be to the level of the most competent pupil in it. It is the teacher who has the wisdom to guide further (Robertson, G. 1981). The pupils can grope on their own and learn from this seeking. However, if the teacher acts as facilitator, he can prevent the loss of direction while the group is groping for an answer. Two or three pertinent questions - not instruction - from the teacher's overall knowledge of the book can restore the momentum of a group discussion. In addition, the reciprocal nature of the learning process must not be forgotten. The responses that are made are self honing. Perceptions are developed as each participant's ideas contribute to the shaping and formulation process. Avoiding domination, the skilful teacher is the catalyst.

IV. THE MODE OF OPERATION

Why include related activities? Having established the value of sharing, the natural question is how the interchange of ideas can best be implemented. The *modus operandi* is pupil activity. Direct teaching is to be avoided because teacher dominance destroys any propitious climate for interaction. It might be felt that simply bringing together the child and a book is sufficient because so much is gleaned from individual reading. The importance of private reading has already been acknowledged, but there is "a more excellent way

Let the pupils actively search for insight which will come through text-related activities, especially discussion. There are a number of reasons for devising activities to accompany an exploration of literature.

A. ACTIVITIES PROMOTE LEARNING

Likening the investigation of literature to an exploration suggests a necessary exertion by the reader who is endeavouring to understand the story. It is indeed self-effort that is the kernel of true education. Class, group, paired or individual activities all enhance the impact the story makes because the reader is re-thinking parts of the work of fiction. Passivity in the pupil will never lead to the maturity of perception and self-expression that is so desirable. I find the trenchant voice of Jack Ousbey appealing. Having examined the effort that a child reader makes in reading, he concludes:

> All that we can be sure about is that keen and lasting learning seems to depend on the activity of the learner. The more the child is called on to make sense of his experiences and to formulate his own understanding, the better the quality of the learning; the more the teacher classifies material and offers solutions the more irrelevant the process becomes (Ousbey, J., 1980, p170).

B. ACTIVITIES PROVIDE DELIGHT

It might be felt that activities could destroy the enjoyment that the pupils derive from reading. The phrase "reading for pleasure" has been bandied about. Activities to explore a text more fully, if judiciously handled, need not taint the delight of stories. Meaningful probing of the text through interesting and creative activities will multiply the pleasure the reader feels. One of Charlotte Huck's major purposes in a literature programme is for children to discover "delight in books". How does she propose to create this delight? Personal reading, the teacher reading aloud and exposure to a wide variety of books are mentioned but she continues:

"Provide time for children to talk about books, to share them with others and to interpret them through various creative activities" (Huck, C., 1978, p704). Delight does not disappear through busy involvement in a story but, in fact, can be intensified by it. One is tempted to add that if it is good enough for Huck's American elementary school child then it is good enough for the South African child too.

C. ACTIVITIES PROMPT A RESPONSE

Reading research has increasingly examined the response that the reader makes to a book. This area (considered in detail in Chapter Two) also suggests that activities should accompany reading because the reader is constantly engaged in evaluating, sifting, reflecting and reacting. The fact that the reader responds has consequences for teaching. The teacher needs to use the response which is already there in the child and allow for an articulation of the feelings and thoughts which would otherwise remain shadows in the recesses of the mind. W. Jackson provides succint confirmation. "It is this interchange that should excite the teacher and which should provide him with opportunities for significant involvement with the child" (Jackson, W., 1972, p17).

The kernel of the reader's response is trying to perceive the meaning in the story (Fox, G., 1977; Whitehead, F., 1966). Sense which is personally satisfying can be derived in a number of different ways and can relate either to one's inner or outer life (Fox, G., 1977). Once again there is fruitful opportunity for the teacher to investigate the meaning of the story with the class. Making sense of a story is worthwhile and pupils need to be given the chance to formulate their opinions in a way intelligible to themselves and others. It would be an enormous waste to neglect to expose hidden layers of meaning in a story, especially when the veins of ore run close to the surface for the primary school child. One needs to be reminded too that deeper

delving often uncovers a richer lode. Because the reader responds to and indeed seeks a meaning in the story, the teacher must react accordingly. Imaginative activities to inspire the pupils to explore and explain the meaning are the teachers' responsibility.

V. THE MAJOR BENEFIT

Why should there be an early start to exploring books? In addition to being the crux of learning and giving enjoyment, activities around fiction in the primary school can initiate the fulfilment of one of the main aims of literature teaching: a growth towards a mature appreciation of and sensitive response to literature. Included in this aim would be the thoughtful contemplation of the issues of life portrayed in the book. The cynic would scoffingly suggest that such a process is far removed from the primary school. The sincere teacher might join the critics' ranks to oppose such an advanced aim. Ought it to be absent from primary school literature presentations? Starting to think about and responding openly to literature need not be left until the senior school where it becomes, unfortunately, academically uncomfortable for many pupils. Let us begin early to encourage a fascination with books. Fascination comes through close involvement.

C. Huck reminds us that literary growth is "gradual and cumulative" and is developed by "discussing and comparing books, and reading and reacting to them from kindergarten through college" (Houghton-Hawksley, H., 1983, pp 33-34). An early start can be made to exploring literature provided that the principle of readiness is constantly applied. If the child is mentally and emotionally ready to proceed with any form of learning, then education can continue. The child's stage of development is the determining factor in organising learning activities. The views of J.S. Bruner (1960) uphold this idea of developing

children's thought processes early. His contention is "that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (Bruner, J.S., 1960, p33). When the key words "some intellectually honest form" are applied to the child's state of maturity, they suggest that the child will only benefit from any learning provided that the work is appropriate to his patterns of thought. Bruner also gives valuable advice on how the early beginning to learning should be implemented.

> If one respects the ways of thought of the growing child, if one is courteous enough to translate material into his logical forms and challenging enough to tempt him to advance, then it is possible to introduce him at an early age to the ideas and styles that in later life make an educated man (Bruner, J.S., 1960, p52).

A skilful teacher, knowing the "styles" of thought that are best suited to looking into literature, can incorporate these at a preparatory level into the activities around the book. The doctoral candidate thinks about and discusses literature. The eight-year-old may also think about and discuss stories at an appropriate level and degree of difficulty. Obviously the levels on which the two operate will differ, but the child has to start at some stage the development which culminates in advanced academic analysis. Why not provide the rudiments at a fundamental level in the primary school? It could prove advantageous given a child's receptivity.

The child's personal growth (see Chapter Three) is the English teacher's main concern. He needs to consider how this may be best achieved and when it is best begun. The upward movement in English involves studying books in depth. Calthrop (1973) quotes an English teacher who saw his task as being to

"encourage the pupils to read more deeply (looking for implications) and to assist in discernment because they won't always be reading superficially. Looking for depths in a book is a skill that is learned" (Calthrop, K, 1973, p20).

If pupils must learn how to inquire deeply, and if such a skill does not simply arrive, then they must become active in learning to read and respond with discernment. Dare one add, the sooner the better? The Dartmouth Seminar group investigating response to literature believes so.
"It seems possible, even probable, that the basic structure of these activities (i.e., of an adult response to literature) will develop by the age of eleven, given reasonable circumstances" (Meek, M., 1977, p 380).
James Britton optimistically concurs that the child can be led to greater literary maturity. In talking about response he suggests that naive incomplete responses can be refined and can lead to genuine literary responses. He believes that "satisfaction with the second-rate differs in degree, but not in kind from the higher satisfaction" and thus "teachers should surely be concerned to open doors" (Meek, M., 1977, p107). After an examination of the stages in a child's response to stories from age 6 to 17, A. Applebee (1978) reaches a conclusion which fosters early meaningful contact with literature.

> The patterns of development found in the present study certainly do not suggest that encounters with immature or juvenile literature are any less important or any less educative, than later encounters with more sophisticated works (Appplebee, A.N., 1978, p135).

Because the process of learning to think about literature goes through stages from elementary perception to more mature modes of reflection, primary school educators should nurture the tender shoot which develops into a full-grown appreciation of literature through sensitive responses.

A practical example from D. Fry's research (1985) into children as readers clinches the case for letting pupils explore literature through various activities even when young. When only 8 years old, a boy reader was entranced by Watership Down and embarked on the following list of activities while grappling with aspects of the meaning.

1. Showing other children his picture book and telling them the story.
2. Talking to another adult about the story on tape.
3. Talking to the teacher about the story on tape.
4. Making an advertisement for the film (in the form of a large cardboard folder).
5. Telling the story to the class in preparation for drama.
6. Acting out the story, playing the part of a character.
7. Asking questions: (a) in a letter to the author;
   (b) in a letter to another adult;
   (c) on a tape to his teacher;
   (and getting answers).
8. At home, hearing the story read aloud, and reading to himself.

(Fry, D., 1985, pp28-29)

For me, the significance of this impressive catalogue lies in the encouragement it gives to the teacher to be bold in investigating stories with young children. There is no place for hesitation on account of age, if the pupils are ready and interested.

The opinions reflected above substantially support the idea that the development of mature judgement and a sense of discrimination can begin in childhood. The proviso is crucial: any activity must be done at an appropriate elementary level which accords with the child's mental growth and emotional capacity. The child must be ready. Let it be understood that I am not supporting a formal, structured programme of literary instruction in the primary school, (e.g. how to teach irony and metaphor in standard two) but an imaginatively informal approach. Informality does not imply haphazard teaching but takes into account

the abilities and interests of primary school children. Careful planning and creative imagination are essential tools in devising situations which will impart these preparatory skills with enjoyment remaining paramount. (The nature of acceptable activities will be discussed later.)

VI. THE PRIMACY OF DISCUSSION

The proposed activities need not be profound or intricate. The simplest mode of operation is discussion. Discussion starts when a child begins to talk. It is a natural human activity. All the teacher needs to do is to focus the discussion on a story. Teachers confirm that discussion accompanying the reading of a book is a valuable method. Calthrop's teachers regarded it "as an important and integral part of the experience" (Calthrop, K., 1973 p7) The Dartmouth seminar group referred to earlier, chose as one of three modes of teaching literature, the combination of reading and discussion either structured or informal (Meek, M., 1977 p384).

Why is discussion so important as an accompanying activity?

Discussion is highly valued because reading alone has been found to be inadequate. If formative views are to result, discussion must accompany the reading. In conducting research into the effect of books upon children, it has been questioned whether reading had any impact upon a person's moral standards of behaviour or social relationships. The research evidence shows that little beneficial influence results if discussion is neglected (Huus, H., in H.-Hawksley, H., ed., 1983b, p45; Hoffman , M., 1982, p28).

Discussion also provides for the type of growth in literary appreciation that has been advocated already. Class talk is the main means of communication and teaching in the classroom and also provides for sharing.

> As the young reader proceeds through school, teacher presentation of literature followed by discussion (in whatever form) can introduce young readers to new kinds of literature, can assist them in the problems of perception and interpretation, and can thus free them to read increasingly mature books on their own (Harding, D.W., in Meek, M., 1977, p386).

Once again the significance of the phrase "young readers" must not be overlooked. Discussion can commence at any stage and at any level because the movement towards maturity encompasses all educational experience. This growth in understanding books brings immense personal satisfaction as expressed by the following pupil after an interview about her reading habits. While it might appear to the learned to be an insipid or low grade pleasure, there is no doubt that it is personally fulfilling for the individual concerned. "I've learned a lot. I've never talked about books before - just written in English. I now feel more about books, through explaining to you" (Fox, G., 1977, p26). The simple pleasures are sometimes the most rewarding and durable.

In concluding this look at the vital role that discussion plays in exploring a novel, I want teachers to outline the practical advantages and worth of class discussion. In so doing they remind one of the shared and reciprocal nature of the activity. It cannot be denied that a fully educational activity needs interaction. Pupils must be busy trading ideas, perceptions and feelings. To discuss is to share. Sharing means growth. Calthrop distills this wisdom from his "survey of teacher opinion".

> The reticent child is far more likely to bring forward his ideas when the whole class is engaged in a common discussion; and the brighter members of the class and those who are particularly enjoying the book give something (far more effectively than the teacher can) to those who are struggling. This process of cross-fertilization feeds back both into the child's individual reading and into his writing. To ignore the benefits of this kind of discussion is to remove the only advantage of being in a class (Calthrop, K., 1973 , p6).

Even when groups do not seem to be functioning efficiently, the teacher should persevere with discussion. That is the reassurance given in a down-to-earth

book about handling literature in the classroom. M. Hayhoe and S. Parker (1984) write: "Research into 'teacherless groups' discussing literature has shown that pupils are capable of reaching perceptive conclusions on their own, even if they may *seem* to ramble a little in the process" (p28). The benefit derived from discussion is not easily dissipated.

The verdict of teachers seems incontestable. Discussion does cause pupils to learn from one another. As they do so, they need never find it boring. Adeptly contrived by the teacher, discussion can be refreshingly different each time a group meets. Mike Toun believes that "imaginative analysis in small-group discussion, carefully organized, can be interesting exploration in which pupils marvel at their discoveries; what they find should deepen their appreciation and enrich their enjoyment" (Protherough, R, 1983, p126). The diverse excitement and satisfaction of shared discovery through discussion, once encountered by pupils, will become self perpetuating. Love for literature will grow through brains and tongues being busily involved with stories.

VII. SOME CONTRARY OPINIONS

The role of the teacher has received prominent mention thus far. Indeed the teacher is a key figure especially as planner and guide. However, there are dissenting voices.

Two strands of thought are expressed by proponents of contrary views. Both the teacher and complementary activities are regarded as superfluous. The non-interventionists elevate personal experience,extolling the power of the book to influence the reader. An unnamed questioner at the children's literature conference at Exeter in 1969 expressed it in this way: "I think sometimes the book is not really the child's own until it can tackle it directly, read it silently. It seems to me that ultimately if it can only be a success when it is helped in class that it has not won its way" (Fisher, M., 1970, p.20).

I share the sentiment that a book ought to find its own way into a child's heart. A book for class exploration should be selected because it has already captured the imagination. The speaker implies that a book ought not to be "helped in class" too much, but be left to speak for itself. I would not presume to "help" a book to be accepted by children by means of activities; that would be a waste of time. I do believe that a book can be shared and there is great profit in those communal activities.

Margery Fisher (1970) at the same conference made similar remarks advocating that children be left alone with books. The remarks were made in the context of a discussion as to the merits of the teacher intervening to handle difficult books which pupils were unable to appreciate fully on their own.

> I can't quite see what the point is of not pushing children bang into books from the word go as soon as they can read. I don't think it matters if they can't read half the words that they are reading. They get more out of a book if they are left ... but I don't think it matters if they don't understand what they read. It comes but it only comes if they try and they have got to be made to try somehow. If children don't start at the very beginning trying to understand books on their own, they probably never will (Fisher, M., 1970 p21).

Her remarks are directed at the earlier years of schooling and it is unsure as to whether she would advocate this policy throughout the primary school. Her main principle is valid. Children do need to work through books on their own but there is both desirability and scope for something extra: meaningful activities. It is very doubtful whether children will derive more benefit from a book by solo effort. The evidence already presented contradicts her belief. What is the harm in assisting the child towards a greater measure of understanding? Is there any danger in attempting to heighten a child's pleasure in a story by means of exciting, related activities? Very little indeed.

In extolling the impact of the book, the non-interventionists give little credit to teachers for a child's growth in understanding of books. The teacher is regarded as superfluous in the encounter of a child and book. This seems a faulty notion for the classroom exploration of a story. R. Protherough demolishes this belief espousing non-interference by citing research which indicates that sound teaching does make a difference to pupil responses to literature while recognising the influence of other factors. Michalak's research with high school students showed that "there is a direct relationship between the way literature is taught and the way students respond to it" (Protherough, R., 1983, p55). If this conclusion is valid, then the teacher is an integral part of teaching literature in the primary school through being a reading facilitator. The quality of the pupil response to fiction in the primary school is equally as dependant, if not more so, on a sensitive strategy by the teacher as is the case in the high school. He cannot be relegated to a chalky corner. The teacher can justifiably and confidently assume his rightful place in the trilogy of teacher, child and book. Only then will a book yield its full treasure to youthful explorers.

CHAPTER TWO: JUSTIFICATION THROUGH EXAMINING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE READERS' RESPONSE.

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CHAPTER TWO: JUSTIFICATION THROUGH EXAMINING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE READER'S RESPONSE

Reading response theory re-inforces the idea that pupils should actively seek to understand a work of fiction. As studies of the responses that readers make to books have proliferated, so interest has focussed on the inner processes of the reader and not on the text (Tabbert, R., 1980).Children's responses have been examined with the International Research Society for Children's Literature devoting their fourth symposium (1978) to the topic. It is a fruitful area because of the implications for classroom practice. Improvement in practice must be based on proven theory, and response theory provides both a stimulus and a warrant for innovation. The research evidence is germane to this dissertation leading in two fruitful directions. Firstly, further justification for the exploration of a text through accompanying activities is given. Secondly, guidelines for appropriate methods are suggested. The characteristics of the reader's response will be examined accordingly.

I. ACTIVITY

Reading is not merely a series of eye movements over printed words on a page telling a story. Although sedentary, the reader is far from being a passive recipient of ideas. The casual observer has little inkling of the hectic processes at work in the reader's mind and emotions. Inner activity characterises all reading once mastery of the basic skill has been obtained. The reader and the text are in constant inter-action demonstrating the vitality and dynamic nature of the reading process. As Protherough (1983) points out the researchers have utilized many terms to describe this basic activity such as "a transaction, a recreation, a performance, an interplay, a participation, an interaction, a construction or an encounter" (Protherough, R., 1983, p26).

The reader's activity is the hallmark of a response to literature identified by researchers (Jackson, D., 1983) and is designated by some as the first distinctive feature (Benton, M., 1980; Rosenblatt, L., 1978). The novelists through the centuries have been united in recognising the truth that the reader collaborates with the author. Laurence Sterne felt it necessary for the author to "leave him [the reader] something to imagine" while Henry James admitted that "the reader does quite half the labour" (Quoted by Benton, M., 1980 pp15-16). John Fowles gives some details of the process. "A sentence or a paragraph in a novel will evoke a different image in each reader. This necessary co-operation between writer and reader, the one to suggest the other to make concrete, is a privilege of *verbal* communication" (Quoted by Rosenblatt, L., 1978,p14). Accepting the reality of the reader's activity through the imagination, what then is the nature of this industry?

A. PREDICTION

The theorists agree that the reader is attentively engaged in making meaning of the text (Benton, M., 1980; Fox, G., 1977; Jackson, D., 1983) through all the processes identifiable as constituting part of response. Prediction is the chief element in reading for meaning. Benton (1980) elaborates: "He is constantly predicting, trying to anticipate the story line ... as he reads on, he starts to construct alternative 'stories', trying a hypothesis and then reading on to test its plausibility" (p.25). The meaning is understood through this constant process of reviewing earlier decisions in the light of new developments. Benton concludes that the response is thus "anticipatory" and "dialectical". While retrospective elements do operate, the reader advances holding "a dialogue" with himself either accepting, rejecting or modifying the images in his mind (p 27).

If a reader is busily occupied in this manner, then successful teaching can <u>extend</u> the process through prediction activities either during or after reading.

This will be an extension of the inner response - one which is occurring naturally - and allowing for its articulation in discussion or writing. Involvement with a novel beyond the reading stage is not merely an artificial extra. Further activities here build upon the foundation of the reader's inner processes. Surely there can be no sounder basis for education than starting with the reader's experience and seeking to improve the ideas already present in his mind. The type of activity is clearly indicated. As prediction is the kernel of response, so pupils must be given opportunity to speculate about the story: the progression, the meaning and the impact upon their own consciousness. Clearly, the value of reading can be multiplied.

The value of prediction as a response must not be under-estimated. It is not only an elementary skill, but is a constituent of more advanced literary abilities. This is the conclusion of Evans after a survey of reading research, especially that of W. Iser.

> It seems, therefore, that the readiness to guess, predict, and modify, which is the clue to the earliest steps in reading at the level of words and constructions continues to be essential at the levels of meaning, understanding, aesthetic appreciation and literary skills (Evans, W.D.E. 1981, p38).

This is an interesting confirmation of the view expressed earlier that the growth to greater literary appreciation can start in the primary school. If prediction forms the basis of both the initial and maturer stages of reading, then its importance increases and becomes a very acceptable method of classroom procedure.

B. SUPPLYING LINKS WITH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

There is another strand of the reader's active response expounded by different researchers which is worth closer examination (Benton, M., 1980; Fox, G., 1977; Jackson, D., 1983; Protherough, R., 1983; Rosenblatt, L., 1970 and 1978).

While reading, the background experiences of the reader are brought to interact with the text. The reader's experience of life and his reactions to those experiences, his personality and his literary knowledge are employed in attempting to understand the reading experience. Thus distinct links and parallels are formed between the reader's past apprehension of life and the world of the novel. Protherough (1983) finds that part of the process occurs when readers "visualize the book in terms of their own world" (p23). Benton (1980) employs the term "analogizing" and explains it as "the paralleling of the story" with personal memories because of "our tendency to compose stories structured upon ones we read ... which give us an opportunity to relive or alter our actual experience, or act out dramas revolving around our wishes and fears" (p28).

The correlation of the two experiences, both life and literary, has been explored by David Jackson (1983) and Nancy Martin (1976). They show how pupils use anecdotes from their own lives to interpret and apprehend an encounter with fiction. Thus pupil stories and personal memories may not be irrelevant chatter, but may be a means of creating a personalized meaning of a literary encounter. Jackson explains how the "anecdotalizing" occurs emphasizing how the reader actively juggles the elements of the text and his background.

> To take on and possess for themselves the spirit of what they are reading, the pupil has to try and actively fit the unfamiliarity of that experience into her already developed systems of understanding (and especially those organized networks of personal knowledge kept in the mind in the form of anecdotes) so that both the original experience and those existing systems are modified in the process (Jackson, D., 1983, p98).

He proceeds to outline the advantages of employing anecdotes while exploring literature. Pupils' learning is facilitated because anecdotes are "Their own meaningful currency that they can feel at home with". In addition, anecdotes "often validate and encourage an immediacy of felt contact between the child's world and the world of the reading experience" enabling the child to express feelings more freely. He also feels that "anecdotalizing" is the fore-runner

of more evaluative thinking about a text because analytical remarks about a story mingle with anecdotal sentiments. His conclusion is that "anecdote, along with other modes of personal knowledge, has a contribution to make to the pupils' learning, enjoyment and understanding of what they read" (p108). However, a vital controlling principle must be remembered, if this benefit is to emerge. The pupils' anecdotes must "illuminate more clearly the focus of the book" and transport them "more deeply into the heart of the reading experience" (p104.) These far reaching assertions based on his research establish the great educational significance and value of this facet of a reader's response.

What are the implications for the child in the classroom? A child, especially a girl, on reading Nina Bawden's Carrie's War should find a memory in her own personal fund which matches the experiences of Carrie on being separated from both parents by World War II. The current heyday of divorce proceedings and the need for children to enter into close "family" relationships with new people (not necessarily with the status of step-mother or step-father!) should provide the background experience in many a child's life for seeing mirror images in Carrie's struggle to enter into meaningful relationships with strangers. If "analogizing" takes place, then there is therapeutic value in the child talking or writing about personal memories, whether painful or pleasurable. Subsequent activities by incorporating anecdotes can give heightened perception and appreciation of earlier experiences recalled through reading. The teacher needs to recognise what is there and plan to use it to best advantage for each child. Pertinent personal experience linked to literature could result in writing being enriched by a dual stimulus, the text and recollections from life. A reminder that the child is grappling with the meaning of the story through these response processes is apposite and should spur even the Standard 3 teacher to re-examine the way in which reading is handled. Allowance must be made for responses to be explored and expressed.

C. SUPPLYING MISSING DETAIL

It was earlier mentioned that the author has a responsibility to allow the reader opportunity to respond imaginatively to a text. R. Tabbert (1980) has investigated the idea expounded by Wolfgang Iser that there are "telling gaps" in any author's narrative whether by conscious design or not. The reason may also be entirely practical: the novelist is unable to provide every detail of the situations being presented. These "telling gaps" provide for reader involvement. Iser's example is taken from Oliver Twist when Oliver asks for more. He suggests that Oliver's inner feelings are not revealed in order to emphasize the reaction of "the authorities". The consequence is that the reader supplies the missing sympathy for the hungry boy (Tabbert, R., 1980, p39). M. Sendak's reply to Tabbert's query over the exclusion of an illustration of Max's mother in Where the Wild Things Are makes the point very clearly. Sendak replied that the mother is left to the reader's imagination because "by her absence she is *more available*" (p40, my italics).

The two examples reveal a largely emotive response to the "telling gap". At times the "telling gap" will require the mere supply of extra information, but at others there will be chance for a broad range of responses. The implications for reading lessons are significant because the gaps have the potential to be windows into the story, opening up vistas for the imaginative child. If the gaps are there, then there are almost limitless opportunities for discussion, writing and drama. These pregnant spaces must be encouraged to give birth to sextuplets under the teachers' guidance. Because the gaps encourage reader activity, the teacher is foolish not to exploit them.

