Children’s Literature: A Rhetorical Analysis

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English 104: Current Issues From a Rhetorical Perspective
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Project Notes

The term ‘children’s literature’ as used within this report refers to literature aimed at children aged two to six, unless otherwise specified.

This report’s focus is on original research and synthesis of ideas relating to rhetoric within children’s literature. Secondary sources were consulted to reinforce ideas regarding discussion topics and the history of children’s literature. There was much concentration on primary sources.
Introduction

Children’s literature is a genre with a variety of interesting and effective rhetorical techniques seeking to entertain children and educate them about the fundamentals in life. There are many subcategories in this genre dedicated to different age groups. The focus of this report is the examination of the rhetorical stance in early children’s literature meant primarily for youth aged two to six. The report then seeks to draw conclusions about central thematic tendencies present as well as the different methods and mediums used to convey generally complex ideas in a simple manner.

A sample of children’s literature, forty-eight books in total, was analyzed. Thirty-eight of these were artefacts intended for very young children. They were generally books published within the last few decades, and as so are very recent and telling examples of the current state of children’s literature. Within this sample, several rhetorical tendencies and strategies were observed. There are three primary focal points around which most stories in children’s literature are centred. There is the contrast and opposition created between human society and nature in general. Nature, in so far as the books are considered, exists in two primary forms: animals and their interactions, and as a greater force dictating the actions of man and beast alike, through things like weather or environmental degradation. Animals and humanity are often portrayed as alien to each other’s lifestyle and needs, but they are both consistently depicted in opposition to natural forces greater than themselves. Books focused additionally on animals operating in their natural habitat, often without the consideration of humans or their influence. In situations like these, animals usually have anthropomorphic tendencies and think and communicate in a similar manner to humans.

Often times children’s literature, while offering information in narrative form, is concerned with simply teaching readers about certain things. In so far as the environment is considered, books educate young readers about things like the food chain, the lifecycles of plants, the nature of predators and the different ways in which animals survive in the world.

In order to accomplish this, children’s literature generally, but not necessarily, employs simple informative diction, which often times will rhyme. The text is almost always paired with vivid illustration to appeal to children more effectively. Illustrations render the text more real and help early readers make connections between what is written, and what seems to be happening in a picture. Children’s literature is characterized by a distinct interplay between logos, ethos and pathos, though this will be further elaborated upon in the ‘Background’ section.

This report also contains analyses of ten books intended for older children. Each of the books selected has some form of relevant environmental context. This part of the sample is intended to offer contrast with literature intended for early readers and provide some insight into how children’s literature evolves as children grow and tackle more complex and detailed stories. This part of the sample will not be analyzed to the same extent as early children’s literature, but will be expanded upon in the ‘Discussion’ section.
Background and History

Background

Children’s literature, as detailed in the introduction and further analyzed later on within this report, seeks to educate and delight children, and sometimes to persuade them on certain issues. Its purpose is, generally speaking, to introduce children to reading in a positive and amusing manner, while educating them, as stated earlier, about the more fundamental aspects of life. As humans are products of nature and are constantly interacting with it in some way, many children’s books have the environment as their major focus.

Authors of children’s books are usually individuals whose names carry a high degree of ethos. Someone writing a book intended for children is entrusted with providing a sound and positive moral and ethical story that children should generally be warm and receptive towards. Children are extremely impressionable and, since the insertion of literature targeted towards them into society, they tend to be heavily impacted by the stories they read. Humans have an almost biological need for stories, as discussed by Carl Jung in book Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. Authors appeal in their stories to a child’s natural curiosity, by writing about things children are likely unfamiliar with. Any sort of story about animals or natural occurrences will teach children something new about the world they live in. With this charge of education, authors do utilize logos heavily. They provide simplified but usually accurate information of natural phenomena, on animal behaviour and many other things. As will be mentioned later on, there are many cases in which authors give children false information about a given subject, say for example that weather is actually controlled by fairies. This should not be thought of as dishonest, because here authors cater to a child’s broad and extensive capacity for imagination. They employ pathos and offer a delightful and entertaining explanation of events that can be amended by simple explanation from parents or teachers or even other, more logos based books.

Children’s literature is an excellent example of a genre in which there is clear and obvious correlation between content and form. Words are limited, though the actual amount of text varies from selection to selection. They are almost always paired with large illustrations. These images depict the action occurring in the book and are a fundamental aspect of the genre.

Overall, children’s literature is distinguished by the pathos-driven appeal to children’s imaginations and emotions, the logos based delivery of facts and the ethos characterized by the trust placed by parents in authors of children’s literature and the stories they write. The tone of such moral and ethical lessons is dictated by the social paradigm of the time and place in which the work was created. With a large portion of the sample written in the latter quarter of the twentieth century, moral messages are focused around treating others, no matter who they are, as well as the natural world, with respect and always seeking to achieve one’s best, no matter how long it takes.

History

Looking at children’s literature today, one would never expect that even five hundred years ago children’s literature was virtually nonexistent. In fact, it is believed that all literature, both adult and children’s, began with stories that were told orally by elders in various civilizations (Russell, 3). These stories were suggested to possess ‘mythological’ and ‘ideological’ elements, which were told through ‘fables’ and ‘epics’ to civilizations (Russell, 4).

Throughout history children have not always been seen and treated as they are today, but rather as ‘miniature adults’ (Cullinan, 641). This perception of the child, remained fixed in people’s minds up until the late 1600’s early 1700’s, and is reflected in the literature or lack thereof offered to children during that time. Although the Gutenberg printing press had been developed in 1440, books were still a rare and costly commodity (Cullinan, 641). Therefore, books for adults and children alike were only available to the wealthy (Russell, 4). The very few children’s books that were in circulation strictly delivered logos based messages, which were chalked full of ‘moralistic’ and ‘religious’ themes (Brown & Tomlinson, 70). Much of what was read to the general public was of biblical content as well folk tales and fables and was primarily shared through ‘minstrels’ or plays, where literature was read aloud to the audience (Cullinan, 642).

During the late 1600’s and carrying into the 1700’s society’s perception of the child grew and developed into a recognizable and special stage of life (Russell, 9). As a result several different models and forms of children’s literature began to make themselves readily available to the public (Russell, 9). The infant mortality rate was much higher and life expectancy of children was significantly shorter than what we have come to be familiar with today. Because of this, literature for children during this era closely reflects society’s belief that children were to read books in part to educate themselves, but primarily to ‘earn’ themselves salvation (Brown & Tomlinson, 70). This was most prominently believed amongst a religious sector of the Protestant church that referred to themselves as Puritans. Because the infant mortality rate was so high, Puritan children were encouraged to devote themselves to their religion at all times with the belief that by doing so, they would receive salvation (Cullinan, 642). Two pieces of children’s literature were primarily used and encouraged within the Puritan tradition to help children learn about and receive salvation – The Hornbook and the New England Primer (Cullinan, 643). The Hornbook, consisted of simple text [the Lord’s Prayer] and a lesson [the alphabet], which was mounted on a wooden paddle and covered with a thin sheet of hammered cow’s horn and fastened to the wood in a brass frame and nails (Cullinan, 644). The New England Primer on the other hand consisted of wooden cutouts of pictures which displayed graphic images that depicted punishment as a result of disobedience. Both the Hornbook and the New England Primer contained various editions and messages, but both pieces of literature aimed at providing education both religiously and secularly through the use of logos and ethos (Russell, 7). In the secular world, two other mediums of children’s literature were circulating around the same time – Chapbooks and Battledores. Both books were made out of layers of cardboard;
however Battledores were usually educational books whereas Chapbooks on the other hand, consisted of fables and fairy tales (Russell, 7).

While the Puritans placed importance on religious children’s literature and the secular world on imaginative children’s literature, John Locke focused in on a child’s intellectuality, and the importance of shaping that through literature (Cullinan, 647). With his essay entitled “Some Thoughts Concerning Education”, John Locke suggested that all children are born with minds that are waiting to be written on (Russell, 9). Arguing that every child should have the same education, Locke suggested that this in part be accomplished through the use of literature (Cullinan, 648).

Jean Jacques Rousseau furthered the constantly growing paradigm of children’s literature, with his book “Emile” which stressed the importance of incorporating moral development into children’s literature (Russell, 11). Believing that each child is born with a preconceived notion of what is right and wrong, Rousseau argued that a child should be guided and taught how to present themselves through proper etiquette and the right morals (Russell, 11). With the vision of religious, moral, and intellectual literature intact, it would only be a matter of time before children’s literature burst forth in a way no society had ever seen before.