D. TOTAL COMMITMENT TO THE STORY

Response theory has shown that the reader is far from being inactive. In fact, total commitment is often the consequence with younger readers being

almost obsessively absorbed in the story. Proof of this close involvement comes from two quarters: the theorists and also pupils describing their own reactions to stories. Characteristics of this involvement can also be identified. The end result is again justification for extra chances to be given to pupils to extend the processes already begun in their minds and emotions.

A. Warlow examining the views of Tolkien and Coleridge concludes that "there is an *all or nothing commitment by the reader*" (Meek, M, 1977, p94). His statement is founded on Tolkien's view that the reader creates and enters "a Secondary World" in which he can fully believe while inside. Coleridge contributes the idea of absorbed reading being a state of "illusion" where the evaluative powers of the mind are suspended.

Gill Frith's research (1979) supports the idea of total immersion. The following quotation shows the complete entry of the child into the world of the story with the extensive incorporation of realistic elements from the child's life.

> While I was reading it I imagined that I was in it and my friends were in it. And that my mum's friend who has a farm was the farmer's wife and that her husband was the farmer. I imagined that I was George who is a girl... (Frith, G., 1979, p30).

This extract also illustrates another characteristic of the reader's response: entry into the life of fictional characters.

E. ENTRY INTO CHARACTER ROLES

The active identification by the reader with the characters Protherough (1983) isolates as one of the modes of response while reading. This "projection into a character" means that the imagination lets the reader penetrate the personality of the character experiencing the character's thoughts and feelings. D.W. Harding calls this response "empathic insight" as it enables the reader to enter the roles denied to him in life. He elucidates:

> Contemplating exceptional people, he can achieve an imaginary development of human potentialities that have remained rudimentary in himself or been truncated after brief growth; he can believe that he enters into some part of the experience of the interplanetary explorer, the ballerina, the great scientist, the musician or the master spy, and again this applies at every level from popular entertainment to serious literature (Meek, M., 1977.p70).

Identification with fictional characters can promote personal growth - an attractive benefit. Jones and Buttrey (1970) view each person as having a need to develop the identities that constitute human personality. Rehearsing these many different roles imaginatively can lead to character development. They explain it thus:

> When a child reads or listens to a story he plays all the events upon the stage of his own imagination and makes an investment of himself in them. Using the models of fiction, the child can be master, slave ... In his inner vision of himself he can practise possibilities of identity and behaviour that will enrich his personality and enable him to mature (Jones, A., and Buttrey, J., 1970, p11).

Rosenblatt (1970) concurs that the imaginative contemplation and speculative performance of potential roles encompassing human situations and behaviour does prepare one to face life with greater confidence.

he reader's empathy can be intensely intimate as in this girl's confession that "you feel you want to help Cissie in the story" (Blunt, J., (1977) p40). The sceptic might question whether this identification is of any value to the reader. I would give an affirmative answer and most teachers too would agree while differing over the extent of the benefit. Teachers need to take heart from the recommendation of the Dartmouth seminar group: "We need to encourage, very warmly, verifications from personal experience, not frown on the 'That's me' identification with a character" (Meek, M., 1977, p 390). While being careful not to destroy the enchanted moment of empathic involvement, gentle teacher guidance could lead to the pupil exploring the ramifications of his affective identification. Immense personal benefit could result as emotive perceptions are broadened through probing the experiences

and personalities of people in fiction. If the reflection were left to the post-reading period, then there would be little danger of destroying the enjoyment derived from living another person's life.

F. MAKING MEANING OF THE TEXT

What is the focal point of the reader's activity? It is to fashion a personal meaning through the interplay of the reader's background and the text. The significance that each reader perceives is uniquely his own. The deep longings of the heart can be satisfied as the affective elements of the text minister to the emotions. For others a story arouses questions which have a bearing on their particular problems of life. They may seek a more intellectual answer finding the satisfaction to be as real as emotional comfort. All the facets of response already identified contribute to this process of creating an individual interpretation of the story.

The research of Don Fry (1985) into children's motivation for reading supports the idea that children are constantly engaged in seeking some point of personal consequence in a text. His work with two eight year olds is particularly revealing. He concludes that one girl re-read stories because the stories enabled her "to think about herself" and spoke to her inner being. She returned to "The Shrinking of Treehorn" time and again to grapple with a problem raised by the story for her: an apparent lack of concern by the mother for her son. In doing so, she related her own life situation to the details of the story and to her desires for the relationship with her parents. Fry decides that this girl found books worthwhile "because they enable her to ponder upon aspects of her own experience: in re-reading, she is reviewing and reconsider ing things that intrigue her *because they are part of herself as a growing person"* (Fry, D., 1985, p16, my italics). The converse helps to substantiate the case. A friend found the same book "a bit boring" because it did "not meet either her imaginative or her emotional expectations" (p15).

In the second instance a boy became enchanted by Watership Down. Through a variety of activities he investigated the matter of the leadership amongst the rabbits, the central issue of the story. His interest in seeking an answer as to why one rabbit was designated leader and not another extended to his sending his query to the author. The class teacher felt that he was "examining aspects of his own behaviour and personality" through this fascination with the leadership issue. Fry's conclusion is that the boy gained a knowledge of himself and of life through living in the story.

In both instances the children grappled with the elements of meaning in a story. They sought for personal significance in different ways. One was an intellectual quest while the other was more a search for an emotional security. Both identified a problem of life in the story which impinged upon their own experience and looked for a satisfying answer. Each grew uniquely in perception of human nature.

The major consequence for the classroom is clear. Because creating a meaning is a private affair, pupils need to be left to formulate the special significance of the book for themselves. Activities must be designed to give personal latitude in exploring the story and avoid the imposition of one point of view. It must also be recognised that all responses to a text are valid because of the very personal nature of each response. When individual needs are different, satisfaction will come through various stories and through diverse responses to them.

A central truth has been exposed and proved: children are active while reading. This industry as outlined can take different forms with each form suggesting another method of approach. Learning requires a bustling brain; the thoughts being expressed through a busy tongue or hand. Children are "little factories of understanding" (to use Ted Hughes's phrase)

grappling with mental images as they seek (perhaps largely unconsciously) the meaning. The teacher's responsibility is to assist this search with all the legitimate means available. It is not the message that they take away which is of prime importance, but the road by which they have travelled in reaching a meaningful conclusion. As Charlotte Huck reminds us, "the process of the interpretation is more important than the interpretation itself" (Huck, C., 1978, p738).

II. CREATIVITY

In the interaction occurring between reader and text, there is much of the reader's activity which is creative. Indeed, it is difficult to separate these two elements into distinct categories as there is extensive overlapping. Creativity is manifested in the prediction which constantly occupies the reader's mind. Creativity sees the link between personal experience and the revealed experience of the novel synthesising the two into a new whole while "analogising". Creative thinking supplies the missing emotive elements for the "telling gaps". At the heart of all this creative response, is the imagination.

Perhaps the most persuasive words concerning the essential creativity of response come from D.W. Harding. "Response is a word that reminds the teacher that the experience of art is a thing of our own making, an activity in which we are our own interpretative artist" (Meek, M., 1977, p391). Rosenblatt (1970) conceives the reader's response to literature in similar creative terms giving details of the process as well as a warning not to arrive at so private an interpretation that it is unrelated to the story. She writes,

> Every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense created anew. *Fundamentally, the process of understanding a work implies a re-creation of it, an attempt to grasp completely the structured sensations and concepts through which the author seeks to convey the quality of his sense of life. Each must make a new synthesis of these elements with his own nature, but it is essential that he evoke those components of experience to which the text actually refers (Rosenblatt, L., 1970, p113).*

While reading is dynamically creative, it is also a collaborative enterprise between reader and author. Tabbert (1980) sees the reader as a "co-author" which accords with literary critic Lubbock's view that "we proceed to create what is in effect a novel within the novel which the author wrote" (Quoted by Benton, M., 1980, p17). The dualities are important; not only author and reader but also creativity and interpretation in combination. The reader responds to words and according to his personal interpretation constructs a mental image belonging to him alone. The images are formed, say the response scholars, in the light of the reader's knowledge and background i.e. the sum total of the reader's life experience (Benton, M., 1980; Harding, D.W. 1977 b; Rosenblatt, L., 1970). Interpretation and creation thus take place in a context not a vacuum. The context is jointly the novel and the reader's contribution from past perceptions of life. The reader's background is a vital constituent in responding to a text. Rosenblatt expands as follows:

> In order to share the author's insight, the reader need not have identical experiences, but he must have experienced some needs, emotions, concepts, some circumstances and relationships, from which he can construct the new situations, emotions, and understandings set forth in the literary work (Rosenblatt,L., 1970, p81).

The teacher thus uses the book to stimulate the creative process in the pupil - the inescapable trilogy. Creative thinking uses all the building blocks of experience, both literary and personal to fashion new artifacts. Different combinations are tried and rejected in the process of making a satisfying picture. J.A. Smith's definition neatly sums it up.

"Creativity is sinking down taps into our past experiences and putting these selected experiences together into new patterns, new ideas or new products" (Chambers, D.W., 1971, p166). What if children do not respond creatively to the stimulus of the text through a classroom activity? While the fault may lie in a badly conceived activity, the teacher can be consoled that not all the blame need be apportioned to his faulty approach. Rosenblatt (1970) suggests that the deficiencies in a pupil's background can truncate the reader's response. Once again the influence of the reader's background experience upon the response becomes apparent.

The imagination is well known for conjuring up either fearful monsters or pleasurable fantasies from a chance stimulus. The images can range from being ordinary and related to reality to titans of monolithic proportions with megatons of potential to cause disturbance to the mind. The imagination is constantly creative in magnifying details. Benton's research (1980) revealed this trend in children's thinking about a story. One boy exaggerated the simple mention of rain and lightning into this mental picture.

> This is where the storm comes in. Now I'm picturing big black skies, black as a cloak that they used to wear in the olden days... and I keep on thinking about the blackness and the small forest; and the lightning seems... bigger than normal lightning (Benton, M., 1980, p30).

What are the implications of this imaginative creativity for teaching? These mental images need not be left in the minds of the pupils. The freshness of an internal Eden can be translated into words and then shared with others with enrichment for all. Talking, writing and especially drama provide the means for externalising and displaying these precious internal masterpieces of the imagination. If reading generates beautiful inner landscapes, then let the teacher use this stimulus productively. At times though these dreams can well be left in the privacy of the mind.

III. EVALUATION

The two aspects of response examined thus far have highlighted the reader's commitment, usually total, to the text through prediction, empathising and the imaginative re-working of material. There is another element which is at the opposite end of the involvement scale: evaluation or critical analysis. Here the reader is distanced from the text and stands emotionally aloof from the characters. Cognitive rather than emotive sensitivities are brought into operation as critical faculties are exercised.

D.W. Harding (1977,a) sees the reader as a "spectator" participating through imagination and even empathy is "only imaginative sharing of the participants' experience". The stress falls on the reader's detachment from the events of the novel and on evaluation rather than participation because the story is only an artefact used by the author for communicating with the reader. As a result "our task as readers is not complete unless we tacitly evaluate his evaluation, endorsing it fully, rejecting it, but more probably feeling some less clear-cut attitude based on discriminations achieved or groped after" (Harding, D.W., 1977b, p201).

It seems that evaluation belongs to the top end of the reading response scale being found usually in some older readers (despite Harding's assertion that it can occur in rudimentary form) - a higher order response skill if the researchers are to be believed (Blunt, J. 1977, Frith, G. 1979, Protherough R. 1983). Protherough feels this response is learned through literary studies at school. Thus evaluation is more a developed or acquired response than one which occurs naturally.

The crucial question concerns the relationship between the full involvement noted earlier and the detachment needed for responding evaluatively. It seems sane to accept both as being valid but to separate the two in practice.

Warlow decides that while evaluation and "total commitment to a fantasy" are both parts of reading, *"the two activities cannot take place simultaneously"* (Meek, M., 1977, p94). James Squire's conclusions add confirmation.

> *The two types of responses seem to reinforce one another, with readers who are emotionally involved formulating more literary judgements* even though the responses occur at different times... Only when the reading of the story is completed do literary judgements become a major concern (Quoted by Warlow, A, in Meek, M., 1977, p95, author's italics.)

Gill Frith (1979) brings the matter closer to the primary school child. Having quoted two eleven year old readers' responses, she finds that the child's "involvement is so great that to 'stand aside' and 'analyse' the book is an effort which has little connection with her enjoyment" (Frith, G, 1979, p31). R. Protherough (1983) adds another nail by finding that it is only at the ages of 13-14 that "they become capable of more sophisticated levels of response" (p53). Confirmatory research evidence is found in the work of A. Applebee (1978). Investigating children's responses to stories, he found that analysis as a mode of response only develops after the age of 12. Concrete thinking then rather than manipulating abstract principles characterises the intellectual life of the primary school child.

The logical conclusion is to exclude critical evaluation from the range of activities in exploring literature with the primary school child. It is simply a response which the 11 year-old is incapable of making. This study of the evaluative element in reading has thus given further guidelines for sharing literature, both negative and positive. The teacher must eschew overtly critical work rather emphasizing and allowing the children to become engrossed in the story. Evaluation, even at a more mature level is secondary to feeling the full power of the book speaking for itself. Complete absorption comes first and is the basis on which "higher", more analytical responses are built. (This latter point is confirmed by the research of Thomson, J., 1979.)

While education aims at constantly improving the quality of a reader's response through building up to more evaluative modes of thinking about a story, other more personal responses must not be despised. Maturity of response does not belong to the intellectual realm alone. Special private responses are as valid as indicators of personal growth for certain people as being able to think analytically is a mark of mature reflection for others.

This personal testimony eloquently pleads for recognition as a meaningful response. John perhaps took more away from his reading than the adolescent who could expatiate on the poetic qualities of the sonnet. It is this type of impact that teachers must seek for the primary school child. I love the sincerity and forthright appreciation expressed by this "secondary modern reader of 'average ability'". "Bevis influenced me greatly. It altered my whole approach to life. I used to stay indoors and do nothing, but now I want to do something, you can" (Fox, G., 1977, P 21). The story here has entered the personality and affected the fibre of this teenager's being. It indicates an abandonment to the influence of the story. Surely this is the type of desirable response a teacher should always allow for, but never work to achieve.

IV. SATISFACTION

It is pointless trying to educate children without enjoyment permeating the whole process. It needs more than just a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down. Unless satisfaction is present in reading all other responses will not result in effective learning. Thorough planning and extensive teacher effort are negated by an absence of joy in the book. Believing that satisfaction is vital, the nature of literary satisfaction as a response needs examination. Interestingly, the teacher's faith in the close reading of a text, given a

blow by the look at evaluation, can be restored and justified.

James Britton believes that literature is made by men "to please themselves" and proceeds to outline that pleasure. Satisfaction "comes from a contemplation of the form given to events" (Meek, M., 1977, p106) and the teacher's aim is to develop this "sense of pattern of events", which he suggests can be felt in rudimentary form by very young children. As proof he quotes a three-year-old's assessment of Cinderella as, "A big, sad book about two ugly sisters and a girl they were ugly to' (p107). (Is this not an inducement to the primary teacher to discuss more stories?)

He continues to press for maturity in literary perception and the accompanying satisfaction. How does this occur?

> Progress lies in perceiving gradually more complex patterns of events, in picking up clues more widely separated and more diverse in character, and in finding satisfaction in patterns of events less directly related to their expectations and, more particularly, their desires; at the same time, it lies in also perceiving the form of the varying relationships between elements in the story and reality, as increasingly they come to know that commodity (Meek, M, 1977, p107).

Satisfaction comes from juggling with the elements of the story and I perceive parallels with the prediction and analogizing discussed earlier. Satisfaction emerges from creative reflection and understanding of the issues of the story. The juxtapositioning of satisfaction with mental struggle is interesting and adds another element. Satisfaction is not inane entertainment but involves contemplation in an increasing degree of difficulty. The close link between enduring satisfaction and maturing taste must be heeded.. Britton sums it up:

> Our sense of literary form increases as we find satisfaction in a greater range and diversity of works, and particularly as we find satisfaction in works which, by their complexity or the subtlety of their distinctions, their scope or their unexpectedness, make greater and greater demands upon us (Meek, M., 1977, p108).

Are these sentiments not sufficient encouragement for the primary teacher to embark on a literature programme to develop satisfaction of a kind which will endure? The primary school can lay the foundations for later growth in perception and increasing contentment with literature. Activities need to be so devised that enjoyment is paramount. This fourth element of response is the life-blood of the others. Activity and creativity cannot flourish without abundant infusions of deep pleasure.

Having dissected response to examine the fibres and sinews giving movement to our literary limbs, let us look at the whole man in conclusion. Each reader responds uniquely to a text deriving satisfying enjoyment from the experience which constantly challenges the mind and the emotions to creative involvement. The mind's predictive faculties range backwards and forwards searching for the pattern in the text. Often the emotions are moved by empathic sensitivities as characters live out their lives. As the reader imaginatively interacts with the text, so a new world is made by combining elements of past experience with the author's offering. The search for meaning does not cease until the last word has been read. The reader's mind is not a sleepy Pofadder but a bustling Johannesburg. The challenge to the teacher is clear: capitalize on the existing opportunities.

Let this clarion summary of the educative value of response provide the final persuasion.

> *The expression of responses is central to the life of any group where people are growing and learning:* it helps the individual to know what is in him, to represent to himself what might otherwise remain only a dim apprehension, and begin to feel its significance; it reveals to the teacher possibilities of growth - suggesting the next question, the next poem, the next story; it is important to the group because one child's response stimulates another's, and the flow of the group's responses becomes an essential, perhaps the staple, ingredient of their imaginative and intellectual life (Jones, A. & Buttrey, J., 1970, p26, my italics).

CHAPTER THREE: CRITERIA FOR SELECTING SUITABLE ACTIVITIES

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CHAPTER THREE: CRITERIA FOR SELECTING SUITABLE ACTIVITIES

Accepting that activities to explore a book are justified, guidelines need to be formulated to separate the spurious from the worthwhile. I would hesitate to support the view that the quality of the child's workmanship is largely irrelevant as long as the child produces something which reflects his personality. The cry to "Do your own thing" can only be seriously applied to education subject to the guidance of educationally sound principles. While individuality and each pupil's unique response are respected, education must guide the student towards maturity however that term is defined. A multitude of interests and options bombard the teacher clamouring for attention. There is little time for mindless entertainment in the modern school. Standards which ensure progress are essential. How are these standards to be drafted? What better way to establish criteria than to elicit principles from a survey of the value of literature for children. If activities conform to such standards, then it can be assumed that great advantage accrues to the pupil as the justifiable activity should always magnify the latent power of the story.

I. PERSONAL GROWTH

The Bullock Report unequivocally claims that the chief value of literature study is "personal and moral growth". The majority of teachers would endorse this truth in one form or another. The concept embraces many facets with the kernel being the provision made for each person to develop as fully as individual ability and motivation make possible, thus giving maximum personal fulfilment in life. Is this not an acceptable and attractive view of maturity as an educational benefit? The pupil matures through the multifarious processes operating within the mind and emotions while responding to a story. The anticipatory projection of expectations is tempered by their rejection or modification in the light of later developments. While enchanted by the story, there is an intuitive grappling with the elements of meaning.

The questioning of values proferred for investigation leads either to their re-affirmation or improved notions of appropriate behaviour. In this way, literature causes an inner shaping of the personality as the essence of our consciousness is transformed. The stimulated imagination gives expression to new thoughts through speech and writing. Each person's growth to maturity, while unique, utilizes these active means for improvement. The story initiates the development.

The supreme value of stories in promoting a person's growth emerges from Barbara Hardy's investigation of the way in which stories affect our lives. The reader makes sense of life through imaginative involvement with stories. Our developing notions concerning life are shaped because storying is an integral part of our being. Narrative for her is

> a primary act of mind ... that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives ... In order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future (Meek, M., 1977, pp12 & 13).

Life then is a story and story gives direction to the whole of life.

Personal growth has been viewed in different ways. The teachers in Calthrop's survey (1973) saw growth as "self-identification" coming through the empathic response to characters especially those with personal problems similar to the pupils' milieu. The Bullock Report opts for a psychological value as literature often enables the fulfilment of personal dreams. Whatever the value ascribed to literature in promoting personal growth, the conclusion is inescapable - the reader changes. As D.W. Harding once said, "Responding to a great work means becoming something different from your previous self" (Meek, M., 1977, p215).

The first general criterion is clear: a child should be able to grow through the experience in the classroom. This personal development takes place in

four areas providing additional criteria. The capacity to think and question should improve, which opens the possibility of moral growth. As feelings are involved, so too can the emotions be educated. Through it all comes a deepening insight into the universal elements of human nature.

A. MENTAL GROWTH

Because fiction is more than a story, there can be more than surface involvement by the reader's mind. Response theory has shown (See Chapter Two) the feverish engagement of the mind/imagination with the story. The mind does more than simply indulge in undisciplined flights of fancy. Logic is present in prediction because it is based upon evidence already presented in the novel. The forward movement follows a suggested rather than an erratic course. An element of precision appears as the mind sifts through past experiences of people and places to find one which provides illumination for and correspondence with the situation in the novel. The mind then works within a framework of greater or lesser extent dependant upon the literary and personal background of the reader. Chances for reflection are legion. Because literature is about life, thoughtful meditation perceives the patterns of the past and present. The complexities and perplexities of life can be contemplated and meaning with a personal significance extracted. This is not to denigrate the role of the imagination, because imaginative perceptions constantly contribute to the overall rational understanding which results. Mental activity should not be over-emphasized at the expense of emotional identifications as the two are complementary in the reader's response. Neither feeling nor thought can be accorded the dominant role, as either comes to the fore as ordered by the author's purpose. There need be no conflict. Michael Paffard (1978) in fact suggests that "imaginative literature is the great unifier of thought and feeling" (p136).

This criterion decrees that the child's cognitive ability should be stimulated through activities where the mind is exercised by reflecting on the story. Although sounding profound, the instruction to the class reflecting this guideline can be simple: Why do you think...? That question asked in the appropriate context can generate much fruitful discussion and thought. The child who thinks rather than merely reads will progress mentally. Thinking is important for another reason. It can lead to moral growth.

B. MORAL GROWTH

This sub-heading in this context may cause deep misgivings about the suitability of this aspect in the education of the primary school child. It has been questioned whether a teacher can justifiably have a moral purpose in teaching literature. The doubts perhaps arise from viewing the children's novels of the nineteenth century which had a serious moral tone and in which all the ends justified the "sermon" presented with frequent Biblical quotations. This overtly didactic approach has been rejected in the twentieth century (and rightly so for educational purposes) because it smacks of brainwashing, propaganda and is potentially offensive to the individual's conscience. Thus moral growth needs to be carefully defined because of the sinister connotations it has acquired.

It is best to begin with an axiom. Novels present certain values to the reader for consideration. The values may be expressed either positively through the virtuous hero or negatively through the vices of the villain. (Even Andy Capp has confessed that he can serve as a bad example.) The reader cannot remain neutral about the issues. A response must be made to the author's point of view. D.W. Harding confirms that authors write "for the crucial purpose of our joining with him in the values he affirms, whether we join wholeheartedly or with reservations" (Meek, M., 1977, p207). Later he explains how this affirmation takes place. It is not a blind acceptance of another's views and values but a questioning thereof.

> A literature does not sanction any particular outlook or scale of values; it is committed only to the belief that human experiences and our ways of evaluating them must be brought to light and looked at, probed and discussed. *The reader must make his own value decisions* (Meek, M., 1977, p214, my italics).

No unacceptable views are imposed upon or need be accepted by the reader. He remains the final authority. Because the reader grapples with moral problems seeking a solution, his understanding improves. This is moral growth. It comes through the experience of sifting and evaluating the values proferred by the author. Questioning remains the essence of the approach.

Other children's literature specialists support this oblique approach. Charlotte Huck agrees that values have to be "considered". Nicholas Tucker affirms that a child can move beyond the early stages of moral judgement in which all issues are viewed in simple terms of black and white. Books which promote "two viewpoints are the ones which lead the child onward into moral knowledge" (in Fox. G., 1976, pp 185-186). Moreover, moral knowledge often causes the child "to grope and stumble" but there must be "faith that these gropings have *more value* in the long run than the smooth acceptance and utterance of moral precepts" (Jones, A. & Buttrey, J., 1970, pp 14-15, my italics).

Bettelheim needs to have the last word in confirming the belief in the morally educative power of literature for children. The comments are as much applicable to children's stories as they are to fairy tales, his primary reference. Stories provide "a moral education which, subtly and by implication only, conveys to him the advantages of moral behaviour, not through abstract ethical principles but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful to him" (Quoted by Reid, J., 1982, p32).