Climbing into the mid 1800’s and early 1900’s, the late Victorian Period is often referred to as the golden age of children’s literature for many astute reasons. Children’s books were not only being created for educational purposes, but many were being written to simply please and entertain children (Russell, 13). Folktales, fables, fairy tales, and fantasy books were evolving and taking shape with several of them incorporating beautiful illustrations (Cullinan, 668). Along with the familiar mediums of children’s literature, several new genres were erected as well, including boy stories, and girl stories (Cullinan, 657). ‘Boy stories’ contained eschatological and identity myths about adventure and quests and delivered a message which promoted hard work and high achievement (Russell, 14). ‘Girl stories’ also fed into eschatological and identity myths and depicted a life which consisted of safety and security within the home and a dependence on a handsome young man (Russell, 15). As previously mentioned, illustrations also became a key element in children’s literature during this golden age (Cullinan, 672).

In the past, many artists refused to work on children’s literature, as most artwork used in books were to help lighten the text, fill in gaps in the pages, or break up the text, and didn’t require the work of a ‘serious’ artist (Cullinan, 669). However, with the invention of the full colour printing press towards the end of the 1800’s, many artists were drawn to children’s literature (Russell, 16). The images and pictures within a children’s book became just as important if not more significant than the text itself, aiding in the effective deliverance of all elements within the rhetorical stance, and specifically in that of pathos (Cullinan, 673). Thus the golden age partnered both artists and authors as crucial team players within children’s literature.

Over the past five hundred years, it is remarkable to witness the lengths at which children’s literature has developed and grown into a widely and arguably the most recognizable form of literature around the world. Today children’s literature is recognized, praised and loved by all- acquiring countless awards yearly for both the story itself as well as illustrations all over the world (Cullinan, 37). Children’s books have inspired several different genres such as video games, television shows, and audiocassette
books-on-tape, to tap into the popularity of their prevalent and often recurring themes and ideas, and to help this medium to expand even further (Cullinan, 674), (fig 1). The future of children’s literature seems to be filled with endless possibilities. It is a medium that will constantly be growing, changing, and evolving, and so it seems, as long as there are children, there will always be a need for a story.

Figure 1: Children’s books, like the Cat in the Hat, are often adapted into other mediums.
Results: Summaries of Content

[Children’s Literature, ages 2-6]

Content Expert: Matthew Worsell

Backyard Bear

The main theme of Backyard Bear is that wild animals are being forced out of their natural habitats due to construction. Some of these wild animals relocate to a residential area, including a bear. This book offers a good lesson to young children letting them know that taking over natural environments is harmful to animals and, in this case, the consequences can pose a threat to people. The book also includes a short message to the reader at the end of the book mentioning that black bear appearances have been increasing in Western Canada and the United States because of construction and development next to and over top of traditional bear habitat. Backyard Bear gives the reader a good sense of how people can be a threat to the environment. Protecting families is another issue that would rise if an increased number of wild animals, such as bears or coyotes, start to be sighted near towns.

The Crunching Munching Caterpillar

The Crunching Munching Caterpillar is about a caterpillar who wishes to fly. After talking to a bee and a sparrow who explain to the caterpillar that flying is a great luxury, he feels jealous and somewhat depressed about his inability to fly. When the caterpillar talks to a butterfly flying by, the butterfly gives the caterpillar confidence that one day he will be able to fly. One day the caterpillar changes into a butterfly and is happy he can finally able to fly. The message that is sent to the reader is that if you believe in something that you want you can achieve that goal. It may not be a reliable source, but it will keep children interested with the colourful pictures. The Crunching Munching Caterpillar shows how the caterpillar feels inferior to other flying insects and animals. This is similar to how children feel jealous of other children who can skate or ride a bike, when they can’t. The book helps show that if you wish for something that you truly desire you may eventually achieve it.

Egad Alligator

Egad Alligator is about a little alligator that wants to explore new places because he is bored of staying around his swamp. When wandering off to new places the alligator starts to notice how people fear him and how they see him as a threat even though he is friendly. The book teaches the reader that sometimes traveling to new places is not as important as being at home or in a certain environment that you are familiar with. The main theme is how people and wild animals are not able to interact with one another safely in the same environment because some animals are considered a threat to humans.
Egad Alligator helps the reader understand how alligators are not meant to live in the same environment as humans.