Incidents which instruct in this way are not confined to adult books. Ivan Southall's Ash Road, which could be read by a Std. 5 class, provides moments for the reader to assess the morality of the characters. Three boys, having started a killer fire in critically hazardous weather conditions, flee and are unwilling to acknowledge their culpability. Before the most unwilling finally accepts what he ought to do, the reader has had the opportunity to consider their action and affirm intuitively the correct moral decision.

Even an hilarious romp portraying the exploits of primary school children, The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler by Gene Kemp, has its moral moments. Danny, a kleptomaniac, is Tyke's closest friend but causes him anguish by stealing a ten pound note from a teacher. Tyke is averse to the idea of keeping and spending the money, suggesting that it be restored secretly to the owner. Tyke does not quote the eighth commandment to Danny, but reminds him that trouble can only result from his thoughtless action. No "abstract principle" has been enunciated, yet the reader can confirm that Tyke's suggestion is the appropriate one. The "tangibly right" decision has been made. The moral effect of literature on practical living has been questioned and alleged to be negligible. This criticism is perhaps true for the majority of children, but there are those who can attribute a moral decision to the direct influence of a story. This is the testimony of one who had read The Belstone Fox by David Rook.

> After I read it, I gave up hunting because I began to see fox-hunting in a new way. I saw it from the fox's point of view. It would be very unpleasant to run for miles being chased by hounds and people on horseback. I haven't been fox-hunting since, and I don't think I will again (Fox, G., in Foster, J.L., 1977, p.24).

Those who have not had a similar conversion experience because of their reading should not be despised. They are not morally dead. About the remainder who are said to be unresponsive to a book's moral influence, I have one question: How do we know that they have not benefited? The character has

been exposed to new influences and views and values have been shaped. The consequences may never be directly attributed to earlier reading, but that is not to deny the efficacy of a story's moral influence.

Activities can unlock the morally educative value of a book showing the relevance of this criterion even for the primary school. Give a child the correct book and moral education can take place in the ways mentioned - by discreet suggestion and allusion. The supreme method remains open-ended questioning. Novel selection is all important here as only a book written to fulfil this aim through questioning or the presentation of alternative viewpoints is acceptable. The teacher should thus be encouraged to select appropriate incidents for class consideration. There are also implications for teaching method as the approach is crucial. The teacher must not dominate, but allow the pupils to reach personal conclusions. Preaching should never intrude; rather thoughtful probing of the issue should prevail so that the moral growth achieved is educationally sound. Growth comes through the reader meeting the challenge of reflecting on moral alternatives or morally provocative situations. Even a child may do so in simplified form.

C. GROWTH IN INSIGHT INTO LIFE

Literature relates to life. This key principle has been embraced by most supporters of literature study from Matthew Arnold to the Bullock report. The implication of Arnold's belief that literature helps to "form the soul and character" is that literature affects life in some way. One of the chief concerns of man is surely to gain insight into the workings of human nature, especially the factors common to all mankind. The reader is better able to understand not only himself but also the motives, thoughts and feelings of others through his examination of life in the novel. The child's experience of life is broadened through sharing the experiences of fictional characters. The lives of others can be lived by walking around in their shoes

as Atticus advises Scout in To Kill a Mockingbird. Relationships in all their intricacy and intimacy can be surveyed and enjoyed. The value of literature then lies in the manner in which literature "explores, re-creates and seeks for the meanings in human experience" (Quoted by Chambers, A., 1973, p5). The joys and problems of life can be imaginatively experienced and can both instruct and reassure. The Bullock committee sums up how life is understood by the reader. Literature presents

> the thoughts, experiences, and feelings of people who exist outside and beyond the reader's daily awareness. This process of bringing them within that circle of consciousness is where the greatest value of literature lies. It allows imaginative insight into what another person is feeling; it allows the contemplation of possible human experiences which the reader himself has not met (Bullock, A., 1975, p725).

The teachers in Calthrop's survey (1973) provide positive confirmation from practice of the desirability of using this criterion as a teaching aim. All the teachers wanted the book to have for the pupils

> an emotional appeal which allowed for identification and involvement in order to enrich their own experience of human behaviour and thus mostly through discussion to help to come to some sort of terms with themselves and society (Calthrop, K., 1973. p10).

There is an important point raised by both the Bullock committee and some of the teachers. Pupils must be exposed to experiences which they are not likely to have in life and thus extend their knowledge of human behaviour and relationships.

Recognising this value for life, what are the implications for programmes designed to use a novel? Firstly, the novel needs to be selected carefully. If it is to fulfil some of the above functions, then the contents must deal meaningfully with some aspect of life. Secondly, follow-up activities must focus upon these relevant incidents, gently seeking illumination about the human condition and facilitating an appropriate response. In our mechanistic world, man needs to feel that he is fully human and much can be achieved

through enlightening literature. This criterion suggests that some of the activities should lead towards a fuller perception of the complex web of human attitudes and emotions. Carrie's War is a superb example which meets the heavy demands of this criterion without being pedantic. In it we meet Johnny, a mentally retarded man. Various reactions to him are given from mockery to genuine acceptance and understanding. The child can benefit from surveying the delicacy demanded in handling one of the perplexities of life. In this way, the emotions and sensitivity of the reader can be educated.

A further question can be asked which leads to the next criterion. How do we best proceed to teach about life? The answer - involve the emotions. The Bullock Report outlines the close association between these two factors.

> Though we consider it important that much of a child's reading matter should offer contact at many points with the life he knows, we believe that true relevance lies in the way a piece of fiction engages with the reader's *emotional concerns* (Bullock, A., 1975, p129, my italics).

D. EMOTIONAL GROWTH

Is the education of the emotions so important? What is the evidence to confirm the inclusion of this factor as a standard for measuring a literature programme? The attestation comes from many quarters: psychologists, practising teachers, literary theorists, pupils and mothers all join to endorse man's need of finding emotional satisfaction in reading. Hence it is a major benefit.

Piaget provides a justification related to a child's overall personal development in which emotive elements are paramount.

> It may seem that affective, dynamic factors provide the key to all mental development and that in the last analysis it is the need to grow, to love, to assert oneself and to be admired that constitute the motive force of intelligence, as well as behaviour in its totality (Quoted by Jackson, W., 1972, p17).

Teachers are not far behind in agreeing. The research of M. Yorke in which teachers were asked to rank their aims for teaching literature is illuminating. With one accord affective concerns were placed in first position (Yorke, M., 1978). Harding's seminar group at Dartmouth are equally as convinced of the necessity of emotive factors in literature teaching believing that "the essential task is not done without his [the student's] affective involvement" (Meek, M, 1977, p388). L. Rosenblatt (1970) agrees in similar vein maintaining that literature creates the unity of "intellectual perception and emotional drive that is essential to any vital learning process" (p. 182). When pupils' emotions are enmeshed by the events and feelings of a story, insight results. In a project linking fiction to a study of the history of World War II, a pupil acknowledged the value the story had because "it had feelings and emotions which helped me know what it was like to be alive in the war" (King, P., in Hoffman, M., 1982 p126).

Perhaps the most telling motivation for greater attention to be paid to providing emotional satisfaction for children comes from Elaine Moss's personal testimony. Ironically enough, intense affective contentment was derived by her daughter from a book which she as a librarian regarded as being "artistically worthless". Her conclusion is that such a book "may, if its emotional content is sound, hold a message of supreme significance for a *particular child*" (Meek, M., 1977, p142, my italics).

The latter phrase needs emphasis. The affective value of a book cannot be coldly calculated by the teacher in advance of the reading. There is no way of knowing exactly how each child may respond or benefit. The emotional profit accruing is highly personalised. Whereas one child may shed a tear on

Charlotte's death in Charlotte's Web, another may be completely unaffected. Happiness certainly means different things to different people. The unique quality of emotional satisfaction must be recognised and allowed for in class activities. Protherough's warning (in the context of moral education) that teachers must be careful of teaching for "personality stretching effects" is apposite here. He considers that the value is often incidental and that lessons specifically designed to achieve a certain effect should be avoided (Protherough, R., 1983, p13). If that is true for moral education, then I endorse it even more strongly for affective education. No teacher should deliberately set out to cause children to cry on the death of Charlotte. That would be to cheapen the whole concept. The teacher must never become a manipulator of children's emotions as it would be a betrayal of the trust placed in him. What the teacher can do is to present the experience with great feeling and sensitivity while reading and show the same consciousness during discussion. If the child is to be stirred, then personal imaginative involvement in the fictional experience must be the agent - not the teacher. Tender and delicate handling must characterize any activity designed to touch an emotive issue. This does not mean that the case for this criterion is weakened; simply that more circumspect teaching is demanded.

Protherough admits that there is doubt, confusion and little finality about the emotional benefits of a reader's response, even an intense one. The only safe conclusion "is that *some* books are good for *some* children in *some* ways on *some* occasions" (Protherough, R., 1983, p14). Does this inconclusiveness cause us to avoid examining emotional incidents in a story? I believe not. The fact that we do not know exactly how each child is going to benefit is the greatest strength and not the weakness of the approach. The teacher is encouraged rather to pursue affective satisfaction for the children but subject to the safeguards already mentioned. Faith is needed in pursuing educational goals (Paffard, M., 1978). The teacher believes when desiring a sensitive response, although not fully understanding the wafts

of feeling. The emotional value of literature is incontestable - the doubt is over the extent. Our inability to classify the details of this satisfaction confirms how valuable it is as an educational tool. Why? Because the unique quality of an individual response is thereby protected - a major advantage.

II. THE SAFEGUARDING OF A PERSONAL RESPONSE

One of the chief merits of reading a story is that no strait-jackets are imposed upon the reader in responding. The enjoyment and apprehension of meaning are entirely personal. While the advantages of sharing are great, each reader's particular and special response must be respected and safeguarded. In planning activities, the teacher must be content to stand aloof if necessary and refrain from influencing pupils until they have had a chance to compose and express their individual thoughts and feelings. Uniformity of response is not desirable. It is for this reason that David Jackson's suggestions allowing for an early personal response are so attractive. He suggests that "first encounters .... often produce an intensity of feeling and thinking" and furthermore that even critical thinking should stem from initial impressions (Hoffman, M., 1982, p64). The method for doing so was to encourage pupils to write a journal recording their reflections while reading. One of the advantages is the avoidance of "a stock response to please the teacher". Meanwhile, the pupil can expand and explore his reactions and find solutions to the queries raised through the reading. Once again, the pupil has the freedom to start from where he is - an educationally sound practice. In this way, the individual's unique response can be cherished and nourished. The investigators of reading response confirm this factor as an important element and worthy of teacher attention (Benton, M., 1980 ; Blunt, J., 1977; Britton, J., 1977b; Fox, G., 1977; Rosenblatt, L., 1970). Rosenblatt's explanation (1970)

of the reading process highlights the uniquely personal qualities of the reader's response.

> Through the medium of words, the text brings into the reader's consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him*. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text (p30).

As in all education the teacher walks a tightrope. If this criterion is to receive adequate attention, then teacher guidance, accepted earlier to be necessary, must be gentle and discerning. Greater demands are placed on the teacher but the rewards for observing this standard are more than adequate compensation. Pupil writing, for one, will have a freshness and vitality because it has been prompted from within.

III. IMAGINATIVE INVOLVEMENT

One is tempted while surveying the value of literature for children to identify one particular feature as the most important. The temptation needs to be resisted because there is no objective means of judging relative worth; and the type of growth that literature encourages cannot easily be classified. However, if one can be chosen, imaginative involvement is the supreme benefit. Why? Imaginative vision is the spiritual life force of literature. Words are dead bones, quickened only by the imagination. As such, exploration activities must allow the imagination freedom to roam and grant latitude for creative expression in speech and writing. A reminder about an earlier emphasis is apposite. Due deference must be paid to the imagination when activating the factors contributing to personal growth. That development can only take place through the imagination being fully and actively involved.

The classic definition of the imagination by J.S. Mill has been echoed and endorsed in this century by both the Plowden and Bullock Reports. The main elements are being able "to conceive the absent as if it were present, the imaginary as if it were real" and to enter "into the mind and circumstances of another". Perhaps the chief value of the imaginative response is to put "the reader inside the rabbit ... or hobbit ..." (Johnson, T.D., 1979, p 37). No longer is the reader looking on, but is on the inside looking out through the eyes of the character.

Why should the imagination be accorded a central place in a literature programme? The answer is simple. Imaginative response is the core of any encounter with literature. Different people have explained the significance of the imagination in various ways; their conclusions all serving to emphasize the importance of the imagination. Knowledge is incomplete without the contribution of the imagination, because true knowledge includes more than rational explanation. Thus argues William Jackson who clinches his argument with this quotation from R. Mock. "When we have only factual knowledge of evil and when it in no way affects our lives it is possible to tolerate or ignore it; but when we comprehend it imaginatively, it is intolerable" (Jackson, W., 1972, p 16). W. Iser's view confirms the centrality of the imagination while reading because the words of the text are changed into mental images and "the real experiences of fiction - the experiences we shall first enjoy and then remember - consist of these mental images rather than of words" (Evans W.D. 1981). It is impossible to read a work without this picture making process being initiated by the imagination. Satisfaction in reading can come through no other means than the imagination.

Ted Hughes (1976) has argued cogently for the restoration of the education of the

imagination. He views man as living in an inner and outer world with the inner being little understood because the demands for objectivity in the outer world of reality have dominated. Man needs to discover some of his inner spiritual resources through myth because the two worlds are represented in harmony in great literature. The imagination is the unifier of both worlds and works through a story in this way.

> What began as an idle reading of a fairy tale ends, *by simple natural activity of the imagination*, as a rich perception of values of feeling, emotion and spirit which would otherwise have remained unconscious and languageless (Hughes, T., 1976, p94, my italics).

The imagination is the key which unlocks a treasure trove of creative activity when a book is read. Hughes hinted at it above, while R. Elliott sees the imagination as giving entry to "a state of rapture..." in which we are able to "become superabundantly generous, able to lavish upon the work a wealth of images and ideas which are not normally at our disposal" (Quoted by Lewis, R., 1975, p174). The teacher ought to note the practical consequence for his teaching when the imagination is lacking because "persons of unready imagination... simply (do) not get to the heart of the work" (ibid .).

The evidence is convincing. The imagination is the agent in animating the text. Not only does the text begin to live as the imagination flows, but the reader also moves to a fuller perception of meaning. Far from leading one away from the text, the reader is lead further into it with increasing personal benefit. The imagination sweeps the reader along and enables the literary encounter to be experienced either by being disconcertingly terrified or pleasantly gratified. The teacher's role is clear. He can allow each child to select those imaginative moments for the novel which are the most vivid and personally impressive for further talking or writing. This way the previous criterion can also be implemented. Alternatively the teacher may choose some of the incidents which have the potential to be

imaginatively explosive for class exploration. A wise teacher knows the sensitivites of his class and can choose appropriately. By these means, the child can extend, enhance or refine his basic imaginative response.

Once again, it can be done quite simply. The assignment can be phrased: "Imagine you are in these circumstances. What are your thoughts and feelings?" The situation of the chosen character is then outlined; the aim being to lead the pupil on from there. I love a passage in C.S. Lewis's The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe which gently chills rather than thrills the soul. The cold shivers come from an imaginative reconstruction of the unbearable horror of cutting into living flesh. The past witnessing of a sheep being slaughtered should provide sufficient background stimulus for a child to respond more than adequately. Even if that additional experience is lacking, the passage itself is sufficiently powerful. Imagine you are Edmund.

> "Prepare the victim," said the Witch. And the Dwarf undid Edmund's collar and folded back his shirt at the neck. Then he took Edmund's hair and pulled his head back so that he had to raise his chin. After that Edmund heard a strange noise - whizz-whizz-whizz. For a moment he couldn't think what it was. Then he realised. It was the sound of a knife being sharpened! (Lewis, C.S., 1974, p133).

Did the magic work for you?

Roger Lewis closes and in summing up the teacher's role opens a consideration of the next standard of judgement: the importance of looking at the meaning. "The teacher's job would seem to be to facilitate imaginative reception, allowing the child not only to understand the author's message, but to reflect upon it, assess it and move beyound it imaginatively (Lewis, R., 1975, p176)

The key word, the imagination, remains prominent.

IV. THE MEANING NEEDS TO BE EXPLORED

Constantly there have been reminders that the reader is seeking a meaning of some sort, sometimes highly subjective but always personally satisfying. All the activity of a reader's response constitutes an attempt to improve the understanding of an author's purpose . Any "quality" literature has significant viewpoints, not necessarily synonymous with a moral, which the author offers for pleasurable scrutiny. The meaning is important enough to justify attention being paid to it. F. Whitehead certainly thinks so as he believes that "any conception of reading is inadequate which fails to include reflection, critical evaluation and the clarification of meaning" (Quoted by Whitehead, F., 1966, p85).

How should the meaning be explored? C. Huck suggests that the meaning is acquired "as children relate what they are reading to their background of experience" (Huck, C., 1978, p707). The Bullock Report sees intelligent responsive reading as asking "questions of the text" and using "one's own framework of experience in interpreting it". (p129). Meaning can also be sought through all the other activities considered thus far. Discussion gives clarity to the imaginative activity of empathy, prediction and analogising. By these means the pupil's personal and literary background is used as a filter to select personal meaning which also can be shared publicly. The meaning is being perceived very often by the reader regardless of the teacher. The teacher's responsibility is to guide the perception.

In looking for meaning the teacher will examine significant sections of the novel being careful to avoid unnecessary analysis in the primary school. The examination of pertinent parts leads to the final comprehension of the totality of the story. Edward Blishen's warning provides a healthy corrective.

> The discussion of particular books is important so long as analysis of books and discussion of the use of books is always subordinated to the desire to take in and understand and feel a whole book as a whole book, as an ultimately unanalysable whole (Blishen, E., 1970, pp67-68).

The teacher again must not dogmatically pontificate what he thinks the meaning is nor try to impose a single meaning upon all members of the class. Opportunity for a sharing of views will be given. Ultimately the pupil can be given the latitude to decide upon the final impression that the book has made upon his consciousness.

V. THE CENTRALITY OF THE TEXT

A further value of stories lies in their power to promote a child's language development. Words influence the reader. Intimate contact with words is inescapable and a nicer appreciation of the beauty of words ought to result from reading. Jack Ousbey convincingly explains how a worthwhile story gives children

> an opportunity to make sense of the constantly changing relationship between words and facts, between words and meanings. The living language of a story is accessible, persuasive, variable and compelling in its direct influence (Hoffman, M., 1982, p85).

For Aiden Chambers too "the old magic of the poets and storytellers" is their "power to bring an experience back to life through words" (Chambers, A., 1973, p 9). This criterion is also crucial. Because words are so important and their power so impressive, the text must be central to all activities.

The potency of the story must be encountered by the child and the creative energy of the words experienced and appreciated. The children must understand <u>the book</u>. Only a constant return to the text will achieve maximum benefit. If it is only a starting point for the pursuit of peripheral matters, then the text is being abused and the activity becomes questionable. A book should not be primarily used in the reading lesson for forays into other fields, e.g. history. (Fiction can provide valuable insights to bolster learning in other subjects if used wisely.) In the literature class <u>Tom Sawyer</u> should not be used to describe the living circumstances of the white American child in the mid-nineteenth century. Such an issue circumvents the heart of the story.

Educators writing about creative project work connected with novels stress that the "main reference point" is the text (Cheetham, J., 1976). Children, in commenting on project work, confirm this truth. "Having a topic based on a book is a very good idea. I thought the book seemed more interesting by working on it" (Hoffman, M., 1982, p85). We are weakening our efforts at education through literature if we ignore this criterion when devising follow-up activities. It is so simple to implement. During the school project (See Chapter Six) pupils were reminded to consult the book when stuck for an answer.

There is another reason for the text to be kept at the heart of activities. The child's response has been stressed as a major consideration when examining a book. An over-emphasis on personal responses and ideas can lead dangerously to mere re-telling of personal anecdotes during discussion (Protherough, R., 1983). The teacher should prevent the child from rocketing off at tangents into excitingly interesting but less profitable pursuits. Returning to the text provides the necessary restraint. Frank Whitehead's remarks give the proper perspective on how reading response should operate.

> What we surely want above all is that our pupils should be able to make a thoroughgoing imaginative entry into the experience of the novel or story, ... and at the same time that the experience of the story which they thus create for themselves *should be controlled, firmly and sensitively, by the actual words the writer has used* (1966, p80, my italics).

VI. ENJOYMENT

No-one will contest the fact that literature should be enjoyed. Perhaps it is the supreme benefit from curling up with a story, whether a classic or Mills and Boone. Certainly teachers have revealed that they regard deriving pleasure as the major objective for teaching literature (Yorke, M., 1979). If reading needed justification, one need not look further than enjoyment. Most people would prefer eating pudding rather than porridge, and literature can be the dessert in one's life because of its propensity to provide pleasure and satisfaction of a distinctive nature. Even if children gain few

or none of the benefits referred to earlier, it is enough for them to have enjoyed a book. Enjoyment has its own indefinable reward. It need hardly be said that any project associated with literature should be enjoyed by the pupils as much as the story delighted them. To prescribe activities which were seen as a punishment rather than a delight would be grossly counter-productive.

I have argued that reading, especially sharing a book with others, has many opportunities for personal improvement. How are all these advantages to be achieved by pupils without suffering burn-out? How can the teacher avoid overloading the pupils with the work proving counter-productive to the enthusiasm and creativity of the pupils? A guiding principle is needed when the zealous teacher might be inspired to squeeze the last drop of profit from a book. Caldwell Cook gives sound advice. The teacher's task is "making pleasurable pursuits profitable". The order of priority is clear. The primary school reading teacher must think of pleasurable activities for the class to follow, being guided both consciously and unconsciously by the other relevant standards. Profit must be added to the pleasure. To take what is a justifiable aim, e.g. personal growth, and then try to add pleasure to taste can be dangerous. The seasoning can all too easily be insufficient. Delight is the accomplice of true learning. The ecstasy of a new experience has to sweep all else with it. Benefit follows in the wake. The inseparability of enjoyment and educational worth is apparent in Dryden's dictum "Poesy only instructs as it delights". Learning is facilitated when enjoyment is present. Pupils confirm this truth. When asked for comment on the continuance of a reading project, the answer was "Yes! Because it's much more interesting, and even if we don't notice it we are learning whereas if we are given a book with spellings, verbs, vowels, nouns and suchlike, it seems hard work and it doesn't sink in as well" (Baber, J., 1972, p113).

Is any further confirmation needed? Let it be this: "The man who thoroughly enjoys what he reads or does ... profits to the full" (Henry Miller from Books in My Life).

These criteria have been based on the assumption that activities associated with a book should provide similar qualitative benefit for a child as the original encounter with the story, (i.e. at the reading stage). The list appears formidable, prompting the exasperated question from an overworked but keen teacher: How do I achieve all that? Not all these criteria can necessarily be met each time a book is shared by a class. They are counsels of excellence, but the teacher should not become alarmed. These standards are guidelines for mutual profit, not the laws of the Medes and Persians. Above all, a rigid literature programme with inflexible objectives must never be devised around them for use in the primary school.

Knowing that literature can promote a child's mental, moral and emotional growth, the teacher can devise imaginative and pleasurable activities to explore the author's meaning through a close examination of the text. Through the class discussions and exercises, the child will be able to express insights and gain increased understanding of human nature. Contentment for all concerned, pupils and teacher, will come from the shared experience. However, there are further pre-conditions for the successful use of literature in the classroom. These will emerge as the role of the teacher and the handling of the reading are considered.

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CHAPTER FOUR: PRE-CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL EXPLORATION

I. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

It cannot be denied; the responsibility for failure or success in using literature rests upon the teacher. He is the vital constituent and the qualities he brings to the task are crucial. On this issue the major educational reports which touch on literature teaching in Britain are unanimous (Newbolt, H., 1921, par. 89; Plowden, B., 1966, paras. 596-599; Bullock, A., 1975, par. 93). Educational opinion has not changed over half a century. Even the modern marvel, the computer, will never be able to replace the teacher in looking at literature. Computers will never have the ability to respond imaginatively to the nuances of words; nor be able to discuss sensitively issues of personal significance arising from any reading. Only the teacher can provide an individual touch. What then must the teacher bring to the important task of guiding the responses of the pupils?

A. THE TEACHER'S PERSONAL PREPARATION

Firstly, the teacher must have an infectious enthusiasm for books which children can catch from him. He cannot inspire them to scale heights which he has not attained himself. A love for books cannot be taught, only caught from a lover of literature and then confirmed to be true through personal experience. When it comes to imparting a lasting interest in books, the Plowden Report believes that "the teacher's knowledge and enthusiasm" help to initiate and sustain the momentum (Plowden, B., 1966, par. 593). The teacher must be an example through his exuberant interest in books. The consequences may not always become immediately apparent. Whatever adult critics have thought of the quality of Roald Dahl's writings, his stories have been joyfully received by children. His delight in books stems from his primary school days when a woman, Mrs. O'Connor, adeptly communicated her love of literature to a hall full of boys on a Saturday morning! She did not read the latest in children's stories as is recommended now. Her course consisted

of the literary heavyweights from A.D. 597 to the nineteenth century which for Dahl was an experience "that came very close to ecstasy". The secret? Her competence as a teacher and an intense affection for literature.

The beneficial effect of a teacher's personality and approach emerges in E. Blishen's recollection of the man who gave to him both "pleasure" in and "understanding" of books. This teacher (who had many educational shortcomings) was "an avid untidy reader of novels, who fell helplessly in love with some and was helplessly scornful of others" (Blishen, E., 1972). Children ought to see the teacher's honesty too. There must be no false declaration of admiration for all literature. It can be instructive to discuss that which is not enjoyed personally. Nevertheless, the light of love must burn brightly. My own experience at university confirms this truth for me. Chaucer lived because of the lively ministrations of a diminutive lecturer. Other poetry died painfully because an expert in the field lacked the personality to communicate its vibrancy and vitality.

A lack of theoretical knowledge about general literature is excusable in a teacher in the primary school; a shortage of enthusiasm for books is a capital offence. To start with it need only be "simply delighting in the existence of literature" (Blishen, E., 1970, p65). A further dimension can be added later as the teacher comes to "enjoy the book at his own level as an adult reader" (Jackson, D., 1982a, p61). A passion for books will ensure their acceptance even by recalcitrant classes and will facilitate the achievement of some of the desirable goals already established. Teachers need to be told this truth constantly. "Before they are anything else, our pupils are people, and what engages them, *emotionally and intellectually, is* not the relevance of their courses, but *the enthusiasm of their teachers*"(Kefford, R.E., 1974, p125, my italics).

The teacher's personal preparation involves accepting certain other attitudes as permanent features of life. R. Lewis (1975) stresses that the teacher is a "learner" at the same time as being a guide. The teacher's own understanding is important because "*the child's grasp of the material before him depends very largely upon the quality and depth of the teacher's re-creation of it* in his own life and imagination" (Quoted by Lewis, R., 1975, p176, my italics). Humility to assume the role of student will ensure an improved understanding of the book for the child. The teacher must accept the discipline of being instructed and inspired afresh each time a novel is read as preparation for class discussion. Relying upon constant personal renewal, the teacher is better equipped to play certain roles. These include those of being a planner, a selector, a con-man and an entertainer.

B. THE TEACHER AS A PLANNER

Oddly enough the teacher's key role in exploring literature often relegates him to background planning rather than promoting him to the forefront of classroom operations. The earlier look at a reader's response to a text revealed the interactive nature of response as each reader fashions in the imagination a personalised interpretation of the meaning. Responding involves the reader in making meaning in a number of creative ways. What are the implications for the teacher as planner? Because of the diversity of interpretation and viewpoint, greater attention must be devoted to planning activities which will provide for the expression of the pupils' ideas. Full use needs to be made of the opportunities provided by the text for analogising and prediction. Only imaginative planning will enable justice to be done. Thus response theory by emphasizing pupil activity encourages the teacher to adopt a hands-off policy with confidence knowing that so much is happening. Planning safeguards these truths.

If planning is neglected, then the teacher is likely to dominate with his point of view, because he has nothing else in mind. Extensive planning can assist the teacher to avoid monopolising the shared experience. Pupils must develop their own perspectives. The teacher has to create those conditions conducive to extending insight. Discerning questioning is an essential technique. The questions designed to stimulate discussion and debate should be planned. Thoughtful planning built upon the basis of the teacher's knowledge of the particular needs of his pupils and the peculiar social circumstances of his own classroom will result in a project being designed for them. A haphazard approach will invariably lead to the teacher doing most of the talking and ignoring the cherished goal of literature teaching - the expression of personal ideas. C. Huck (1978) outlines the advantages of extensive planning. "The more planning that is done to discover all the possibilities in a book, the freer the teacher will be to follow children's interests and extend their understanding." (Huck, C., 1978, p717).

The teacher needs a delicate sense of equilibrium as he juggles with conflicting factors. As the Bullock Report advises, the teacher has to "guide, but he will do this by devising situations which lead the pupils to their own insight" (Bullock, A., 1975, par. 9.15). Careful planning can also avoid the danger at the other extreme: winding up an activity and then withdrawing. The teacher remains an integral part of the process. He must plan to participate in the shared exploration at judiciously chosen moments.

It was argued earlier that the primary school teacher can lay the foundations for an improved appreciation of literature. Once again, only planning will provide for the early acquaintance with sound ways of reflecting upon literature. Knowing the principles that can be used, the teacher must incorporate them (mindful of all other guidelines) into the class programme. (See Chapter Six for practical examples.) The teacher's role is thus to give "repeated guidance" so that "the principles underlying the guided experiences

will be internalized, generalised, and applied to future reading experiences of the child's own choosing" (Johnson, T.D., 1979, p.35).

In summary, planning enables the teacher to achieve the most profitable educational goals. Enthusiasm without structure or direction can lead very quickly to spurious thought and activity. Interestingly, (as C. Huck confirms above) thorough planning gives liberty in the classroom rather than bringing restriction.

C. THE TEACHER AS SELECTOR

The planning and selection roles are closely related. While planning the overall attack on the book, the teacher has to select from his options at a number of points. The primary selection involves the choice of a suitable novel (considered later). Having obtained a thorough knowledge of the book through reading it, the teacher has to select the main aims. Further selection singles out significant passages, including relevant questions, for class discussion. From the wide range of possible activities allowing for pupil expression, a selection of the most appropriate ones has to be made. Selection presupposes that the selector has a thorough knowledge of all the alternatives. The teacher is responsible for acquainting himself with the available options as part of his personal preparation.

Discussion has been singled out as the most obviously useful method in exploring a novel. Discussion should largely relate to the text. As it is usually impossible to discuss the whole book in detail - and highly undesirable in the primary school - the salient passages need to be chosen for closer class attention. How do we recognise these passages? F. Whitehead (1966) offers some wise guidelines. A suitable passage should "make a powerful initial impact" upon the children while arousing their interest for further study. As such depths of meaning which can be uncovered must be present. The discovery will give commensurate satisfaction to the pupils for their efforts

at understanding it. Such passages will also contribute to the main theme of the book. His reminder that "the highest degree of selectivity will in general be needed with the younger and with the less able forms" is so relevant for the primary school teacher (Whitehead, F., 1966 pp 70 & 75). One of the main advantages of selection recognised by Whitehead (and others) is that the teacher can deal with difficult passages that the child could not handle alone. Profit and enjoyment will follow the implementation of these suggestions.

D. THE TEACHER AS CONFIDENCE TRICKSTER AND ENTERTAINER

The teacher needs the subtlety akin to that of the serpent in Eden. The aims of education can be painlessly achieved if the children can be tricked into enjoying themselves so much that they do not notice that they are learning. The ultimate deception occurs when pupils wink at one another signalling that they feel that work has been avoided. Most teachers would be happier to hear it phrased more formally. "Much of the teacher's ingenuity and expertise has to go into devising acceptable incentives for this more careful attention to meanings and to the words through which the meanings are conveyed" (Whitehead, F., 1966, p.72). Whitehead, in fact, even calls the acceptable activities "dodges".

Being a con-man sounds somewhat disreputable, so it may be more appealing to be known as an entertainer. Most teachers would agree that attractive teaching includes a measure of showmanship. Literature, because it is so closely allied to life and thus to drama, requires more big-top manners than other subjects. Let one example be taken. Reading aloud to a class will involve more than an occasional modulation of the voice. The whole gamut of sounds will be employed from a whisper to a bellow, from a sob to a belly-laugh. Gestures will emphasize emotions; facial expressions will alter, portraying not only the feelings of the fictional characters but also revealing the attitude of

the reader. The teacher reading aloud needs to have the skills of a one-man entertainer. By such means the fellowship experience will truly become memorable. There is a proviso. No matter what brilliant histrionic skills are employed, the prime aim is always to illuminate the text and not to distract attention from it. M. Paffard (1978) sees the literature teacher's roles including those of "producer, public reader, performer, impresario". As impresario "his skill lies in capturing an audience and getting them alert, expectant, agog to share, not passively, in the performance" (Paffard, M., 1978, p81).

In conclusion, what then is the teacher's task? It is quite simply to introduce books to children with great fervour. Although he is there as a guide who instructs, directs and feeds in ideas after planning, he also needs to withdraw at times to let the book work its own magic. Whatever methods are used to look at books, the vital ingredient is the teacher's exuberant enthusiasm. St. Paul's words (adapted) say it all. "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not enthusiasm, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal".

II. THE HANDLING OF THE READING

In creating a fellowship experience around a story, the manner in which the initial reading is done is crucial. It is highly desirable that the teacher should read the entire story (or at least most of it) aloud to the class. The importance attached by educators to the teacher reading a story aloud to a class is striking. The viewpoint is by no means only a modern one having prevailed from at least the time of the Newbolt Report (Newbolt, A., 1921, par. 173). However, it is the superlatives used that give prominence to the idea. In 1929 it was stated by the Board of Education in the Handbook of Suggestions for elementary schools that "Reading aloud is *the most potent means* which a teacher possesses for awakening in his scholars an appreciation of literature" (Quoted by McKellar, D., 1983, p30, my italics).

Edward Blishen writing in 1970 regards reading aloud as "one of the greatest skills" that teachers need to develop and concludes:
"The simple fact is that reading aloud is *of the utmost importance* - a truth that through its very simplicity and obviousness is sometimes in danger of being forgotten" (Blishen, E., 1970, p67, my italics).

Why then is reading aloud so important to the fellowship experience? What is its relevance to the teacher wanting to explore a novel in the primary school? (Refer to McKellar, D., 1983; Trelease, J., 1984 for comprehensive coverage of the advantages of reading aloud.) Obviously reading aloud will greatly improve the quality of the shared experience. Whether the pupils are only listening to the teacher or both listening and following in their own copies, the resulting sense of community is great. The story, both its sound and meaning, enfolds the participants. To a librarian it is a "unifying" experience to read aloud even to children of differing reading abilities". (Moss, E., 1982). To others tranquility and trust can enter the class through the "powerful bond" created by reading aloud.

> The bond of mutual enjoyment that is established between teacher and class during storytime pervades their relationship throughout the day. As a teacher reveals her understanding and sympathy with the plights of fictional characters, she also reveals her potential of understanding and sympathy for the plights of the children in her class. As she reveals her delight in a vivid phrase or a fresh bit of imagery, she is also revealing something very personal about herself. It is an act of trust to which children are very responsive (Arbuthnot, M., Sutherland, Z., quoted by McKellar, D., 1983, pp 69-70).

The closeness engendered by being read aloud to is a tremendous emotional security for the child. It was explained in the quotation above and emerges clearly as an advantage in the exhortation of Trelease to parents to read to their children (Trelease, J., 1984). Even if there were no other benefit in reading aloud, it would be worthwhile just for the unity inherent in sharing a common experience: imaginative involvement in a story.

Reading aloud stimulates many of those elements which have already been attested (in Chapter Three) as being vital parts of the whole approach especially the awakening of the imagination and the emotions (McKellar, D., 1983; Trelease, J., 1984). "The web of enchantment" (to use McKellar's phrase) is spun through reading aloud. Furthermore, the teacher is enabled to move easily into accompanying activities and reading aloud would certainly facilitate discussion. Reading aloud is an integral part of using literature (McKellar, D., 1983; Seely ,J 1982b). Earlier in this dissertation it was noted that reading boosted the child's overall language development. A similar benefit is claimed for reading aloud (Huck, C., 1978; Trelease, J.,1984). It also reinforces the child's ability to write (Moss, E., 1982; Trelease, J., 1984). This is a desirable side-effect, if children are encouraged to write after reading. In addition, the child's own reading is improved by listening to the example set by the teacher (Plowden, B., 1966; Whitehead, F., 1966). This latter factor is significant in the primary school when a child's reading ability is still in the formative stages. It provides an incentive for the teacher to read aloud and not rely more exclusively on silent reading. Reading aloud then fulfills more valuable educational functions than at first thought or even imagined. All combine to entrench firmly the place of reading aloud while a class and teacher together share a book.

It was stressed in Chapter Three that pupils should derive maximum pleasure from both the reading and the accompanying activities. Once again reading aloud can inspire children to love books and perceive the many pleasures to be found in reading. There are two witnesses to this truth (Plowden, B., 1966; Trelease, J., 1984). Just to achieve this single goal is good enough reason to read aloud, but the basic delight in books will lead easily to further thinking and talking about them. (My own interest in history resulting in a History Honours degree stemmed from an inspired history

teacher who read history aloud.) All these reasons are sufficient theoretical warrant to read aloud. The most compelling justification comes from the commendation of practising teachers who attest to reading aloud being an integral and desirable part of their literature programmes. (Barker, J., p88; Jackson, D., p58; Knight, H., p73; Morris, J., p127; Ousbey, J., p85; Seely , J., p70; page numbers all refer to Hoffman, M., 1982).

The reading aloud can be done in a variety of ways but the cardinal feature is clear: complete the reading as soon as possible. This emerges from a survey of the teachers acknowledged above; one of the advantages being the maintenance of continuity. (Jackson, D., 1982a). Obviously the teacher determines what is best for his own class and teaching circumstances. Whatever decisions are made, the freshness of the story must always be retained. Hence, the need for a fairly rapid reading.

There can be a combination of silent reading by the pupils with the teacher reading key passages aloud (Seely , J., 1982b). I foresee a problem here. The reading speeds in a class vary enormously. The better readers will have to be restrained in order for the plodders to keep abreast. Practical problems of class control can then arise. The speedy readers will also have to agree not to complete the book ahead of the class if that is deemed undesirable. Discussion is facilitated if the passage has just been read in class by all concerned and this is perhaps the most cogent reason for reading the major part or all the book aloud. The length of the average novel suitable for the primary school will allow easily for the reading of the whole book aloud. Some teachers favour re-reading certain chapters so that vital ideas are fully grasped (Cheetham, J., 1976). One teacher repeated a chapter before reading a new one at each reading session. She explains the advantages: "The children liked to hear a chapter again. It re-set the scene before the next episode: they had a further insight into the mysterious nature of the story..." (Quoted by Ousbey, J., 1982, p85).

Re-reading, I feel, needs to be used with great care lest it lead to boredom through slowing down the pace of the story. This technique should be employed only when really necessary for a fuller understanding. The usual excited interest of a child in a story must be encouraged by the reading, not restricted.

Reading aloud is thus not an optional extra but one of the pre-requisites for a successful look at a book. Once again the teacher is responsible, if the class is going to thrive on their diet of stories.

III. GOOD, BETTER - THE BEST: The Search for the Desirable Book

A. MUSINGS ON GUIDELINES

If the fellowship around a book is to satisfy, then all the participants must enjoy reading it for one reason or another. The teacher has to select carefully as the book should also provide a basis for meeting the criteria discussed in Chapter Three. Poor book choice may limit the sharing or even doom it to fail. A shallow story has little power to generate fruitful discussion. Possessing depth either in characterisation or theme, the book will stimulate both thoughts and emotions and give the reader a reservoir of experience which can be tapped during the discussion. The major considerations are thus applicable from the book selection stage to the completion of the project: community feeling and group activity must be ensured.

In addition to promoting sharing, the teacher also needs to examine the novel to ascertain the topics which will both provoke and satisfy the mental probing and emotional desires of the class. Issues should tease the readers into reflection about life in all its complexity: the problems, idiosyncrasies and ironies that make the fabric of human existence. Careful vetting of the emotional impact of the book needs to take place to shield the child from undesirable experiences (Protherough, R., 1983) or those which might be inappropriate for the particular age or class (Trelease, J., 1984).

Even books with questionable content can provide emotional and social satisfaction for groups of pupils with particular needs (Trelease, J., 1984). The emotionally sound book will enable the reader to enter, share both the joys and the sorrows, and allow him to leave changed but unscathed.

The teacher also has to examine the morality portrayed in the story. A morality there must be whether positive or destructive of existing norms. Thoughtful consideration of moral alternatives should result from the reading. The teacher has to ask whether the book can be used to analyse ideas critically; be they notions of courage or cowardice. In order to avoid a pedantic didacticism, the book should "set in action truths worthy of lasting forever, and of inspiring one's whole inner life" (Hazard, P., 1944, p44). I endorse this thought of an inspirational morality being added to the more reasoned approach. Often more can be achieved in education through inspiration than through intellectual calculation - especially in the primary school. Once again the imagination is close at hand.

The call for relevance in children's books has lead to an insistence that "a communication must take place which is relevant to the actualities of living" (Quoted by Driver, C.J., 1976, p165). The imperative tone of "must" is questionable. While I have constantly referred to the need for literature to be related to life, the harsh and miserable realities should not have to be considered each time reading takes place. An overemphasis on the realities of life can lead to depression. The daily newspapers give emotional indigestion with their glut of the sordid realities of life. The child can easily get enough of the "actualities of living". Books give inner delight while providing insights into life. The call of children is still "Give us books, ... give us wings" (Hazard, P., 1944, p4). Books uplift the soul so that "old men [can] dream dreams" and "young men [can] see visions" (Joel 2:28).

For the sake of primary school children let teachers be dreamers rather than realists. The teacher needs to try to balance these conflicting claims when selecting a book for class use so that the child can "return from his imaginative journey with some addition to his understanding of men's motives and behaviour, some education of his emotions" (Quoted by Whitehead, F., 1966, p55).

This dissertation is not the place for an exhaustive look at the topic of book selection for class use. (R. Protherough (1983) has a compact, lucid and educationally useful account of the factors associated with book selection in Chapter Ten.) I want to highlight some of the compulsory considerations before examining briefly some of the controversial issues.

B. SOME SPECIFIC COMMANDMENTS

(i) IMAGINATIVE EXPERIENCE MUST BE DOMINANT

It emerged earlier that the imagination is vitally active in the reader's response to a text. Following that was an insistence that follow-up activities should extend the imaginative process already begun. Therefore, a suitable text will deal imaginatively with any topic or situation. "Imaginative experience" is the distinctive feature in the Schools Council Research project's differentiation between "quality" and "non-quality" literature. "Quality" literature was a book

> in which the involvement of the writer with his subject matter and his audience has been such as *to generate a texture of imaginative experience which rises above the merely routine and derivative.* ...[and pupils were] likely to *take from it some imaginative experience valuable to them at their own level,* over and above the mere practice of reading skills (Whitehead, F., 1974, pp21-22, my italics).

When it comes to appreciating literature, the imagination operates to extend each person's perceptions. The feelings and thoughts of a response often remain unarticulated deep within the recesses of a person's being. Only gradually may these hidden glimmerings of truth be brought to the surface

for closer conscious scrutiny. This is the immense value of literature as it allows these imaginative forays to take place within, uninhibited by external influences. The aesthetic sense assists the imagination, and the interplay leads to intense personal pleasure while reading. Paul Hazard says it so magnificently in this definition of a worthwhile book.

> I like books that remain faithful to the very essence of art; namely, those that offer to children an intuitive and direct way of knowledge, a simple beauty capable of being perceived immediately, arousing in their souls a vibration which will endure all their lives (Hazard, P., 1944, p42).

All this can only occur if the imagination is operational.

The current call for relevance in children's books attacks this principle. It has been recognised that the modern novels which concentrate on social and cultural realism are enemies of the imagination (Driver, C.J., 1976). This fact seems to be ignored by the voices demanding greater social realism. What cannot be ignored are the people associated with the education of the child who rate imaginative literature highly (Driver, C.J., 1976; Trelease, J., 1984; Tucker, N., 1976; Jones, A. & Buttrey, J., 1970). An integral part of the reader's imaginative involvement concerns the background atmosphere of the story. As C.S. Lewis points out in his essay On Stories, the true pleasure for him lay in the atmosphere and background to the action, not in the rapid succession of events, exciting as the incidents might have been. It is the imaginative mind which seeks such qualitative satisfaction. Not all books will provide this type of deep delight prompted by fervent imaginative involvement. The teacher must find those stories which do.

(ii) THE TEACHER MUST ENJOY THE BOOK

The second commandment is the easiest for the teacher to observe: Choose a book which you like. All will fail if the teacher shows little enthusiasm for the title being read. The planning will be shoddy and the activities unimaginative, because the teacher's imagination will not have been

stirred. Excitement in the teacher will be reflected in all that he does and the class will be similarly inspired. An obvious delight will hide lapses in planning. One of the implications is that the teacher has to read children's books extensively in order to encounter those which he finds personally appealing. This search for the most delightful and useful is ongoing as the flood of new titles necessitates constant reading. However, it is a task with great rewards.

This pre-requisite for success is recognised as important for reading books aloud (Trelease, J., 1984), for group study of a text (Calthrop, K., 1973), for handling stories in the primary school (Plowden, B., 1966) and in book selection (Jones, A. & Buttrey, J., 1970). The following extract in examining selection discusses the elements of the teacher's pleasure in terms that subscribe fully to the central thoughts of this dissertation.

> We have to recall that in judging a book, we are essentially judging the experience of reading it. If the teacher's response is unfavourable, then it is hard to see how she or he can *share* an enjoyable experience, one of *mutual pleasure* with children, however enthusiastic they may be ... Of course, a teacher's response is likely to be *different* from children's, but the sense of pleasure, of a worth-while experience, in engaging with a good children's novel should be common, though differently formulated. (Protherough, R., 1983, p151).

(iii). THE BOOK MUST BE MATCHED TO THE CLASS

The book must possess as great an appeal for the hearts and interests of the class as it does for the teacher. Only then will the joint exploration be mutually satisfying. It would be suicidal to read a pony story (of the type loved by girls) to a class of rugby-mad Std.4 boys. Because the teacher has the best detailed knowledge of the type of book which would either attract or repel the class, he must carefully match the book to the class. The same novel could easily evoke opposite reactions from two classes in the same school. Cognisance must be taken of the differing personalities and interests of the pupils. Acknowledging the heterogeneous nature of the class does complicate book selection, but the obstacles are not insuperable, only an incentive to look further afield.

The simplest way of framing this commandment might be in this form: select the book you hope the children will enjoy most. While appearing easy to obey, the pitfalls caused by the diversity of the pupils' response to literature cannot be ignored. "Faced by the enormous variety of individual response, teachers should perhaps not build too much on the anticipated popularity of a particular topic or theme as a criterion for selection" (Protherough, R., 1983, p153).

While this warning is appropriate, more needs to be said. If the interests of the class are considered important, then what they enjoy reading should receive prominent recognition. I feel that Roald Dahl is closer to the truth when he defines "worth-while children's books" as having these characteristics' "(i) *children must love them, and succeeding generations of children must love them* (ii) they must be excellent both in content and style." (Houghton-Hawsksley, H., 1983c, p3, my italics). The former part of his statement needs no elucidation. Delight remains an essential feature of any type of look at a book whether personal or public. If the teacher remains concerned that the quality of the books children enjoy is sometimes suspect, then let the latter part of the definition be a guide.

R.E. Kefford makes the point rather too bluntly that individual differences need to be recognised. "Fundamentally, the pupil we teach is an individual, and no-one, not even his teacher, can decide what is relevant for him, or relevant to his needs" (Kefford, R.E., 1974, p125). Unfortunately, no-one else is qualified to make the choice for the pupil. The teacher is compelled to select a suitable novel while trying to recognise the pupils' needs and interests. An attempt has to be made to reconcile all the conflicting factors. There is one consolation. More than enough great children's books exist to cater for all tastes. Discover them!.

(iv). THE BOOK SHOULD EXTEND THE CHILD'S KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF LIFE

Any activity, if it is to be called educational, should extend the child's mental, emotional and imaginative horizons. The teacher is not only an entertainer. While the role of enjoyment has been stressed, so much can be done to enlarge the child's experience of life through a meaningful story. In any one year, a class may have 5 - 6 books read aloud to them, but there is insufficient time for more than 2 books to be shared by means of joint exploration. Thus there is motivation to select novels of worth which grant opportunity for reflection upon the puzzles of life and for re-creating imaginatively the circumstances of others. The literary experience is a powerful instructor about life.

A major advantage in group attention to a text is that it enables the teacher to handle difficult stories that children could not comprehend fully on their own (Plowden, B., 1966). In discussing perplexing stories the teacher can thereby add to the child's understanding of life, especially the problem areas like death and relationships. When selecting a book, all the teachers in Calthrop's survey "considered it important" as a criterion that life perceptions should be enlarged through its use (1974). I love the way in which this teacher expresses her thoughts which correspond closely with the sentiments of Jill Baber (1972) about her reasons for selecting certain books.

> You should never teach within the children's experience. We tend to be afraid that children can't appreciate beyond their own experience. I've never found this with literature, drama, or poetry - they can appreciate the best. We wanted *something that took children away completely from their mundane ideas of life - so we gave them something that transcends the boundaries of life*. I was determined that they were to have the fascination of the mystic everlasting quality of the book (Calthrop,K., 1974, pp 12-13, my italics).