**In the Woods**

The idea of In the Woods is taken from the idea of the “Teddy Bear’s Picnic” which is seen at the end of the book. At first it appears that three teddy bears are simply lost in the forest. Soon enough they become the target of a hungry wolf. Eventually the bears find the teddy bear picnic and the reader understands their initial purpose. The wolf is scared and disappears at the sight of many bears. The book follows the exploits of three bears, Bubba, Pog and Rollo. Each bear has a specific defining characteristic. Bubba is portrayed as the positivist who keeps the bears going through the forest even though they are off track. Pog is the realist of the group because he notices that indeed they are really lost and are in danger of being hunted by a predator (the wolf). Rollo provides comic relief to prevent the group from despairing at the thought of being lost in a deep dark forest. Though teddy bears may not truly walk and talk, they serve as simulations of young bear cubs, that, without their mother present, could indeed fall victim to a lone wolf. Overall, the wolf and the bears help show how predators in the forest attack those that are smaller than they are, and that predators are wary of large numbers of their prey. (Book cited)

**Jaguar**

This book follows a jaguar through a jungle detailing what different animals it confronts, and whether they are a threat to the jaguar or if the jaguar would consider them prey. The reader gains insight into the nature and behaviour of a jaguar, but the key element in the book is the antagonist, a hunter. The man tries to hunt down the jaguar because he sees the jaguar as a threatening creature. However, close to the end of the book the man begins to understand that the jaguar is not a threat to him, rather he is a threat to the jaguar. The man starts to see that if the jaguar does not infiltrate human society that he should infiltrate into the jaguar’s habitat. Jaguar is an accurate portrayal of animals in their natural environment and shows how hunters are a threat to their wellbeing, sometimes for no logical reason. This book is an effective illustration of man versus nature when the man is hunting down the jaguar, and of how the jaguar survives in its ecosystem.

**A Medieval Feast**

The book, A Medieval Feast, is about a king that goes to visit a village. The village decides to prepare a feast to show respect for their monarch. The reader develops an understanding of how people prepared for a feast during the medieval times, from hunting for meat to serving the meal and the entertainment provided to please the king and other royal figures. The book illustrates how people survived during medieval times. A Medieval Feast can help understand how people developed through living in certain environments in different time periods and the nature of their connection with nature.
Ruby Flew Too

Ruby Flew Too is about a young duck that is a late bloomer. She takes longer to develop new abilities than her brothers and sisters who are able to achieve such things more quickly, such as eating on one’s own, learning to swim, etc. Even though Ruby is unable to develop at the same pace, she still achieves the same level of competence as her siblings and eventually learns how to live on her own. Ruby Flew Too helps children understand the developmental processes of species, in this case ducks, and what they are capable of achieving in their natural habitat. It also functions as a metaphor encouraging children to keep on trying, regardless of what level their peers are at.

Snow Day

Snow Day is about different activities and responsibilities that take place after a large snowfall has occurred. The children have a snow day from school, so they play in the snow and enjoy their time off. As for the adults, they see the snow as a nuisance because the snow blocked the roads and sidewalks, making it difficult for people to get around. The book is gives a good sense of how children and adults react to the environment surrounding them, in this case a snow filled neighbourhood. We see that the kids are happier than the adults with the snow amount of snow surrounding them. Overall, Snow Day is a good way to discover the perception of children and adults in cold and snow covered environment.

Storm Cats

Storm Cats is about two cats, Miro and Ben, and they both get caught outside during a terrible thunderstorm that causes them to seek shelter away from their home. The owners of the cats, which names are not mentioned, looked around for their cats and eventually run into each other and look for their cats together and eventually come across both of them by helping one another out. The book shows how cats react in a dangerous environment, in this case a thunderstorm, and shows how cats are afraid of harmful environments. Storm Cats helps show how indoor pets are best kept inside because they see something as natural as a thunderstorm as a terrible and frightful experience.

The Lorax

The Lorax (fig. 2) is about a small furry creature, called the Lorax, who tries to stop a man named Once-ler from destroying his trees. The Once-ler’s business is to create Thneeds that require ‘truffula’ trees for their production. The Once-ler’s industry keeps getting bigger which causes him to destroy the Lorax’s natural environment by cutting down more ‘truffula’ trees. This causes several animals and creatures to leave the Lorax’s habitat and eventually it becomes a wasteland. The theme of the book is how large corporations tend to disregard everything in exchange for the highest possible profit margins often at the expense of things like the environment. The Lorax represents real
life environmental activism. This book sends a powerful message to the reader because it offers an understanding of how industrialization is taking over the natural environment and displays how nobody pays attention to the factor that if humans do not act in the best interest of the environment that even they are intimately connected to, it will be destroyed and replaced with desolate wasteland.