I am fully persuaded.

Although other standards e.g. matters of style and aesthetic appeal can also be applied to the book selection process, the four above taken with the introductory musings are sufficient. A satisfying group journey through the book

will result. It is unnecessary to consider the detailed criteria for "great" literature too closely when selecting a book for use in the primary school. A classic by world standards may not suit local conditions. Conversely, teacher enthusiasm may lead to the unexpected succeeding; e.g. A teacher with a single abridged copy of Ivanhoe encouraged a prodigious amount of work from children of eight to nine years old (Cheetham, J., 1976).

C. SOME PROBLEM AREAS

There are some controversial issues which complicate the selection of suitable material for class use. Relevance has become the slogan in a call for literature to be socially and culturally pertinent to pupils' lives. In a related development, the major social pre-occupations of society have become issues in children's literature. Thus children's stories are vetted for the presence of race, sex or class discrimination and rejected accordingly. Then too the questions relating to violence or sexual situations ask for answers. How does the teacher find a way through the morass?

(i). RELEVANCE

The call for literature which is socially and culturally relevant to dominate a child's literary education has been largely rejected for a number of reasons. Relying on relevant material only, often means that second-rate literature is chosen for class use and the excellent ignored (Hollingworth, B., 1973; Kefford, R.E., 1974). It can also mean cultural restriction as a pupil never sees beyond his own cultural boundaries (Hollingworth, B., 1973). Another danger is that the teacher may under the guise of relevance impose his own prejudices on the pupils (Driver, C.J., 1976). Ultimately, enjoyment will diminish as education falls increasingly into the utilitarian trap (Hollingworth, B., 1973). Practically, too much relevance is very restrictive. Should children in this country only read about South African schoolboy capers? I know of no local equivalent of the William series. The humorous escapades

of Tyke Tyler can be appreciated by South African pupils despite the context being a foreign (British) school system. Relevance then has its deficiencies as a major criterion. Nevertheless, the principle should be borne in mind as one of many useful guidelines.

(ii). SEX, RACE AND CLASS DISCRIMINATION

Should all books with an abhorrent bias in these three areas be removed from the school milieu? While some would reply in the affirmative, the answer seems to lie in critical, evaluative teaching when such issues are encountered (Jeffcoate, R., 1982; Protherough, R., 1983). The motive behind the exposure of these evils and an insistence upon a more truthful portrayal of reality is "to increase the range of options available to children in their literature" (Quoted by Jeffcoate, R., p24). Now this is a seemingly noble motive and has a place, if seen as a corrective notion. It should never be dominant. Protherough (1983) rejects the desire to remove all literature which may smack of sexist, racist or class discrimination because education becomes "propagandist" with the insistence that certain ideas should be acquired and other knowledge avoided. The wise teacher will avoid the extremes while being aware of these issues.

Jeffcoate's advice runs as follows'

> One thing everyone is agreed about is that the most important positive action teachers can take is to broaden the base of the literature programmes they devise for their pupils in order to draw on a wider range of cultural sources and to represent other races and disadvantaged groups prominently, accurately and in a diversity of situations and roles (Jeffcoate, R., 1982, p27).

The statement has an emphatic note which I dislike. Why should only certain groups in society i.e. "other races and disadvantaged groups" be given prominence? Understanding all groups is important for a balanced viewpoint to result. Once again, this guideline needs to be regarded as optional when selecting books, and not obligatory especially for the primary school context.

While it may be argued that the South African child has a dire need for training in racial awareness, the chances are great that the educational opportunities presented by an appropriate novel would be abused. Fervour of either a conservative or liberal nature would result in objectivity being lost. Reasoned evaluation can so easily become "political" preaching.

(iii). INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL THEMES

How does the teacher react to these socially relevant themes in literature? A publisher's criteria may be helpful. The incidents should be "appropriate and meaningful to the children for whom [they are] intended." He continues:

> As to being meaningful, it's my firm belief that controversial issues *should* be depicted in books for young people, with all the details of language and description to make them convincing - but only if they and the books that feature them will meaningfully extend the perception and understanding of their readers (Giblin, J.C., 1977, p125).

When it comes to these two issues, common sense should prevail. Most sexual themes will not be "appropriate" or "meaningful" for the primary school child. T.V. violence bombards the child each day with intense and gory realism. Why pursue the same matters in school? Let the children rise above the depressing circumstances of life. The four commandments outlined earlier are far more pertinent criteria for selecting profitable books than appeals for children to be fed on a diet heavily laced with social and cultural relevance. Literary heartburn may result.

D. A FINAL WORD

In summary, what book ought the teacher to select? Only the very best to which his pupils can respond with insight and enjoyment. M. Yorke (1979) discusses what constitutes the best and provides a motivation for pursuing excellence. Both mediocre and "quality" literature have similar content, e.g. "human relationships, God, death, sibling rivalry, love, aggression ... but the difference in merit lies in the way these subjects are handled". He continues:

> We should present the best, not because it is more entertaining or will give more 'pleasure' (though it might), but because the best deals with these developmental crises and needs more responsibly, offers less glib and unreal 'solutions', uses more exact and delicate language, presents a committed personal viewpoint which must be responded to, and examines the commonplace with a critical eye: in short the best is ego-building and forms a basis on which further reading (and living!) may be built up to the most demanding levels of maturity an individual is capable of (Yorke, M., 1979, p24).

His reasons are overwhelmingly impressive; the conclusion is simple - seek the finest. Only such a book will promote an enjoyably successful exploration.

IV. PROVIDING AN AUDIENCE

A fourth factor greatly assists the literature project. The children's response and participation can be more highly motivated if they are aware of a potential audience. A teacher involved in the Helen Cresswell project described by Jack Ousbey felt that work of a "higher standard" than usual was prompted by the thought that the author was coming to examine their work. The advantage lies in the sense of purpose that the pupils acquire in writing for an audience outside the school milieu (Ousbey, J., 1982). In another project it was found that pupils polished their work because of the outside audience and, in fact, found a greater sense of enjoyment. Anticipating that a class from another school was going to vet their efforts, individual motivation was so high that pupils whose average effort at writing was one page produced stories of eight sides (Barker, J., 1982). These advantageous consequences ought to be sufficient to prompt any diligent teacher to consider similar projects. The potential audience is very wide and need not be restricted to classmates or even to fellow schoolmates. Considering South Africa's isolation from overseas authors, it is possible to capture an author's ear through a class letter. Again the teacher must select the audience which is best suited to the circumstances.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY - AN ASSESSMENT OF SOME METHODS AND APPROACHES

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CHAPTER FIVE: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY - An assessment of some methods and approaches for the classroom.

I. THE MARRIAGE OF PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

Ideas for handling literature in the classroom abound, but not all are suitable for application in the primary school classroom. Not all are educationally justifiable in terms of the acceptable criteria dealt with in Chapter Three. Furthermore, the response theory examined in Chapter Two encourages the teacher to formulate activities which extend the processes already operating within the reader while absorbed in the text.

The principles of those earlier chapters will be linked to classroom activities, thus confirming their suitability for use. This narrow focus will exclude detailed examination of how each method operates and of all the advantages involved. The following books may be consulted with profit for further practical advice: Hayhoe, M & Parker, S., 1984; Huck, C, 1978; Protherough, R., 1983; Thomas, R. & Perry, A., 1984. (This chapter was written before the new book by Benton, M.& Fox, G. became available in South Africa.)

A. SHARING

How can sufficient opportunity be given for the sharing of each pupil's response? The sharing commences (as noted earlier) with the story or parts of it being read aloud by the teacher. Competent pupils may be requested to read brief portions without any detriment to the enjoyment of the reader or the hearers. This is an invitation to pupils to participate and must never involve the whole class reading aloud in turn. The differing levels of reading ability would reduce the impact of the story and the appreciation of it by the class. The fellowship begun through reading aloud facilitates the discussion which may accompany or follow the reading.

Discussion gives great scope for swapping ideas and feelings. Sharing can be done in various ways: in pairs, in small groups and through whole class

discussions. The natural enthusiasm of the primary school child for relating his own thoughts, even to the entire class, needs to be nurtured. (This desire to share was most apparent in the empirical study conducted in a standard three class. Refer to Chapter Six.) An added advantage in the primary school, in the absence of widespread subject specialist teaching, is the rapport that exists between the class teacher and the pupils. The atmosphere of trust and loyalty develops easily because the whole school day is spent together. The primary teacher has a head start over the high school counterpart when it comes to promoting the correct milieu for sharing. The teacher, as Louise Rosenblatt (1970) notes, has to create the setting for encouraging spontaneous expression and the exchange of ideas. (Refer to Appendix A for practical pointers on teacher led discussion.)

Real enjoyment can arise during full class discussion through subtle teacher stimulation. When the class begins to accept too glibly the teacher's views, the stage is set for some lively argument. The teacher simply has to make an outrageous statement which is a patently distorted interpretation of the text. As the teacher expounds his views, the realization of being hoodwinked will start to dawn upon the class. Reactions will vary, but someone will invariably start to defend the truth. The battle will rage as the class rises to the task of convincing the teacher of the errors in his thoughts, especially if the teacher can appear to be sincere in espousing the provocative cause. This technique will succeed best where there is the openness mentioned above.

Work in pairs or small groups provides for maximum pupil participation and satisfaction. Even the diffident child can develop confidence in presenting his viewpoint in the small group context. It is the teachers' responsibility through thoughtful ingenuity to provide fruitful topics for talk. Re-telling parts of the story is an appropriate activity and especially applicable for re-capping for the inevitable absentees during the reading stage. Two pupils

could be asked to narrate in turn their version of the missed incidents. Because the two accounts are likely to differ, the significant differences can be discussed. In this way too individual responses can be promoted.

R. Protherough (1983) outlines some attractive ideas for paired talking. A pair combines to prepare and then re-tell part of the story but with a specific word limit. The imposition of a word limit means that incidents will have to be selected. Once again personal response while thinking about the text is encouraged. Similar profit arises from a variation involving re-telling from the perspective of one of the characters in the story. While one partner talks, the other may question about uncertainties. Furthermore pairs can discuss their own responses to a story through finding points of similarity and difference. The re-telling of a favourite incident would be very acceptable to a primary school child.

Small groups can operate in a number of fruitful ways. Limiting sharing to each group as all groups talk about a common topic with no report-back session is one way. After small group interaction, sharing can be by allowing group findings to be reported to the class. Then too "syndicated groups" can function (Hayhoe, M. & Parker, S., 1984) where each group discusses different topics. When the class is informed of each group's findings, the sharing contributes to the understanding of all children in the class.

Discussion can become pointless because of poor preparatory work by the teacher. Whichever way the teacher chooses to conduct discussion, the quality arising depends directly upon the teacher's input through open-ended questions and clear instructions. Ill-framed questions and badly formulated topics will cause discussion to degenerate into babbling. Sharing will be spurious through focus being lost. Peripheral or irrelevant ideas will be traded. Quality control in discussion remains the teacher's sole responsibility.

Sharing responses also takes place through the public display and recognition of work done. Bearing an audience in mind prompts avid attention to the task in hand. Basking in the satisfaction of work given open recognition, motivates improved activity in the future. Work of an artistic nature is displayed by clearing a pin-board at the back of the classroom. Written work, including poetry, can be displayed on boards, but that is a static mode. Written work, especially poetry, cries out to be read aloud to the class either by the teacher or the pupil author/poet. This is such a simple way of sharing. Reading pupil work aloud receives scant mention when literature teaching is discussed, yet it remains the easiest way of sharing responses. If the teacher encourages pupils to express their thoughts in writing, then it is a pity to incarcerate these ideas in an exercise book. Why restrict the circulation to the teacher only? Public revelation of private thoughts- with the writer's permission - can be so beneficial by stimulating further interaction and thinking. The reading aloud of written work is an essential component of sharing in fellowship around a text.

B. PROVIDING FOR PERSONAL RESPONSE

As has been seen in Chapter Two, the reader's background is in constant interaction with the text, creating new impressions. What means can be adopted for extending this transaction? Writing which is truly personal will allow all background factors: psychological, emotional and social to influence the response.

While these aspects will be prevalent even in a structured pupil response, there should be moments for completely free expression. An admirable way of doing this is to encourage pupils to keep a personal journal of their musing about the book during reading. There are no constraints. Anything may be recorded: likes, dislikes, thoughts, feelings, improvements, reactions to characters, related anecdotal memories. The response may vary from one word

to another novel. This writing should be impromptu but should include time deliberately set aside in school for the purpose. These jottings may be shared with the teacher or kept private according to the wishes of the pupil. The chances are great that meaningful poetry would blossom under these circumstances because of the personal impetus.

What are the advantages of such freedom?

> The ideal log enables its compiler to see how he or she has changed during encounters with a book, recognising how skills and attitudes have been challenged and have grown, seeing how sometimes a reader and a book fail to make a relationship and how sometimes they do (Hayhoe, M., & Parker, S., 1984, p21).

I do not expect a primary school child to develop all these mature perceptions. However, a start has to be made at some stage and the early cultivation of such a salutary habit will seldom go awry. For me the greatest advantages lie in the increased awareness that the reader acquires of the text and the inducement to reflect upon that specific reading experience. Any thought about a book is beneficial. If personal judgement is valued, then the following sentiments will be echoed. These are the words of Paul Francis in evaluating the written response of a pupil in a literature project (not a journal).

> She may or may not be right; what matters is that she is thinking, clearly and hard, and caring sufficiently to put over what she thinks with intelligence and feeling. And it is that process, surely, that we are after rather than a particular view ... (Protherough, R., 1983, p112).

I submit that such thinking will commence with keeping a journal of personal responses to books. Let the personality of the pupil be freed.

C. EMOTIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Part of a reader's response is to create an emotional link with characters in the story (see Chapter Two). This area of empathy is a harvest field ready for reaping during an encounter with a book. That children do feel with and for fictional characters, leads to a multitude of possibilities for expressive

writing. Instructions can be simply phrased. To use examples from Charlotte's Web by E.B. White: How would you have felt if you had been Wilbur a) when Charlotte died or b) when Zuckerman received the special award at the fair? This is the easiest way to extend an emotional response thereby making the experience in the story more personal. Because children are already entering the lives of the fictional characters and walking around in their shoes while reading, sound educational methods will enrich that response.

Pupils should also be encouraged to share some of their personal affective experiences which have acquired greater significance for them because of encountering similar issues in the text (see "analogising" in Chapter Two). The anecdotal approach, suitably suggested by the teacher and tailored by the text need not be ignored as a teaching method. A word of caution. The entirely peripheral experience must be excluded by the careful selection and framing of the topic. For example, in The Boy who was Afraid the main focus is on courage acquired through overcoming intense personal fears. It would be fitting to allow the pupils to explore their own fears.

The text can supply the imaginative stimulus and the emotional background of the reader, deemed to be so important, can respond. Poetry seems to me to be the best way of expressing emotions and perhaps with experience the easiest mode for pupils. Writing poetry should be a prominent means for sharing feelings.

Drama too gives so much scope for looking closely at the feelings of characters. Simple role-play of selected people and moments enables sympathy and affection to be demonstrated. The child gains immense insight, for example, in being required to portray the movements and manner of speech of an old or infirm person. Children can create and thereby supply an interpretation of another's life, their own understanding growing simultaneously. The basic instruction for both drama and writing remains: "Tell me or show me how another person feels".

D. IMAGINATIVE THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT

The main hazard to avoid when devising activities is that of neglecting the text. The teacher may embark on many ambitious and creative activities which may bring untold enjoyment to the class leading the teacher to believe the project an unqualified success. However, if the activities do not grant deeper insights into the issues of the text, they are as useless as the "colour-in-this-picture" technique so frequently adopted as a time-filler in primary schools. If literature is to be used profitably, then the text must be enthroned (because of its value) and peripheral activities eschewed. I love this example of mindless entertainment given by T. Johnson (1979).

> One young student-teacher enrolled in my children's literature class, when required to produce a classroom activity associated with a story of her choice, produced a large, pale facsimile of Squirrel Nutkin replete with detachable tail. The idea was, having listened to the story, children would, in turn, be blindfolded and attempt to reunite Squirrel Nutkin with his scissile tail. While such an activity may give limited amusement to children at a party, it does little to enchance one's appreciation of Beatrix Potter's story.

He concludes by quoting Mary White:

> Too often, the activities proposed for use with Children's literature lead to merely surface responses. Games and arts and crafts projects are frequently tangential to the literature but do not enable children to make any in-depth responses to books (Johnson, T. 1979, p36).

A superb way of helping pupils to think imaginatively about the text is through re-working the text into another form either through writing, drama, oral work or creative activities with an art bias.

a. Writing the diary of one of the characters assists in reflection on the text. Alternatively, diary entries can be written to supply missing details.

b. Many fictional situations suggest possibilities for letters related to the text to be written. The common and inane "letter to your parents while on holiday" approach invites improvement. Having read <u>The Boy who was Afraid</u>, the class

can write a letter home from Mafatu's perspective after being wrecked upon the volcanic island. The opportunities are endless; the only requirement - an imaginative teacher. An inter-school exchange of letters by pupils of the same standard will provide a stimulus and ready audience for a peer recommendation about a book. The more formal book review is thus made more exciting.

c. Rewriting a section of the book in play form also requires some selective thinking about the main features of a story at an appropriate level. In the process pupils will juggle with elements of the plot, sequence, characterisation and theme without these formal terms even being mentioned. As an added incentive the resulting production can be either taped or video-recorded.

d. Producing a newspaper page based on a story gives scope for different types and styles of writing to be used. A simple editorial column, a report and an interview are all within the capabilities of the primary child. An appropriate text-related advertisement would not be amiss. Group collaboration using each child's special abilities is the obvious method to choose.

e. The "telling gaps" (see Chapter Two) are ripe occasions for exploitation. One way of stimulating the pupils into furnishing the missing moments is to require them to write from the point of view of one of the characters about whom little is revealed in the story. In The Boy who was Afraid, the story unfolds from Mafatu's perspective. At one stage he flees from cannibals. How delightful to get pupils to imagine the thoughts and feelings of one of the pursuers during the chase.

A variation can be to focus on the "meanwhile episode" (Hayhoe, M., & Parker, S., 1984). This is when characters are not in public view in the story. Their absences can be explored by asking pupils to create incidents in character (not stylistically) with the rest of the novel.

Writing dialogue not given but suggested by the text is another useful method for creative thought.

f. Drama opportunities include performing selected incidents, and dramatised readings where suitable dialogue is available. In both instances pupils are free to provide their own interpretations of the text. Personal opinion is highlighted once again.

g. All types of debating activities are relevant and valuable methods for spurring talk about a book. An informal snap debate of only 10 minutes duration will suffice on most occasions. The class can be divided into two groups and the arguments can commence immediately. A question suggesting two options and arising from an incident in the text can spark intense dissension. Formal debating procedure can be used, if so desired, but then prior preparation is required. A snap debate allows the teacher to use the inspiration of the moment. Parachute debates with participants representing different people in the story and arguing from those respective roles necessitates a careful assessment of each character's part. This is motivated talk loaded with enjoyment. To prevent pupil complaints about being allocated a character difficult to defend, write the names of the selected characters on small cards and let the luck of the draw do the allocation. In fact, any type of discussion considering the viability of alternatives is profitable. In The Boy who was Afraid Mafatu finds himself destitute upon an island. What better moment to try to establish which objects he would find most useful. In groups the pupils must select with suitable reasons their three most useful items from a longer list.

h. Creative work utilizing artistic ability contains hazards to be avoided. Artistic ability varies greatly with the more gifted child deriving greater enjoyment from art work than the less able child whose needs must also be considered. Group projects with the allocation of tasks according to ability

solves this problem of catering for a wide range of competence. Art work can so easily become ornamental and contribute little to further contemplation of the issues of the text - a major defect. As such,creative work needs to be chosen carefully. Group tasks- with concomittant discussion - before the final version is attempted, are more profitable than individual tasks because of the pooling and refining of ideas. Even if each child is required to deliver a piece of work, prior discussion with others will be helpful and need not stifle a personal response. Because discussion maximizes the benefit of art related activities, it should invariably be an accompaniment.

Devising a board game based on the advances and reversals of fortune in a story will be certain to stimulate creative thinking. The logicality and appropriateness of suggestions will be both tested and contested by the group as new ideas interpreting the text are spawned. Cartoons, friezes and other pictorial representations of the story similarly have their educational potential increased through groups deciding upon the significant scenes for inclusion. A collage of magazine pictures will require each picture to be justified before being added. The teacher's role is to act as the catalyst constantly asking why a choice has been made. Once again, even when involved in art work, thinking about the text is achieved through talking. It is that simple.

A doubtful activity (suggested by Thomas, R., and Perry, A., 1984) is a picture gallery of the characters. I question whether the average child could accurately portray any distinctive personality features in a face. Rather let the imaginative impression remain unsullied in the mind. Physical characteristics are much easier to reproduce. The suggestion comes close to being embroidery rather than a means for extending insight unless accompanied by discussion. A more suitable activity would be for each child to select a picture from a magazine which represented their image of a character. Giving reasons for their choice would be an essential part of the procedure.

Creating alternative book jackets adds writing to the art work. It is an opportunity for a personal review of the book as a cover usually includes a synopsis as well as comments praising its merits. Advertisements or posters publicising a book would be similarly beneficial. Are not these suggestions more interesting than being instructed to present either an oral or plain written review of a story? Where a map, diagram or model can improve the understanding of a text - use one. As a group project the making will be sure to generate discussion about interpretation.

i. Some vocabulary orientated work may also cause pupils to re-think their reading experience. Writing acrostics is one approach suggested by Thomas, R., & Perry, A., (1984). This is an example they give based on the hero of Dragon Slayer by R. Sutcliff.

> Brave warrior
> Exciting hero
> Ousted Grendel
> Wise Leader
> Unbeaten in battle
> Liberator
> Faithful friend

As illustrated, attention can centre around both a character's actions and personality. An analysis is again being made in an excitingly different way. While the written end product is brief, extensive thought is generated.

Crosswords are usually fun. A well devised crossword is useful for checking on vocabulary encountered during a story. However, even thematic elements can be included in the clues.

j. Even writing a menu is an acceptable pastime provided it is founded on the text. Stories dealing with people stranded on islands or living in foreign or exotic environments are the most suitable as sources. Menu writing could easily emerge from reading one of the following books: Island of the Blue Dolphins, A Pattern of Islands, Lord of the Flies, Robinson Crusoe,

The Boy who was Afraid. The correct sequence of courses in a formal menu should be the preliminary to devising one based on food available to the characters.

II. A PANORAMIC REVIEW

A host of attractive ideas entice the teacher to spend much time on work which the pupils will find enjoyable. If we want profit as well, then practice has to be determined by sound principles. This marrying of theory and method is possible as revealed in the survey above. The guidelines are available. Teachers err when their enthusiasm is misdirected or ill-informed. The "Instant Book" method used by John Foggin (Protherough, R., 1983) is a questionable device born of a wish to help a book. His desire is to make more difficult literature accessible to children who could not handle it alone. An "instant book" consists of a selection of ± 30 passages according to the number of the pupils in the class. Each is allocated a passage to prepare and this is read in class to enable a clearer understanding of the main movements of the story. As Foggin admits some pupils failed to read the original story. Surely this is a waste of time and effort. Children must make full contact with the original story as the power needed to promote creative involvement is sadly reduced by only looking at extracts. If the class is not capable of reading and responding adequately to a book, then it is better left alone. Substitutes for reading the text must never be used. A more suitable book is always available.

Anne Taylor (1974) gives a detailed description of project work associated with a novel. Yet towards the end of the article, she has certain misgivings about it. While pointing out the dangers, she also isolates the chief goal of a shared exploration.

> There is the obvious danger that preoccupation with peripheral matters will obscure the main function of the exercise, which is after all the deeper enjoyment of the book as literature (Taylor, A., 1974, p78).

This kernel truth must be elevated in thinking about activities to illuminate the way through the dark wood: the child and the book must meet in a meaningful encounter.

In his article Celebrating with story Jack Ousbey (1982) strikes the correct tone. All activities should have a celebratory ring. In the reading project involving pupils aged 7-11, all five standards in the junior school studied a story by Helen Cresswell. Much creative work was done, the highlight being a grand pie-making contest attended by the author and parents. It was a joyous occasion. Is pie-making educational? Is such an adventure not a negation of all the principles espoused in the earlier chapters? The fun, however, had a firm base because.

> the contest was only the culmination of dramatic activities *prompted and supported by the story*. Groups of children had already recreated the conference, held by the Roller family in the tale, at which the planning of the pie had taken place. In their dramatic interpretations they referred to the story account for setting, role and properties. ... [so] *real education can be found in events which are shared and enjoyed by the participants* (Ousbey, J., 1982, p87, my italics).

Pie-making alone would have been unacceptable.

Fellowship leads to satisfaction for all involved in the sharing. Fulfilment through literature study occurs as the deep things of the human spirit are explored and meditated upon. The reader enters the world of the story and emerges altered. As he has created mental images, so has the imagination been stimulated and renewed. As the book enthralls the reader, so can the sense of wonder be continued through reflection and creative activities around the text. The teacher has ministered gently during the whole fellowship experience. The encounter of child, teacher and text has resulted in enrichment becoming one with education.

CHAPTER SIX: THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING ---: THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

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CHAPTER SIX: THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING ---: THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

I. SOME BACKGROUND FACTORS

A. THE EDUCATIONAL MILIEU

The empirical study was conducted in the standard three class at St. George's Preparatory School situated in the city of Port Elizabeth. It is a private school for boys, covering the usual seven standards of the primary area. With an enrolment of 102 pupils, the multi-racial classes are small in number. The school aims to provide a balanced education encouraging the all round development of the scholars i.e. their social,physical, mental and emotional well being. A family atmosphere prevails with the boys and staff sharing the midday meal together.

One of the distinctive features of the educational policy of the school is the headmaster's awareness of the importance of reading. There are various facets. A twenty minute period is allocated each day for personal silent reading with all pupils participating in the scheme with a book of their own choice. When it comes to selecting class readers, the headmaster believes that if a school's reading programme is to be successful, then it ought to be based upon a correspondence between the reading ability of the child and the degree of difficulty of the book. Every effort is made to match the child to the book considering not only the boy's reading age but also his interests. As a result books on order for the class reading scheme include titles in the New Collins series such as The Guns of Navarone and Custer's Gold. Titles currently in use as class readers include I am David by A. Holm, The Silver Sword by I Serrailier and The Pinballs and The Eighteenth Emergency by B. Byars. Use is also made of the Longman's series of abridged versions of longer novels e.g. Lord Jim. The Wide Range series is also available for use if desired. The headmaster tests each boy in the school at the start of each year to determine his reading age. The small sets of class readers (2-3 copies per set usually) are colour-coded according to reading age and pupils read their way through the range advancing after appropriate progress has been made. When it comes to the utili-

zation of library resources, the boys are encouraged through a specific library period each week to borrow books from the school library. The emphasis is on reading prolifically including guidance to broaden the range. The resources include well-stocked sections of the authors popular with boys: Willard Price, Franklin Dixon and Enid Blyton. The development of an interest in books and reading is thus actively promoted and supported at all stages in the school.

The teacher of the standard three class has an innovative attitude towards reading. Formerly, she moved from group to group listening to the reading with one pupil in each reading aloud. Recently her approach has changed. The pupils now read silently and she gives individual attention to the weaker readers. Her evaluation of the new method: "It seems to be of greater value". In addition, she reads aloud to the class with a little accompanying discussion.

The teacher regards the boys in the class (total 17) as being enthusiastic readers and 14 out of 15 respondents to the questionnaire on reading interests (See Appendix B) confessed that they enjoyed reading. Excitement was the main satisfaction cited. Despite the extensive attention paid to reading, the boys are not all reading the "great classics". They remain an average class both in interest and reading ability. The questionnaire answers confirmed the teacher's view that the majority of the class favoured Willard Price as an author (13/15 replies). Other authors to feature prominently on their list of favourites were Enid Blyton (11/15) followed by Roald Dahl and Franklin Dixon (8/15). In their reading interests they have not developed gourmet tastes. The pattern is most probably typical of boys of this age because books by these authors appear in H. Houghton-Hawksley's list (1983a) of most mentioned titles in his research into the reading habits of the primary school child in the Cape Province.

Very few read a wide range of authors. Their interests remain rooted in the series books which offer little variation in the basic plots, characterisation and view of life distinctive to the formula of each author. Few of the boys have begun to realize the satisfaction arising from encountering a variety of authors. In terms of reading ability too, the class is not distinguished by outstanding performances. Their reading ages range from 9 years 2 months to 12 years 10 months with the class average being 10 years 7 months. A glance at the pupils' composition work reveals an ability range from weak to proficient. The fact that it is a private school does not necessarily imply that most of the pupils are in the upper academic ability bracket. The whole experiment then was conducted in an atmosphere where reading is valued, but where the capacity to respond, while sound, is not excessively above average.

B. THE DURATION

The experimental programme ran for just over five weeks. It was decided to use three periods per week of ± one hour each for the project work. The teacher used other moments to complete work and the art teacher co-operated by allowing the board-game and cartoon to be worked on during an art lesson. The double periods used were far more suitable than the usual half-hour period employed in the primary school as the pace of a project of this nature should never become rushed. When haste intrudes, then enjoyment vanishes. Discussion can only range freely in an atmosphere unhindered by the restraints of time. A very generous allocation of time is necessary when planning to explore a book.

C. BOOK SELECTION

<u>The Boy who was Afraid</u> by Armstrong Sperry was admirably suited to the purpose of the project. A recipient of the Newberry Award, the book is filled with incidents of danger and challenge. Interest is kept at a high pitch as

a boy of fifteen pits his strength and skill against the physical dangers of his environment. He survives the rigours of a storm at sea in a frail canoe. Mafatu overcomes fear to snatch a spear head from the base of a fearsome idol. Courage is paramount as he disposes of a wild boar, a hammerhead shark and a giant octopus. Finally, the pulse rate quickens as he escapes from the dreaded eaters-of-men. The prolific action and a well-balanced sense of tension captured the boys' interest. Some who were absent wanted to remain abreast of the class's progress. An involved mother ended up reading the whole book. It is a book which gives great enjoyment to boy readers.

The book is more than an exciting sequence of events. The atmosphere of the Polynesian islands is vividly portrayed giving a sense of immediacy. The reader can appreciate the contrasts in mood as Mafatu lands on the volcanic island. The characterisation allows for imaginative involvement with Mafatu as he grapples with fear. His moments of victorious exultation can also be entered easily. Through the story runs a life truth: the need to confront personal fears. Courage comes through encountering and vanquishing the bogeymen of the mind. This worthwhile truth emerges from the fabric of the story without any didacticism. The book, therefore has the potential to stimulate personal, moral, affective and mental growth in an imaginative way. The book fulfilled the dictates of the four commandments enunciated in Chapter Four.

D. PRIOR PUBLICITY

It was decided to stimulate the interest of the boys for the project through some measures in advance of their first encounter with the book. A corner of the blackboard was used for the following cryptic comments on a daily basis leading to the start of the project. The first day's instruction was simply "watch this space". On the second day it was announced that Mafatu is coming. "Who is Mafatu?" was the question on the third day. On the fourth this incom-

plete statement was used "Mafatu is the boy who ---" On the day the project started the statement was completed. This curio sity arousing device succeeded beycnd my expectation with even the headmaster and other teachers being asked about Mafatu by eager boys. When I arrived, the boys were ready to meet Mafatu. (Some even expected a person rather than a fictional character.) This simple device created great interest in the project and was evident in their enthusiastic oral prediction about the book based on the title and the heading of the first chapter "Flight".

E. AN INTRUDING VARIABLE

During the project, an influenza epidemic raged through the school. As a result absenteeism was rife often with four of the seventeen pupils absent and on one occasion seven boys were away. It is difficult to judge the disruptive effect that the absences had on their overall understanding of the book. The breaks in continuity must have had some effect. This factor also accounts for some of the class members not completing all the writing exercises.

II AN EVALUATION OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY.

Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation establish certain criteria for evaluating a project for sharing literature. As the activities are assessed, so too will the viability of those principles be revealed. It must be confessed that the planning of the activities was often done with little thought of their inherent educative value. This has largely emerged upon later reflection. The main criteria in the planning stages were providing for variety in the activities and for pupil enjoyment.

A. THE DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES.

At the heart of sharing a story lies discussion, both class discussion led by the teacher and in smaller groups (See Chapter Five). Discussion was prominent

in this project. The reading aloud was punctuated by discussion. Sometimes the break in the narrative lasted only a matter of seconds as the meaning of one word was sought, while on other occasions the interlude was much longer dependant upon the response of the pupils. This discussion was the crux of the fellowship experience because ideas could be swapped so easily and insights developed. Did the discussion not disturb adversely the reading of the story? No. The class teacher felt that discussion was "imperative" and did not disrupt the reading sequence. It seems foolish to read the whole story before embarking on discussion. It is best to talk about issues while fresh in the memory of all. Interspersing reading with discussion and some writing also provides the variety that is so important in a project of this nature. Mixing discussion with the reading does not alter the principle that the reading should be completed as soon as posible. The teacher simply has to exercise discretion in controlling the discussion so that it does not become counter-productive. (This point was clearly made in the class teacher's evaluation.)

The questions which were used to prompt discussion during the reading of The Boy who was Afraid will be found in Appendix C. These were followed with minor variations, the teacher adding her own questions in similar vein in addition to occasional questions on vocabulary. She also briefly linked aspects of the story to work done by the class in history. The nature of the questions is vitally important. A survey of the questions in the appendix will reveal that many are open-ended allowing pupils freedom to express their own personal opinions rather than requiring a specific answer. The questions endeavour to involve the pupils' emotions in thinking about the story from Mafatu's point of view. The spotlight falls too upon the main themes of the story: Mafatu's brave and victorious battle against fear. Reasoning from the text was also required, not mere speculation. The seasoning of vocabulary and imagery related discussion was mild. No attempt was made to explain every un-

known vocabulary word or allusion. Overall there was a balance in the questions, and certainly not an excessive number for the length of the story.

What was the effect of the discussion?

The statistics reveal a positive response from the pupils. In a questionnaire prior to the project 9 out of 15 respondents wanted to discuss the class reader with the teacher. After the project 14 of the 17 participants declared that they had enjoyed the discussion with 3 being uncertain. The class was at all times eager to talk about the book and some very imaginative suggestions were made incorporating knowledge from the text. For example when asked what Mafatu would have thought during the storm at sea, one boy gave an account of how Moana, the sea-god, was instructing Mafatu to return to warn the people of his island not to catch fish from the sea. Here the elements of the story have been used to create a satisfying answer. The discussion also brought to the fore the latent capacity of some of the pupils. As the class teacher expressed it, "As usual, they responded freely to the class discussions and I realised then how I had actually underestimated the abilities of various pupils". They were able to express appropriately their reactions to the significant moments in Mafatu's experience. In discussing his bravery in overcoming his fear of the gruesome idol, the teacher asked how one would feel in similar circumstances. One boy replied that it would be like starting a new life.

It would not be extravagant to claim an improvement in the reasoning powers of the pupils. At the commencement the pupils struggled to understand the comparisons in imagery but later began to be more perceptive. There was not an unqualified improvement as late in the story they still found it difficult to explore the significance of the drums being "a testament of death". It needed much direct questioning to relate the phrase to the context of the story and to appreciate the full implications. The class teacher's account is corroborative. "At first the pupils' reasoning was not as expected and I virtually had to drag everything out of them, but as we progressed, they began to grasp and reason

things out for themselves".

The predictive element in the boys' response also operated strongly and effectively. The pupils enjoyed looking ahead in the book and predicting from the illustrations. This they did without prompting from the teacher. (They had earlier agreed not to read on ahead). Discernment also characterrised their prediction. Prior to reading the chapter headed "Drums", the boys foresaw that the drum beats could portend danger and death for Mafatu.

There were, however, problem areas. When asked to talk about their own fears and ways of combating these terrors there was a decided inadequacy in the response. Some of the contributions provoked uproarious laughter because of the spurious nature of the fear i.e. they were scared of hidings in the school context. The boys were diffident to become serious in talking about inner personal matters. They shrank from exposing their weaknesses to their peers. Only one boy spoke with real awareness as he shared his fear of heights. Another mentioned death as a fear but did not elaborate. The dark too was mentioned. They reverted to storytelling rather than being willing to talk more rationally about their fears. The boys were keen to talk but not on the main issue; the conquering of personal anxiety. This occurred despite the teacher's efforts in suggesting parallels for defeating fear from the text.

What caused this reticence in the pupils to share freely about personal matters? The answer is important because of the implications for the education of the emotions in the primary school. It may have been that the pupils at that stage did not have full confidence in the teacher to reveal their secrets or the classroom atmosphere lacked the trusting intimacy needed to prompt open sharing. Two weeks later when the same topic was discussed prior to their writing about it, the boys were more ready to talk sensibly

about their fears than on the previous occasion. A change had occurred. It is very likely that the increased time spent in sharing the story had created a more propitious climate for revealing matters of the heart.

There are other possible explanations. The boys may have been emotionally unprepared to participate. L. Rosenblatt (1970) in examining the role that the reader's background plays in shaping response emphasises "emotional readiness" as a factor. An adequate response can only occur if the reader has the requisite intellectual capacity and is emotionally ripe for the experience. A. Applebee's research (1978) seeking confirmation of Piaget's stages of thinking in children as they reflect on stories is also helful. It was only when children passed out of the pre-operational stage of thinking (dominated by re-telling the story) into the concrete operational way of thought that they developed the "ability to classify and organise" material. Thus they were able to summarize a story rather than merely re-tell it. It is possible that these boys at age ten were struggling to classify their own experience of life in terms which they could readily express to others. They were being asked to structure and arrange the events of life meaningfully when they were not ready to do so. The teacher's simple explanation perhaps contains the greatest perception of the situation. Fearing the ridicule of classmates, the boys avoided sharing freely.

Does this mean that the primary school teacher should avoid including emotively charged issues in class discussion? Not at all. Let us try to educate the emotions but be aware of the limitations imposed by the children's maturity and state of intellectual development. The evidence in this study (further details given later in the section on sharing) indicates that affective issues should not be ignored. The readiness of the pupils after two further weeks of co-operative enterprise to share more openly about affective concerns is an encouragement to persist in talking about one's feelings in

class. This is certainly an area worthy of further investigation.

The mini-debate was another activity involving class discussion. The topic was straightforward: Was Mafatu foolish or brave to leave the island alone? The class was divided into two groups and their suggestions written on the blackboard. This was an admirable exercise providing for moral growth as the pupils had to consider viable alternatives while evaluating the ethics of an action. The reasoning evidence in their proposals showed careful thought and insight. For example, it was queried why Mafatu needed to go away to prove his bravery as he could have demonstrated his desire to be fearless at home.

Group discussion (apart from that accompanying the designing of the map, board game and cartoon) was catered for in the following way. Mafatu is cast naked upon the volcanic island with no material possessions to aid him in his daily living. At this point in the story the pupils were asked to decide which objects would be most useful to Mafatu as he set about surviving alone in a new environment. The pupils had to put their heads on their desks, pretend that they were Mafatu and dream that Maui, god of the fishermen, had come to assist him because of his earlier bravery. He could choose only three items from a list of nine articles to give him a helpful start. The items were a net, a spear, hooks, a knife, a canoe, fire, a sleeping bag, a tent and a bag of bread flour. This activity was necessary <u>before</u> the story described Mafatu's ingenuity in making his tools and other necessities. Three groups were formed to discuss the options, reach consensus and report back to the whole class. This was followed by class discussion of all the options. The value of the activity lay in the pupils having to relate Mafatu's needs to his environment. Thus their reasoning was guided by the framework of the text but also free to roam because details of the circumstances prevailing on the island were not known to them at that stage.

When the groups reported back, the reasons given for their choices were most appropriate and logical. Their thinking revealed some lucid in-depth analysis and justification. However, when there was open class discussion on the options, the suggestions were at times too fanciful and nebulous to be impressive. At other moments there developed a careful consideration of issues with one boy countering a specific point made by another. In the main, a worthwhile exercise.

What is the overall conclusion on the discussion element? One boy expressed it like this, "It was nice to discuss the book". I believe that this was no isolated sentiment. The keen voluntary participation by most of the class was indicative of their interested commitment to the task in hand.

B. THE WRITING ACTIVITIES

Were the writing activities associated with the story worthwhile? Did the writing reveal any profitable advance in discernment? Only if there was benefit can the written work be fully justified. There can be no dogmatism about growth, because evaluating a child's response is so difficult. The evidence might be patchy and therefore inconclusive. Often hints of a trend must satisfy. Also the development within may never be articulated adequately to reveal clearly the extent of the new insights gained. It is fitting to be reminded of this truth. "The expression of responses is central to the life of any group where people are growing and learning" (Jones, A., and Buttrey, J., 1970, p26). The teacher can be pleased with many types of response (and perhaps any response) even if it is difficult to classify the quality thereof.

If there is concern about assessing the quality of a pupil's response, then the following guidelines may be helpful based chiefly on the theory in Chapters Two and Three.

a) What is the extent of the empathy? How fully does the pupil identify personally and affectively with people and situations?

b) Is there any indication of a growth in understanding life and humanity?

c) Is there an understanding of the meaning of the book?

d) Is there evidence of personal growth especially in moral discernment?

e) How successfully does the pupil correlate his own experience with the experience of the book? What insights are revealed in any "analogizing" or "anecdotalizing" which occurs? As A. Jones and J. Buttrey (1970) see it: "How is new material related to existing knowledge and values?" (p27).

f) Has there been any distancing of the pupil from the text by the adoption of the spectator role? To what extent has an evaluation (however juvenile) of the text and the reading experience occurred?

g) What imaginative strengths are revealed?

h) Has truly personal opinion been expressed or is there an indication of repetition of the thoughts of others?

(i) Keeping a reading journal.

To allow opportunity for a truly personal response to the book, the pupils were instructed to keep a journal of their thoughts while reading. Writing journal entries occurred before the reading began and thereafter at the end of each chapter. Their first impressions were to be based on a look at the title, the front cover, the contents page and the illustrations. They were told to write whatever they wanted to say. Some guidelines were given: their thoughts and feelings, their likes and dislikes about the story, prediction, improvements, their opinion of Mafatu and his actions. In evaluation the class teacher felt that it had been excessive to write a response at the end of each chapter and that fewer, more appropriate moments should have been selected for writing the journal.

The benefit of recording one's responses in a journal is the freedom granted for expressing a personal viewpoint unfettered by any structure. The restrictions of being required to write within the framework of a specified topic are avoided. The success or failure of such a venture can be gauged by the extent to which the pupils grasp the opportunity to express their thoughts freely. The response will be governed by the individual's capacity for disciplined, reflective thought which can be limited by a lack of wider experience. The depth of the response also depends upon the impact that the book has made upon the child. The most cogent reason for including the free expression of thought comes from James Britton.

> Expressive language is language close to the speaker: What engages his attention is freely verbalised, and as he presents his view of things, his loaded commentary upon the world, he also presents himself. Thus it is above all in expressive speech that we get to know one another, each offering his unique identity...
>
> Secondly it is in expressive speech that we are likely to rehearse the growing points of our formulation and analysis of experience (Quoted by Torbe, M., 1974, p23).

So M. Torbe (1974) concludes that the chief benefit of keeping a journal of responses lies in the use of "expressive language" which is the mode in which a person learns most successfully.

What then was revealed in the boys' journals? There was evidence of personal responses with opinions and judgements being delivered. Growth in moral stature was also noticeable. While many of the boys told of their likes, there was little emphasis on the negative aspects. One boy felt safe enough to voice criticism. "I do not feel like stopping and writing I feel like carrying on reading because I am woundering what is going to happen on the island." Having been encouraged to write in the first person, many did so and expressed opinions which ranged from a reaction to the whole story, "I think Mafatu was very brave

and deserved to be called Stout Heart", to suggestions for improvement, "To improve the story it should have a bit of fighting."

It was most encouraging to notice the direct effect that the theme of courage had upon the lives of the boys. Some even testified to changes in their way of thinking about their own fears. These intimate revelations indicate an openness to sharing personal matters. One cannot hope for franker individual disclosures which are indicative of moral growth. These are some declarations of change:

> "I learnd that you can fight your problems by been brave" R.
>
> "I have got a fear I can't overcome it but I am going to carry on trying" H.
>
> "It showed too that I could overcome one of my fears by not running away from them and facing them like Mafatu did". P.
>
> "I have learnt a lot out of this book and am sure that one day I will overcome my fear! Snakes. I have learnt to face and fight my Fears." E.

While these boys admitted to alterations in their thinking about fear, others commented on the theme in their remarks. It reveals that the central meaning of the book had made an unmistakable impact upon them. Some linked their reason for enjoying the book to the meaning that it had for them.
"I like this book because hes fighting his fear" G.
"I liked this book becaus Mafatu proved somethings to himself. he proved that he was brave and that he had a stout heart" B1.
Thus the boys have indicated that they understood the meaning of the story and many were able to verbalize their understanding relating their new knowledge from the text to their own experience.

The journals also showed a close association with and projection into the character of Mafatu. A number of the boys used variations of the statement "If I were in Mafatu's shoes ..." to express not only their thoughts but more especially their feelings. (This technique was used in stimulating both discussion and written activities during the project.) There were encouraging signs of emotive identification including some personal evaluation of Mafatu's achievement. "If I was Mafatu I would build a canoe and I wouldn't let anything get in my way, I'll be proud because I conquered Moana the sea God, killed the old hammerhead and the octopus and the wild pig" R. (my underlining). P. lives within the story as he selects the most exciting moment.
"The best part of the book for me was when he was running away from the Black Eaters of Men in the undergrowth and when all the trees were tripping him and scratching and clutching at him. It all seamed I was in the story."
I love the warm sincerity of the following statement which reveals the great impact that the story has made upon a boy's sensitivities. "If I was Mafatu friend I would be his best friend" B1. This expression of emotive identification with the story is pleasing because it is indicative of the depth of the response that the story elicited from the pupils.

Embryonic evaluation occurs as some of the boys distance themselves sufficiently to analyse the effect and meaning of the story. The reasoning may not always be clear but an attempt has been made to judge, synthesize and compare. "The first chapter of the book was one of the best begainings I have ever heard of" .Later "This was another one of those brilliant chapters. Exiting scarey happy you name it" N.

The best of the journals is reproduced in its entirety (except for the first impressions) because of the clarity and maturity of thought. It also contains the most penetrating of the evaluation attempts and the comments need to be seen in the context of the whole.

End of chapter one:

I like the story because it is exciting and interesting. I think that he finds an island and people on it. There might be a storm. I feel sad for Mafatu and I hope that one day he is accepted by the other boys.

End of chapter two:

If I was in Mafatu shoe's I would feel depressed but happy. (lost boat but found an island) The book is enjoyable, interesting and adventurous. Uri shows friendliness to Mafatu, but Kivi did not show so much loyalty as Uri did. Mafatu might hunt for food, explor or make a hideout.

End of chapter three:

The story is very interesting, I think it was a great achievement by Mafatu to overcome his fear. It shows that he is brave. Mafatu will have to be careful if the 'eaters-of-man' come. I hope that his canoe will be good once. Now Mafatu knows that Maui guided him to the island.

End of chapter four:

The story is interesting. Now Mafatu has a knife, a spear, a trap and a canoe. He also has a house. But the most important part of this chapter is that it shows how Mafatu conquered his fear by killing the boar, hammer-head shark and the octopuss. But it shows what happened when he neglected his duties. He thought that the 'eaters-of-men' would not come but they did! (I know because of the 'thump-thump-thump!') Mafatu is brave. Now possibly the boys will accept him.

End of Chapter five

Mafatu knows that he has overcome his fear of Moana the sea-god. Tavana Nui is happy that his son has come back.

The story is interesting, exciting and adventerous. I think it is a bit educational (how one could overcome his/her fear). Mafatu was determined B.2.

His thinking about the story includes a comparison of the friendship of Mafatu's two companions, the dog and the albatross. "Uri shows friendliness to Mafatu, but Kivi did not show so much loyalty as Uri did." A perceptive comment. The spectator role is further in evidence as Mafatu's actions are assessed. "I think it was a great achievement by Mafatu to overcome his fear." His comments on chapter four reveal the ability to isolate the significant element of the chapter in a summary. There is a sense of balance too in the evaluation as Mafatu's achievements are offset against his negligence. The last statement "Now possibly the boys will accept him" reveals that his judgement of Mafatu's achievements is made in the light of his earlier failure - lack of peer acceptance. B2 has here borne in mind the events of chapter one and linked them to Mafatu's later actions. In thinking back to the start of the book and correlating the culmination of Mafatu's quest with the cause thereof, this boy has found a meaning which emerges from contemplating the whole book and not only a part. This type of holistic response is evidence of the quality of thought prompted by being given freedom of expression. To the end his thoughts are evaluative and include a delightful understatement, "a bit educational".

Interestingly there was no recounting of similar personal experiences in the journals along the lines of the "anecdotalizing" or "analogizing" described earlier. The closest one boy came to it was to say that the book "reminds you of some of the same things that has happened to you." Personal experience then was not used as a filter for understanding the story.

Was a journal of responses a worthwhile activity for standard three boys? Yes. Their writing revealed that they are not too young to express personal in-depth reactions. They did not simply re-tell the story but offered their own insights and thoughts. Any perception, however crudely it may be couched in language, is a valuable step in a child's growth towards mental and emotional maturity. The ability to respond to a story is latent in each child awaiting imaginative stimulation to call it forth. Let these responses emerge through expressive writing - the most natural means.

(ii) The Poem

Writing the poem offered the pupils a chance to reveal their feelings about a situation which is common in life. They could tell of their emotions when others talked unkindly about them. This activity was suggested by an incident in the text when Mafatu overhears the other boys discussing his lack of courage. There had been class discussion of the incident and so a short poem gave scope for an emotive slant to a written response. The poems were disappointing because this was the first of the writing to be done apart from the journal. There was no poem which was compellingly attractive in its freshness. One of the problems was the boys' false notion of poetry. In forcing their thoughts into rhyme, their thoughts and words became artificial and strained, lacking the personal sincerity that is the true motive power of poetry. While there were words and phrases which showed some insight into the experience, they failed to make the poem a personal revelation. The answer to more effective poetry in this context is better instruction about the techniques of free verse and much encouragement to write in personal vein. The best expression of a boy's own feelings is this poem by P.

When others talk about me

When others talk about me I feel hurt,
When others talk about me I feel like dirt,
I clench my fists and try not to falter and cry,
but deep down inside, my soul is dry,
My heart is like a chamber, that won't let anything out,
But untill the chamber brakes I'm full of doubt.

Interestingly, this boy produced his best work when given freedom to write personally e.g. the journal and telling of his fears. However, in his letter and the description of the chase he failed to make a really imaginative entry into the story. This suggests that the expression of feelings is a vital component of any writing accompanying a look at a book.

(iii) The Song and the Prayer

These two pieces of writing gave variety to the programme and arose directly from the text. Mafatu prays for aid and sings a song of triumph, on both occasions using the Polynesian language. It was so opportune to ask the boys to expand the thoughts that they imagine Mafatu is using. This is the ideal stimulus as there is the freedom for the imagination to roam, but with just enough structure and guidance given by the context.

The boys experienced difficulty in writing the song and perhaps needed more initial guidance about the elements of a song. I then intervened to suggest that a song has both rhythm and repetition. As a result repetition features as a technique, but often without any real thoughtful control being evident. Some groped towards the truth. Needing to be a song of praise on overcoming fear, the content of the songs did focus on this theme and other suitable elements of the text. The quality of the songs could have been improved through more careful prior consideration by the class and teacher of the distinctive features of a song.

Mafatu's prayer asked for assistance during a storm and the prayers written were largely appropriate. Suitable sentiments reflecting relevant insight were expressed through the incorporation of germane details from the text. The language of prayer was used with apposite words making an appearance e.g. "promise", "plea", "forgive", "sacrifice" and "spirit". Interestingly one prayer employed rhyme, rhythm and stanza form. The suggestion of the text and the teacher was that the prayer should be addressed to Maui. One boy adopted a rather different approach to the prayer.

> Help me sun god to brighten up the day!
> Help me wind god to blow the clouds away!
> Im in a huge bad mess!
> Im sure you could spear a bless!
> For I did'nt come here to decay!
> Bless, bless, bless, oh yes, yes, yes. D.

(iv) The letter

The text was again the creative context for the letter. It was written at the end of chapter four after Mafatu had lived alone on the island for some time and was a letter to his father. The boys found it difficult to create an original address for the letter. The freedom to innovate did not liberate them for they hankered after the comfortable security of using their home addresses. I imagined it would have been an easy matter to find an alternative address based on the surroundings e.g. physical features of the island. One boy even turned to his atlas for inspiration! Why did the imagination fail to respond adequately to this creative challenge? The lack of imagination may have arisen from deficiencies in the personal backgrounds of the pupils, (Rosenblatt, L., 1970) but the distress was too general in the class for that to be a satisfactory explanation. Could they have not been fully involved in the story? There is no doubt about their enthusiasm for the story, but imaginative inspiration drained away when called upon to write. They were certainly

not stifled by too many preliminary instructions from the teacher about letter format. In fact, some boys started off ignoring or else forgetting conventional letter form. The teacher reminded them of the structure after starting when she observed things going awry. So having been given the latitude to be creative, the boys failed to utilize the opportunity. The explanation of this failure lies in the fact that normally any writing project is discussed thoroughly by the class prior to embarking on it. Having become accustomed to gleaning ideas from class discussion in the past, they struggled to think creatively and independently. To correct this inadequacy requires the increasing exposure of the pupils to imaginative writing opportunities. Many such propitious moments occur naturally during the sharing of a book. Teachers face the challenge of finding the stimuli in the story which will prompt the child's imaginative involvement to flow easily into inspired writing. Despite the early awkwardness, the addresses eventually did bear some marks of creative thought, but not of the standard I had expected.

Because of the influenza epidemic barely half the class (nine boys) wrote the letter. In those letters the factual details of the story e.g. Mafatu's heroic deeds in killing the boar, the shark and the octopus, featured prominently with all the boys mentioning his bravery in one way or another. There were indications of closer perception of the story. More than one gave the reasons for his sudden departure from Hikueru. Others emphasized the main point of the story , Mafatu's new found courage, showing a certain degree of entry into the character of Mafatu. In only one was there a description of the atmosphere of the island; an indication of an even closer identification with the world of the story. F. wrote "I am on a strange but beautiful Island. It is very welcoming. The forests are the creepiest I have ever seen. The branches on the trees seem as if they will grab you".

For me, the most significant sign of imaginative involvement in Mafatu's world (the letter was written from Mafatu's perspective) was the intimate, personal tone apparent in some of the letters which distinguished them from others which mentioned Mafatu's courage in a more distanced way.

> "I am what you always wanted me to be, I am a brave boy now...." P.
>
> The reason why I left Hikueru was because everybody used to call me Mafatu, the boy who was afraid. I do not want to be called that again. I want you to be proud of me" F.
>
> "I had to leave to prove myself because they called me names, because I was afraid of the sea. Do you understand" R. (my underlining).

This expression of the awareness of the deep longings of a father's heart and of a son's desire to be at one with his father is indeed proof of growth towards a sensitive understanding of the human spirit.

(v) The Chase

The imaginative extension of part of the story is another profitable way of exploring a text through writing. The boys were told to supply the thoughts and feelings of one of the eaters-of-men pursuing Mafatu as the text is silent on that issue. How imaginative was the response? The average answer outlined the details of the story with little imaginative embroidery of the facts. The influence of the war picture library comic series is perhaps the reason for this introduction which is not in keeping with savages on a foreign shore. "One day I was walking through a bush when I saw this figuer moving in the bush. I said, "hult who goes there?" The stock thoughts revolved around using Mafatu after capture either as a sacrifice or a meal.

It was encouraging to notice one of the boys (whose writing is beset with spelling and language errors) revealing careful thought about the text in his answer. He had understood the text and was reasoning from it for his own purposes. The cannibal's account runs as follows (as originally given):

"I scutled threw the bushes after him but he had a advantage he had been living here for I long time and new the path beter than I".

This boy has drawn his own valid conclusion from the text and has incorporated it successfully into his account. The satisfaction for the teacher lies not in the quality of the language but in the thoughtful use that has been made of details of the story. The implications have been noticed. When pupils think, the teacher rejoices. It is in writing exercises such as this one based on the story that the weaker pupil can be supported in his efforts. His ideas, while derived from the text, need not be mere re-telling but can involve the reasoned manipulation of knowledge for a specific purpose as shown above.

The pupils with writing ability did embellish the facts imaginatively. (Examples will be found in Appendix D.) The topic seemed to prompt the boys to write more freely than in the other writing work, but there had been some prior class discussion of suitable ideas. In class, one of the boys exclaimed with glee that he had written two and a half pages.

(vi) My Own Fears

The boys had to write about their own fears and ways of overcoming these terrors. They were encouraged to reflect on Mafatu's experiences and use his insights in talking about their own fears but without repeating the story. There was discussion of personal fears with the boys more ready to talk sensibly than on a previous occasion. Ideas were jotted down with the neat writing occurring later. It might be alleged that this topic was tangential to the book and did not serve to explore it further. That is to some extent true, but the story dealt with fear and courage so explicitly that the boys needed to write personally using the issues of the text as a backdrop.

The topic was a formidable obstacle to the class. The teacher too commented on the difficulty they experienced in tackling it. Despite the suggestion to use the book as a frame of reference, not one boy did so. Their accounts reflected little of the thorough discussion of the themes of fear and courage. More than half the class resorted to narrative and the anecdotal approach, telling of incidents when they experienced and overcame fear with only a few describing the fear in any detail. Others were different. In a short homily of encouragement to himself, one boy expressed his determination to conquer his fear of heights. Little attempt was made to analyse their fears except for another boy who identified the stages he passed through in overcoming his fear of water. There was a dearth of description of the effects of their anxieties upon them. Odd words or phrases were used e.g. "shivery", "insecure" and "I feel a chill up my spine" but the emotional impact of fear was neglected.

Is this an inadequate response? By no means. It has already been suggested (See Chapter 2) that children of ten years of age are not ready to be analytical. Furthermore, this response by telling of their memories is to be expected and not despised. The research of Nancy Martin (1976) and David Jackson (1983) indicate that it is through narrative of personal incidents that children attempt to understand literary experiences. Why then should they not try to fathom personal experience in the same way? Recounting memories certainly holds personal satisfaction for the individuals.

A question remains unanswered. Is there any value or purpose in using a book to educate the emotions through discussion and writing? What is gained by persevering with this approach? Despite the wholesale disregard of the book by the boys at that moment, the meaning of the story remains as a backdrop for the reader to think about himself. Accepting the interaction between reader and text, the book does provide a possible structure and stimulus for the imaginative generation of ideas about the reader's own life. If the reader wants to use it in meditating upon past memories, the book is available. It can be a spur to deeper reflection. It need not always be used consciously as such.

(vii) An overall assessment of the writing

At times I wondered whether the writing during the reading of the book had not been a burden rather than a pleasure. There were brief indications of discontent from the class. Nevertheless, the class teacher's comment is both illuminating and encouraging.

> I think we had a good blend of reading and writing and the written work improved as we went along and they knew what we expected. They more readily made use of adjectives and the descriptive work of some pupils was the best received from them thus far. This I think was greatly due to the stimulus the book provided.

Her remarks justify using writing as a tool for exploring a book. Used in conjunction with judicious discussion, writing is a means for personal fulfilment as elements of the meaning and the story are further investigated. Seeking the appropriate word to express one's feelings and putting ideas into words are all ways of learning as one grapples with these challenges to one's powers of communication and understanding. The responses outlined above indicate that the boys learned a great deal through writing. Some learnt more than others; sometimes even using one distinctively expressive word means progress for an individual. The quality of the response, although patchy and at times restricted to only a few pupils, is significant enough warrant to recommend that writing be an essential accompaniment of an exploration.

The articulation of response should also be enjoyable. The participants attested that this was the case; a majority each time indicating that they had enjoyed the respective pieces of writing, (refer to the questionnaire summary in Appendix E for details) with thirteen out of the seventeen affirming that there had <u>not</u> been too much writing in the programme. Learning was thus joyfully achieved.

C. THE CROSSWORD PUZZLE

(See Appendix F for the copy of the crossword puzzle used.)

The crossword puzzle added further variety to the activities. A crossword has a fun value while being mentally stimulating. The one used had a major defect in that too many Polynesian words were included. The educational value would have been enhanced by the incorporation of more English vocabulary. One of the beneficial side-effects of completing the crossword was practice in the art of skimming - a useful reading skill. This was developed through chapter references being given to assist the search for answers. On occasions when the boys asked for help, the teacher and I usually prompted the questioner to further thinking about the sequence and details of the story to facilitate his hunt for the correct word.

Overall, greater profit would have resulted had the clues been constructed around the issues of the story and not merely the words. Still the text remained the focal point throughout the completion of the crossword.

D. THE CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

These included a board-game, cartoon, map and menu and were done in different ways. The class was divided into two groups for the board-game and cartoon according to the teacher's assessment of pupil strengths and the requirements of each group e.g. the better artists were assigned to the cartoon group where their talents could be best employed. The map of the island on which Mafatu landed was done by part of the class only, because there was interest and an empty moment needed to be filled while others completed different work. (Remember the disruptive effects of the flu epidemic.) The menus were compiled after the official end of the project. The class teacher usefully slotted this work into quieter moments towards the end of the term. All four activities were preceded by discussion, either in groups or pairs, with the group collaborating to produce the finished product in the case of the cartoon and board-game. With the map and the menu, discussion was followed by individual work.

The cardinal feature - and educational advantage - of these activities was the fostering of further exploration of the text. In each case, some form of analytical thinking was required. The most profitable part of each activity lay in the design stage through pupils being forced to select for use only those suggestions most suitable for their particular purpose. The group discussions allowed all ideas to be evaluated communally with only the pertinent being retained. The most intense thinking about the text occurred during the group discussions. The resultant artifact, while revealing some of the quality of those cogitations, seldom indicates the full benefit that each person derives from the interaction.

(i) The Cartoon

The cartoon was limited to eight pictures which involved selecting only the significant moments for portrayal. Care also had to be taken to present as complete an account of the story as possible. The inevitable happened. It was easy to suggest more than eight relevant moments. That was when the activity really became interesting as each inclusion had to be evaluated and justified. (The cartoon was not included as an appendix because the monochrome photocopies were not aesthetically pleasing representations of the original colour drawings.)

A number of questions can be asked in assessing the cartoon. Does the choice of incidents reveal penetrative thinking about the text? Have the most momentous occasions been chosen? Are there any blatant omissions? When each picture is examined, it will be found to be a sound inclusion. The first picture depicts Mafatu caught in the storm with his mother; a necessary starting point because this incident explains the origin of Mafatu's fear of the sea. The second frame is equally important as Mafatu leaves the island at night to prove himself. His arrival at the volcanic island is third in the sequence. Also portrayed are the two distinctive features of the island: the volcano and the idol. The two other canoes shown are a distortion of the text as the isle was uninhabited when he landed. Mafatu's discovery of the whale's skeleton is

another well- founded choice as it provides him with the vital implements for survival: a knife, an axe and hooks. One of his heroic deeds is featured next in his killing of the hammerhead shark. It is an incident which excites the imagination. The sixth picture finds the theme reflected in Mafatu's thoughts after another moment of triumph. He has to leave the island and so the seventh picture is necessary, revealing too his desperate position. Mafatu thus arrives home in the eighth picture amidst acclamation which is an indirect reference to the meaning of the story. Overall the portrayal of the story in these eight incidents shows thought and the careful selection of significant details.

(ii) The Board-game

The boys were instructed to produce a sixty frame board-game with checks and advances reflecting the fortunes of the story. The resultant game is played with a dice and includes cards with further instructions dispensing either benefit or adversity. The advances and reversals in the game were largely consistent with the fluctuations of fortune as detailed in the text. However, the sequence of events in the game did not always accord with the sequence of the story. Nevertheless, well founded use was made of the textual details. There was imaginative incorporation of the text in the fortune/misfortune cards showing most appropriate reasoning in the naming thereof. The bad luck cards were called Moana cards after the god of the sea who, as Mafatu's adversary was constantly trying to defeat him. The cards of good luck were named Maui cards after the patron god of the fishermen upon whom Mafatu called for help. Pertinent use of the text was apparent even in the details of the cards. The Moana cards included a reference to the shark wrecking Mafatu's fish trap and the neglect of his daily duty in going to the lookout. Suitable mention amongst the Maui cards was made of the completion of Mafatu's canoe and his saving of Uri's life. In the finishing block of the game the theme was once again mentioned, "You have overcome your fears and have reached home".

The playing of the game was a climactic celebration for the group with the headmaster participating. The enjoyment exploded into hilarity when the head experienced the gravest misfortune on the board - a trip down the lava slide. The benefit had been derived from the design stage, now the excited pleasure of participation made it a memorable activity. Four boys mentioned the board game as being the most gratifying part of the project for themselves. For one it was the signal experience. He wrote "I feel sorry for the boys that did not do the board game because it was the best thing that I have done!"

(iii) The Map and the Menu

Both these activities showed that the boys could use the text for their own purposes. The menus juggled the foods mentioned in the book in a host of creative combinations. The maps gave a variety of interpretations of the events and places of the text. Through each of these activities the boys explored the story again but from a different perspective each time. Do teachers need to do more?

E. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher was assigned the role of catalyst in the learning process earlier in this dissertation. The practical experience gained during the project confirmed this guiding function of the teacher. If sharing is the chosen method of procedure, then there is little room for direct instruction. The teacher remains though a necessary member of the exploration team. During the group planning stages of the board game and cartoon, this function of acting as a selective participant became vital. The necessary overall instructions were given to each group and then the advisors,(the class teacher and the researcher), withdrew to the periphery of the activity. Both refrained from making direct suggestions about content and tried rather to guide by means of leading questions about the appropriateness and logicality of the group's proposals. While ideas

flowed prolifically in each group, clarity of thought was not always present. The boys' enthusiasm often exceeded their ability to organise. Pointed questioning by the advisors was necessary to prompt the pupils into evaluating suggestions for flaws and preventing them from blithely accepting all ideas. For example, the cartoon group used the word "carcase" when talking about the discovery of the whale's skeleton. Advisor questioning focussed the group's attention on ascertaining the difference until one boy checked the book for the truth. Once again, the text had been consulted. Thus, the teacher guides from a position of greater perception and knowledge while encouraging the pupils to think through the answer for themselves.

There is a time, too, for the teacher to remain silent deliberately and let the answer emerge through pupil initiative. At one stage during the board game planning, a reasonable suggestion was not taken up by the group. The temptation to intervene was strong but was resisted.* The final product was, in fact, superior to the earlier idea which had appeared so attractive. There is no doubt about it - pupils do learn on their own.

Until group dynamics are adequately learned through experience by the pupils, the teacher fulfils a vital function in this sphere. The groups needed prompting from the advisors to maintain momentum and avoid drifting into aimless discussion. Further experience in operating in groups will alleviate the problem, but the teacher needs to be at hand to give direction when the group loses its way. Even during the limited time of this project, group functioning improved. One group used a voting system to resolve the problem of a title for the board-game. This more orderly and structured approach had replaced a more random mode of operation.

The greatest challenge to the teacher embarking on a project of this nature is to adapt accepted beliefs and procedures. The class teacher confessed that "she found it rather difficult to freely accept the noise during various group

* It was learned later that there had been some teacher guidance.

discussions and activities". She was aware too of the problem of "trying to control the class without killing the enthusiasm". At the back of every teacher's mind will also lurk this question "Are they learning anything?" The head may want to ask the same awkward question when he sees pupils chattering excitedly clustered in small groups. The class teacher's sentiments will provide reassurance. "At times I thought so little had been done during a specific time but after careful thought I realised how many more skills of the pupils had been stimulated and developed than would have been during a normal lesson." She also confesses that upon later reading and evaluation "one is at times surprised at the quality of the work". The pupils do learn through self-activity. The teacher must patiently give them latitude to do so, humbly acknowledging that he is not the sole repository of knowledge and wisdom.

F. FELLOWSHIP ACHIEVED

Did all this activity create a community characterised by fellowship? Was the sharing joyful? Did the experience lead to beneficial personal development? Yes, is the answer to all three questions.

The opinions of the boys are instructive. Thirteen affirmed that they had learnt something from the project. Eight boys mentioned in their evaluation that they had taken inspiration from the theme of the story. In some way control of their own fears had resulted from the consideration of Mafatu's exemplary courage. Personal enlightenment was gained which improved their perceptions of human nature and the problems of man's existence. As one boy expressed it, "I have learnt that you must never give up and have the courage to overcome your fears". Such wisdom is indeed precious. The following admission is also exciting because of the potential for further development:

"I learned to think for myself". Perhaps this boy learned the best skill of all. The class teacher concurred about the benefit in more general terms saying that "although some tasks may seem more play than work, there was always something of value to the pupils each time". Personal profit was a consequence of the fellowship.

The fellowship was fun filled. The experience was enjoyed by the whole class with all expressing a desire to participate in a similar project. (See the questionnaire in Appendix E). The chief reasons given reflected their interested enjoyment of the story and the activities. The majority expressed approval of the writing work which proved to be a significant experience for some. Their enthusiasm, during the different activities was obvious and this boy's outburst at the end of 70 minutes of project activity one day most probably reflects the feelings of his classmates. "Is English over already? Why don't we have the whole day for it?" Fun followed fulfilment throughout.

The sharing in groups and writing about their own feelings and experiences promoted a confidential warmth in the class. The class teacher noticed the improved intimacy as the boys began to confide more readily in her. As the one best qualified to judge, she wrote,

> It was most certainly a shared experience. I grew to understand the pupils' way of thinking which made it easier to come down to their levels... I felt a closer bond with the pupils sharing ideas which is not how one feels during any other lesson.

In balancing the expenditure of time in preparation for such a project with the value thereof she concludes that "the enjoyment and the feeling of discovering something new in a pupil is tremendous". She found the whole experience then to be personally enriching and enlightening. The profit is certainly not only on the side of the pupils. Her conclusion:
"The most valuable thing for me was the feeling of being accepted as a more intimate 'friend' of the pupils (some) and being able to share something with them."

Fellowship achieved indeed.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of conclusions have been reached and recommendations made either explicitly or implicitly throughout the dissertation. The main ideas supported by the literature survey and the research are now summarized. These are followed by some recommendations including practical guidelines for the teacher wanting to implement a literary project of this nature.

I. CONCLUSIONS

1. The oral and written responses of the pupils revealed that worthwhile mental and emotional development is promoted in the primary school child through an in-depth exploration of a children's book.

2. The child's capacity for imaginative and creative response improves through the exercise of their faculties in stimulating activities. Children's novels can provide the context and inspiration for those activities.

3. Pupils do learn effectively from one another as groups grapple with creative challenges with the teacher being largely an initiator and guide rather than an instructor.

4. The study of a novel is a co-operative enterprise with teacher and pupils standing side by side as co-learners. The interaction between class and teacher aroused by the sharing of ideas and experiences enhances the classroom atmosphere. Trust and friendship grow.

5. The two educational ideals of growth on the one hand and pleasurable involvement on the other are achieved concurrently.

II PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

These conclusions outline the substantial benefit of a joint study of fiction in the primary school and justify a major recommendation and a corollary for teacher training. Neglect thereof will create an undesirable void in a school's reading curriculum.

1. Teachers in the primary school from standard three and upwards should include the joint exploration of a specific work of fiction as an integral part of the reading programme for each class.

2. It is incumbent upon educational institutions responsible for teacher training to give specific guidance to students concerning the principles and practice of a shared exploration of fiction.

III PRACTICAL AND PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Plan more activities than the class could possibly cover in the allotted time. Have available for use all the feasible ideas that are supported by the text. At this point the teacher needs to be flexible and to allow for the diversity of interests in the class to determine which activities should be done. They are the ones most likely to succeed. With group work being the heart of the mode of operation, pupils could well select the activity they would prefer. Alternatively, the teacher can allocate pupils to groups in terms of their specific abilities.

2. Planning extensively has a further advantage. Often it is difficult to keep all members of the class busy on the same activity at the same time. Some will work faster than others and then sit idle. Disruption can be avoided if these pupils complete other activities which the bulk of the class will not do. The pre-planned list is now invaluable for filling the empty moment.

3. Do not hesitate to differentiate when required. It is not necessary for the whole class to do the same activity.

4. Allocate the length of time deemed to be desirable for the project and add a week to provide for contingencies both positive and negative. An enthusiastic response from the pupils could spontaneously generate new avenues for exploration. Be prepared to accept these other directions.

5. Plunge quickly into reading the book. Do not spend time on lengthy preparatory work or introductions. Let the book work its magic on the pupils.

6. Let the reading stage progress as rapidly as possible breaking only for discuscussion and activities tied to particular moments in the text.

7. The book must be read aloud by the teacher to the class if the shared experience is to generate any vitality.

8. Writing associated with a book should not be extensive. (A reading journal need not be kept every time.) Set a maximum of 3-4 pieces of writing. Ensure that this writing is of a <u>responsive</u> nature allowing for some imaginative extension of the text, for empathy, and above all, for the expression of personal thoughts and feelings.

9. Limit the major creative activities involving groups to one or two projects. Time is usually the problem.

10. If enthusiasm is present for further activities, let the pupils do them voluntarily at home.

11. Do not exhaust the possibilities for creative work. Leave the book with the pupils clamouring for more. That is the best type of satisfaction.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A: Discussion Questions

The following questions can serve as guidelines to the teacher in devising a strategy for class discussion. Clearly, a selection has to be made according to the story being explored and the teacher's purpose. The list is not exhaustive and should be added to by the resourceful teacher. These suggestions are taken from Thomas, R., & Perry, A., 1984, p96.

CHARACTERIZATION

Who were the main characters?

What were they like? (physical description)

What type of person were they?

Did you like/dislike them?

Why were they important to the story?

Why did they behave as they did?

Was it good/bad behaviour?

Do you know anyone like them?

How did they change throughout the story?

SETTING

Where did the story take place?

What was the place like?

Could there be a place like this?

Would you like to live there?

When did the story take place? (past, present, future)

Was there, or could there be a time like this?

MOOD

How did you feel while reading the story?

What was the saddest/funniest incident?

What was the most exciting/unusual/mysterious incident?

How did the author make you feel the way you did?

What do you remember most about the story?

PLOT

What happened in the story? (Verbalize sequence of events.)

What might have happened if a certain action had not ended as it did?

What other way might the story have ended?

STYLE

Was the book easy to read?

Did the author use simple words?

Were there any unusual ways of saying things?

THEME

Why do you think the author wrote the book?

What is the author trying to make us think about?

What do we learn about the author's thinking?

FORM

Was this story

real
fantasy
legend
folklore
biography
history?

APPENDIX B: Reading Interests Questionnaire.

My Reading Interests.

Name :-

1. Do you like reading books? Yes/No.
2. If yes, give reasons for liking reading.
3. If no, say why you don't like reading.
4. Do you enjoy it when the teacher reads a story to you? Yes/No.
5. Give a reason for your answer to No 4.
6. Have you enjoyed the class readers? Yes/No
7. What have you liked about the class reader?
8. What have you not liked about the class reader?
9. Would you have liked to discuss the book with your teacher? Yes/No.
10. What types of books do you enjoy reading? Name your favourite authors.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS USED FOR FULL CLASS DISCUSSIONS

p6. Why does Mafatu like Kivi? In what ways is Mafatu similar to Kivi?

p9. What would you have done if you had heard the boys say those things about you? What would you have thought and felt if you had been Mafatu?

p12. Was Mafatu's action in leaving the island alone foolish or brave? A mini debate was held with the class divided into two groups.

CHAPTER TWO - THE SEA

p74. Mafatu is drifting away from his homeland. How do you think he felt?

p17-19 What would you have thought and felt if you had been Mafatu caught in the storm?

p19. "terror raised its head" Why should he be frightened?

p22. Note the contrast. The land appears friendly after the sea.

CHAPTER THREE - THE ISLAND

p26. Why is the water called "cool magic"?

p26. Give another word for "eaters-of-men".

p29-30 Why did Mafatu not feel particularly happy while exploring the island? Consider some of the words and phrases used.

p38 Discuss the victory Mafatu achieves over his fear especially "He had forced himself to do something that he dreaded, something that took every ounce of his will". What do you fear most? How have you tried to overcome it? If you wanted to overcome your greatest fear, how would you do it? How would you feel?

CHAPTER FOUR - DRUMS

p43. Make predictions about the implications of the chapter heading.

p57. "This was the first day he had neglected that duty." What does this statement suggest? Perhaps refer back to p52 for the full import.

p63. Discuss the definition of courage.

CHAPTER FIVE - HOMEWARD

p66. Why does Mafatu not leave immediately he hears the drums? Why does he want to see who is there?

p66. Why are the drums "a testament of death"?

p76. Moana's threat is finally conquered. Refer to the earlier reminders of the Sea-god's threat pp. 4,18,22,36,72,76.

p78. Discuss the significance of the difference / similarity of the first and last paragraphs of the book.

APPENDIX D

A CHASE

My friends and I were walking in the jungle with a groaning hungry stomach. Suddenly we saw a small boy panting on a rock. I pushed the others aside so I could get the lead. He jumped up and ran so I ran fast after him. He was running towards the beach stumbling, slipping and sliding. I fell...

In a flash I was back up on my feet. At last we had reached the beach exausted. Now I knew he had no chance he would die on this very island; but I saw the boy climming into a canoe. I was furious.

I dived in after the canoe. I found it faster walking on sand below so I ran along the sand. Then I started to swim. I clung onto the edge of the canoe. The the boy took the paddle and hit me very hard on the knuckles. I screamed. My knuckles were saw, bruised and bleeding. Soon I gave up and went back to shore swearing at my brainless friends. I ran and called the others. My knuckles were stinging like mad. I got them all together and were after that dreadful boy. We were a much stronger crew and we had stronger and faster canoes. We were catching up to him. My lips were watering and my teeth were very white. It made the boy very nervous. Suddenly he started pulling away farther and farther he went. I was furious. So we had to return to the island. I had an ugly feeling in my guts. N.

(Note: it seems as if the writer did not intend a new paragraph after "furious".)

THE CHASE

I was the chief of the savages of Smoking Islands. We were coming to Death Mountains to sacrifice for our marae our god. We were dancing around the fire when I saw a person running up the side of the mountain. I gave a shout and started running after him. My men followed.

We saw him get into his canoe and sail away. We ran for our canoes and started rowing after him. I was determined to get him and I was angry for letting him escape from us. We were catching up very quickly. I thought how we would kill him before our god and how he would send us rain and good weather.

Suddenly a wind arouse. We knew that it was all over for us. We watched him go far ahead of us with a hatred in our hearts. It was no use trying to catch him so we returned to Smoking Islands. F.

THE CHASE

We had been dancing round the marae when I had suddenly seen a shadow moving. I charged and immediatly others followed. I had a fleeting glimpse as the shadow slinked away into the trees. We ran behind gaining, losing, gaining and losing. We came to the waters edge and stopped abruptly for he was in his canoe and sailing away. There was only one choice.

We ran as fast as we could, got into the boat and shipped the oars. We rowed and rowed until we eventually rounded the point of the reef. The chase was on! The boy was far ahead (having to find the point had delayed us) and skimming over the water like the wind. We gained and then lost him, but as day broke we could see him and with the day came stillness. The wind had dropped. Now he was powerless. I thought that when we caught him we would behead him, or carry him back. When we got back we would roast him, burn him, ofer him to our god, leave him to be devoured by our god. This made us paddle faster and faster. We had visions of what was going to happen, burning, roasting and a cooked sacrifice to our god.

The wind came up. Once again the boat ahead disappeared, for good. Anger was in my mind. Defeat was on my shoulders. Anger raged in our hearts. We turned back, defeat and despair resting squarly, on our shoulders. We had lost, a disgraceful loss. B2.

APPENDIX E: Project Evaluation Questionnaire

The Boy who was afraid

Total respondents = 17

Name:

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Didn't it – Absent
1. Did you enjoy writing:				
the poem	9	–	3	2 (3 BLANK)
the prayer	11	–	6	
the song	9	1	3	4
the letter	9	–	1	6 (1 BLANK)
about "The Chase"	14	–	–	3
about your own fears?	13	1	3	–
Was there too much writing work?	2	13	2	–
3. Did you enjoy doing:				
the map	8		2	7
the cartoon	10			5 (2 BLANK)
the boardgame?	9	1		5 (2 BLANK)
4. I would have liked to read the story myself silently, rather than hear the teacher read it	4	11	2	
5. Was the discussion enjoyable?	14		3	
6. Did you enjoy hearing the story being read aloud?	16	1		
7. Would you like to do another project like this one?	17			
8. Give a reason for your answer.				

	Yes	No	Not Sure	Absent
9 Did you enjoy the whole project?	16	-	1	
10. Which parts did you enjoy the most?				
11 Which parts did you enjoy the least?				
12 Do you think you learnt anything from the whole project.	13	2	2	
13 If yes, what did you learn?				

14. Tell me your opinion of the project. Say anything you like.

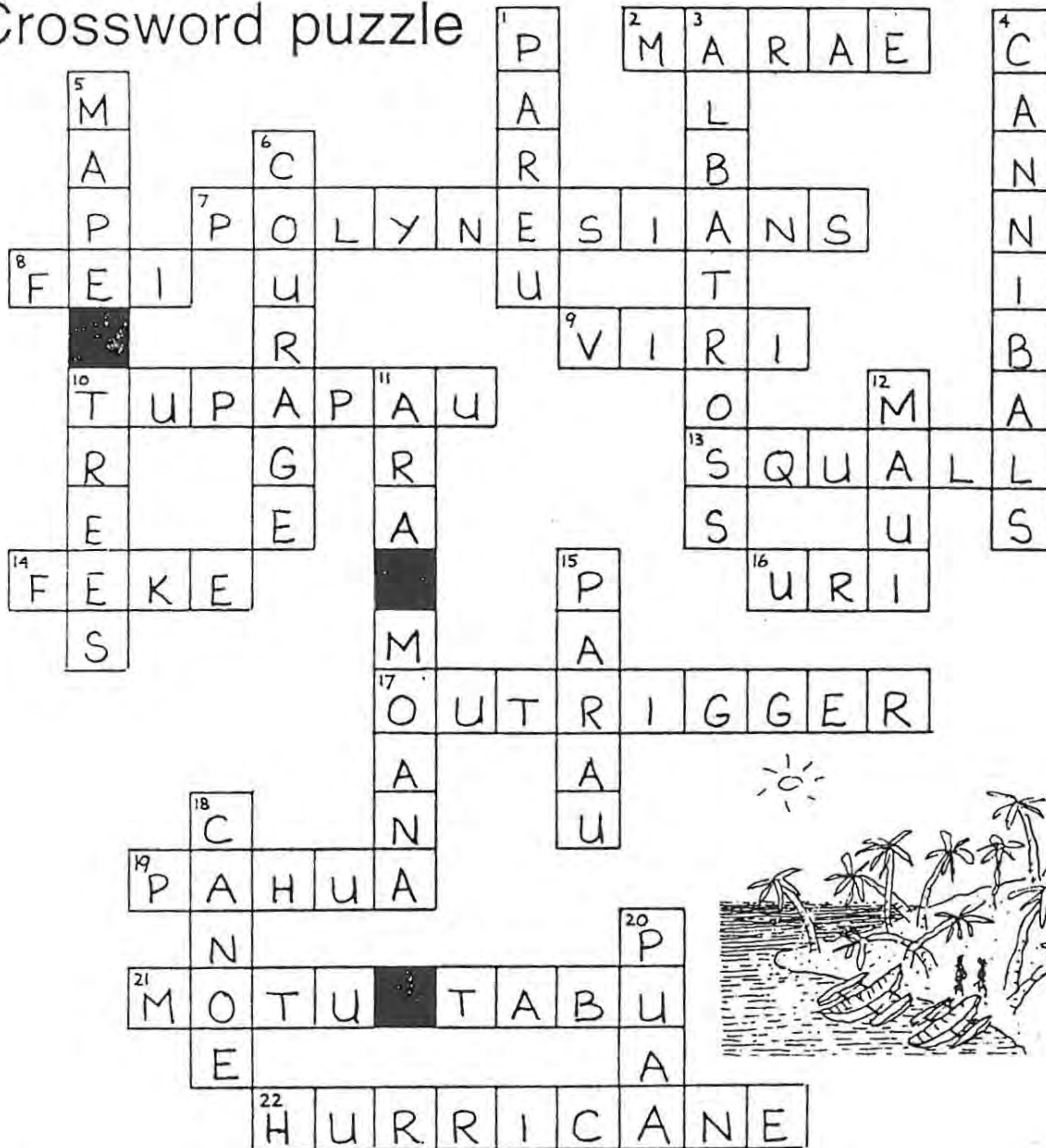
NOTE about the figures in question 3.

Although the class was divided into two groups to work on the game and the cartoon, there are 20 responses. This anomaly arose through some of the cartoon group indicating their feelings about playing the game. One boy from the game design group also helped with the cartoon.

Thanks boys for all your help. It has been fun.

APPENDIX F: Crossword Puzzle (Taken from Thomas, R., & Perry, A., 1984, p110).

Reproducible page



Polynesian words from *The boy who was afraid.*
(Scan the text of the story to locate the appropriate word.)

1 Clothing made of bark (Ch. 2)
2 A sacred place (Ch. 3)
3 A large sea-bird (Ch. 1)
4 Eaters-of-men (Ch. 4)
5 Island chestnut-trees (two words) (Ch. 3)
6 A quality worshipped by the Polynesians (Ch. 1)
7 The race of people (Ch. 1)
8 Wild bananas (Ch. 3)
9 Wild (Ch. 4)
10 The ghost spirit (Ch. 1)
11 Ancient words for Pacific Ocean currents (two words) (Ch. 2)
12 The god of fishermen (Ch. 2)
13 Sudden gusts of wind (Ch. 2)
14 Octopus (Ch. 4)
15 Tree used to make a canoe (Ch. 1)
16 Name of Mafatu's dog (Ch. 1)
17 Framework projecting from the side of the canoe (Ch. 1)
18 A means of sea transport
19 Giant clam (Ch. 5)
20 Pig (Ch. 4)
21 Forbidden Island (two words) (Ch. 3)
22 Violent storm (Ch. 1)

APPENDIX G: Cascades Teaching Ideas

This series of worksheets has been devised to assist response to stories. The principles inherent in many of the ideas and methods are applicable to any study of fiction and can be adapted to suit other titles. The series (based on recent children's fiction) is available in South Africa from Collins Vaal (Pty) Ltd., P.O. Box 61342. Marshalltown 2107.

JOHN BRANFIELD : THE FOX IN WINTER

Introductory Note

A skilled reader, absorbed in a story, seems to be engaged in a range of activities : making mental images; looking forwards to what might happen next or to the end of the story - or thinking back over what has already happened; enjoying the interplay of personal experiences with those of the fictional characters; responding to the way in which the story is being told - its descriptive power, characterisation, dialogue, structure, humour and so on. The suggestions for classroom work which follow are based on this view of what happens when we read, in the belief that the work will not only enhance enjoyment, but also develop pupils' skills as active, responsive readers.

Teachers know best how to plan appropriately for their own classes and will have their own preferences when deciding whether work should be for a whole class, groups, pairs or individuals. Consequently, I have offered notes addressed to the teacher, rather than attempting to phrase invitations to pupils I do not know.

The marginal initials 'B', 'D' and 'A' indicate whether an activity might be used 'Before the reading of the book', 'During the reading of the story' or 'After the story has been read'. I am grateful to my colleague Brian Merrick for his help in preparing these suggestions.

Geoff Fox, Exeter University School of Education

1. The oldest person I've met. Projects and discussions about Old Age in school often seem to elicit clichéd responses - as a way of avoiding these, and preparing the way for the book, pupils might write a short piece about "the oldest person I've met" (or a similar topic), leading to some swapping of experiences in groups. They might find it helpful to concentrate first on outward appearance, then on personality or to describe their person in a very characteristic setting in terms of place and what s/he is doing.

   If it goes well, this work might lead to some improvisation "Meet Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms ..." or "Scenes from the life of ...", although one would not want to delay the book too long.

1A Someone I'll remember. It might be, as an alternative to Suggestion 1, that pupils would find it interesting to recall (in writing and/or talk) an older person who has made a very strong impression on them at some time. Obviously, these may be relatives, but sometimes single meetings or regular but fleeting encounters (e.g. lollipop ladies, people in certain shops, a neighbourhood 'character') leave strong memories.

2. Literary old people. Pupils list memorable old people they have met in books, films or TV. Any in which relationships between old people and teenagers have been important? What were the qualities of these relationships? Any where physical decline (through ageing or illness) has been of importance? It may well be that discussion arising from these starters will involve a useful sharing of personal anecdotes.

3. Pauses for Prediction. Pupils may be drawn into the plot more closely if they are asked to speculate about what might happen next. For example, at p. 55 (end of first section), at p. 144 ("do you think we could have him here?"), at p. 155 ("Mr. Laity ... was holding a package for her. which she should collect"); or,

on p. 91, pupils might speculate about what is likely to be in Mr. Treloar's will - they could indeed try writing it, given a model for the lay-out of a will and some idea of what Mr. Treloar might have to dispose of in terms of cash and property.

D/A 4. Nancy. Nancy's character emerges slowly - our viewpoint shifts as the story unfolds. (For example, we learn little of Fran's father until pp 127/8). The way she talks about her patients is not always reflected in the depth of her concern for them. (The way adults cope, or fail to cope, with jobs which make emotional demands upon them is an area teenage pupils might possibly consider.) They could, for example, be asked to jot down their impressions of Nancy at different points in the story, to share thoughts in pairs or groups and to check if their opinions have changed.

D/A 4A Real Life Interviews. Without taking pupils too far away from the book, an exploration of Nancy's job which has gone well (see Suggestion 3) could lead to a good session with someone invited into the classroom from the 'real world' whose job involves them with the pain and grief of others (e.g. District Nurse, Hospital Nurse, Doctor, Superintendent of Old People's Home, Undertaker, Priest, Social Worker). (I do not myself feel these sessions should be followed by written work unless pupils really want to write - perhaps a story or a poem.)

A 5. Mr. Treloar. One of the strengths of the book seems to me to be John Branfield's avoidance of stereotype. Just as Nancy is slowly revealed to us (and perhaps to Fran), so is Mr. Treloar. Pupils could record reactions to him throughout the novel (c.f. Suggestion 3); discuss why the book is called The Fox in Winter; or conduct a series of interviews with role-played characters about how they saw Mr. Treloar (a kind of posthumous This is Your Life) - for example, Nancy, Rosemary, Desmond, Shirley, the matron of 'The Laurels', Cousin Winifred, Frank Pascoe - and, on a separate occasion perhaps, Fran herself.

D/A 5A In Focus. This last activity can also be explored through a structured improvisation in which 4 or 5 characters who have known Mr. Treloar stand in a circle around a seated, silent Mr. Treloar. They make statements or comments about how they feel about him and his life - and even exchange remarks. At a signal from the teacher, Mr. Treloar can respond. Pupils need to know the specific 'time' they are in for this kind of work - either at a given point in the book or in a kind of limbo after the conclusion of the novel.

D/A 5B Real Life Interviews. As with 4A, the work on Mr. Treloar could well lead to going out to visit older people for interviews (c.f. Fran's English assignment on p. 57). The experience of teachers who have carried out this kind of work suggests that a preliminary visit to an old people's home is essential to make arrangements which reassure both interviewers and interviewed (for example, some elderly people prefer to be interviewed in pairs). It seems best if only a few children go to any one home (numbers of available tape recorders would no doubt dictate this anyway). In planning this work, it would make sense to reread the relevant passages about Fran's experiences of talking to Mr. Treloar, and possibly to run some 'dummy' interviews if pupils are unused to this kind of work.

A 6. Obituaries and Epitaphs. A brief obituary in 'The North Cornishman' for Mr. Treloar, or perhaps a joint epitaph for Mr. and Mrs. Treloar (the latter could obviously be presented as a grave-stone shaped piece of paper or card).

A 7. Institutions. It would not seem to me to be going too far away from the book to reread the section about either Goonlaze House Hospital or 'The Laurels', and then to invite pupils to draw up a list of the qualities (both physical and intangible) which should characterise a good hospital or private nursing home in their view ("one where Mr. and Mrs. Treloar would have been content"). This might be expanded to a design plan for a room or a wing; or a ground plan of a building. Pupils might also devise a timetable of a typical day or week.

A 8. Fran. Collect (say) a dozen phrases of Fran's spoken words or private thoughts which show how she changes through her relationship with the Treloars. If pupils need some guidance, they could be pointed to such phrases as, "She felt very out of place, now that she was here; she felt as though she was intruding upon the old people's misfortune" (p. 20); "I don't want to be old," (p. 41); "I only listened to him". (p. 57). Such phrases can be reported to the whole class, arranged on card with illustrations as a kind of words-and-pictures collage; or prepared as a kind of "spoken-word collage" for performance.

CASCADES

Teaching Ideas

13 THE AWAKENING WATER : G.R. KESTEVEN

Introductory Note

A skilled reader, absorbed in a story, seems to be engaged in a range of activities : making mental images; looking forwards to what might happen next or to the end of the story - or thinking back over what has already happened; enjoying the inter-play of personal experiences with those of the fictional characters; responding to the way in which the story is being told - its descriptive power, characterisation, dialogue, structure, humour and so on. The suggestions for classroom work which follow are based on this view of what happens when we read, in the belief that the work will not only enhance enjoyment, but also develop pupils' skills as active, responsive readers.

Teachers know best how to plan appropriately for their own classes and will have their own preferences when deciding whether work should be for a whole class, groups, pairs or individuals. Consequently, I have offered notes addressed to the teacher, rather than attempting to phrase invitations to pupils I do not know.

The marginal initials 'B', 'D' and 'A' indicate whether an activity might be used 'Before the book is read', 'During the reading of the story' or 'After the story has been read'.

Geoff Fox, Exeter University School of Education

B 1. The Title. Since the 'awakening water' is referred to in Chapter One, a class could be drawn into the book through a short brainstorming session (for perhaps five minutes) about what is a story with such a title to be about? Individual jottings might lead to pair conversations or all-class contributions with a final sharing of ideas throughout the class. This exercise might best be done before the pupils actually see the book, since the cover obviously sets up expectations also ... alternatively, it could be combined with the suggestion made in No. 2 below.

B 2. The Cover. The different elements in the cover may well make the basis of a brainstorming session (see No. 1 above) about the story and the themes suggested by the illustration.

D 3. Chapter Titles 1. Before a chapter is begun, pupils might compare ideas about what they think is about to happen in the chapter on the basis of its title.

A 4. Chapter Titles II. The chapter titles (without numbers) are written out onto slips of card and without reference back to the book, groups or pairs attempt to arrange them in the order in which they think they came in the book. (The purpose of the exercise is to allow readers to 'rework' the plot together, reminding each other of events, and in the process perhaps beginning to make comments about the book itself. This activity may well therefore be a useful preliminary to other work.)

D/A 5. The Stories Told in the Home. (See pp. 10/11) Pupils might : (a) write one of the stories mentioned here or create a new one; (b) write out a list of brief synopses of perhaps half-a-dozen stories - two or three sentences each; or (c) as a group, chant a story written by themselves (as the boys on p. 10 had to do) to the rest of the class.

D 6. A Running Reference List. Various things and places are described which John doesn't know about but which a reader could identify. (For example, the Seventh River, the 'game they played with a ball and a stick' (p. 41), the building which houses the Local Centre (p. 143), Old Potter's gramophone.) To build understanding, a running 'wall-chart' of such objects could be maintained.

D 7. What John was Missing. Much of the underlying 'message' of the book has to do with qualities of life we tend to accept without thinking. As John (and Janet) have their eyes opened to new sights and experiences, they both find a keen pleasure in them. To help readers to recognise this strand in the book, a reference list of these could be maintained and discussed. It might also be worth asking pupils, fairly early on in the reading of the book, to try to list experiences - sights, sounds etc. - which they encounter regularly which Watford Nine John would not experience. Teachers skilled in drama might see opportunities here, perhaps in the use of 'sense-deprivation' exercises?

D 8. Hugh. Before John and the group vote on Hugh (p. 112/3) each individual in the class, perhaps after some discussion with a neighbour or a group, decides how s/he would vote. The vote might be taken (anonymously if one wishes to reinforce this point in the book) and the class's judgement and thinking be subsequently compared to the way the group in the book behaves.

D/A 9. "If I decide to ask you ..." (p. 70). The reasons for the initiative in 'pairing' having passed to the female are not given until the Leader's explanation on p. 158. Pupils might consider why this convention has shifted - possible reasons and their validity. (Although formal proposals may already have disappeared in the UK in the 1980's, pupils may find the question of who takes the initiative in different aspects of male/female relationships an interesting topic - perhaps the use of comparative lists (headed Female/Male/Either/Both) showing how decisions are made between heterosexual couples would be interesting to compile.)

D 10. Maps. It may increase understanding if readers realise that the story is rooted in a real district, so that a sketch wall-map of Herts/Bucks/Oxfordshire might be of use. Creating maps of the immediate locale of the story (showing the Home, the different hides/ruins, the river, roads, Old Potter's place etc.) would provide a way for some readers to 'rework' the events of the story.

A 11. The Leader. The tactics of the Party have been, at the very least, open to question. Suppose the Leader (perhaps role-played by the teacher, a colleague or student-teacher who is available for a lesson, or by a group of pupils who have spent time re-reading the closing chapters) is asked to give a press conference to journalists from the present day (by way of Time-Slip News Services) ... or simply to the class as themselves. They cross-question the Leader and, possibly, write up an account of the conference later. (The 'point-in-time' has to be the end of the book, clearly.)

A 12. The File on Eric. The Party seems to keep records (see p. 152). Pupils might compose files on one or two characters - Eric, Old Potter and Hugh might be suitable cases for treatment. Some pupils might welcome an open brief in preparing such a file but others might need a list of headings (e.g. "Early Background", "Present Whereabouts", "Likely Future Action", "Personality", "Appearance" etc.) or even a duplicated blank record sheet.

A 13. The Continuing Story. Pupils might continue the story, trying to foresee future difficulties and successes for the society. This could be written work, but it could also be done as a 'chain story' around the class or a group (each person adding a sentence) or through improvisation. A starting point for the latter would need to be provided by fixing a point (e.g. arrival at the new settlement beyond Oxford - the group shares thoughts and speculations about their experiences since last they met, or after discussion, pupils prepare a scene some months after the book's account ends).

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P.S.

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