Figure 2: The cover of the famous children's book, The Lorax, depicting the title character himself
**When Autumn Comes**

When Autumn Comes shows the different responsibilities and deeds that people take part in when the season changes from summer to fall. The reader gets a good idea of how people prepare for the change in season from house cleaning and regarding preparations for the autumn months like harvesting crops. It is important for children to understand how people adapt to anticipated drastic changes in weather and how they get ready for certain holidays and events to occur, such as Halloween and Thanksgiving. This book adds to a child’s general body of knowledge about fundamental aspects of human society.

*Content Expert: Leanne Roth*

**Roots, Shoots, Buckets, and Boots**

The book *Roots, Shoots, Buckets, and Boots* written by Sharon Lovejoy is a book about gardening with your children which teaches kids how to garden and how to take care of the environment. The book also offers various activities that children and their parents can participate in together. The style of the text is fairly lengthy and aimed towards parents who intend on reading it to or with their children. Sharon Lovejoy uses various realistic and abstract pictures scattered throughout the text to make it easier for children to follow along with their parents. Lovejoy also employs a great deal of pathos in this piece of literature in providing activities for children it actually gets the reader involved and provides a kinetic learning style for the child. Again, there is a high degree of logos used in this piece as the reader is informed about gardening and how plants grow.

**The Magic School Bus: On the Ocean Floor**

The book, *The Magic School Bus: On the Ocean Floor* written by Joanna Cole takes Ms. Frizzle’s class to the ocean where she teaches her students about all kinds of animals and plants that live in the ocean. The main focus of this book is illustrating the importance of keeping the ocean clean and free of litter. Cole centres her story on keeping the ocean safe for all the organisms that have their habitats there. Cole’s writing style in this piece is energetic and scientific but at children’s level making it easy for her readers to understand. The illustrations used in this story are descriptive, cartoon-like pictures. Cole uses a light, humorous, and educational tone to make it entertaining for the intended audience. She evokes a lot of pathos in this piece of literature by informing kids about the importance of preserving our oceans and the consequences if we don’t. Also, we see several uses of logos as Cole teaches kids about all the creatures who call the ocean home. Furthermore, there is a lot of credibility that goes along with The Magic School Bus series. These books are known to be reliable sources of information for children and popular with both kids and their parents.
From Caterpillar to Butterfly

From Caterpillar to Butterfly, written by Deborah Heiligman, is about a class who has a caterpillar in a jar that the students observe each day as it grows and changes. The teacher uses the transformation of a caterpillar to teach her class about the mystery of metamorphosis. Heiligman uses simple diction, making it easy for the readers to learn and follow along. She also uses brightly coloured pictures with little detail again, making it easy for the intended reader to follow along. Heiligman has a lot of logos in this piece to teach her audience about evolution. By using a caterpillar to demonstrate this, it is fun and easy for children to relate to. She also uses a lot of pathos by evoking emotions of her readers by setting it in a school classroom.

Hope for the Flowers

Hope for the Flowers, written by Trina Paulus, is a story about caterpillars with human emotions and issues. She discusses serious and important human issues personified in two little caterpillars. This makes for light reading yet teaches children to be aware of these issues. By using the smallest of creatures, caterpillars, Paulus expresses that there is hope for all from big to small even when things appear to be at their worst. Her writing style uses simple diction, little bits of dialogue, and very little text getting straight to her point. The whole piece of literature is a metaphor for life through the eyes of two caterpillars. The visual style focuses mainly on one large element with a small piece of text in the middle of the page. Paulus uses a hopeful and optimistic tone teaching kids to always keep their heads up and never give up. Through this we see a lot of pathos and emotions being evoked as the author appeals to issues that readers have gone through themselves.

Figure 3: Inspirational and education children’s book, Hope for the Flowers
**Storm the Lightning Fairy**

The book *Storm the Lightning Fairy*, written by Daisy Meadows, is about seven water fairies that bring weather to Fairyland. Unfortunately, Jack Frost blows in, steals the fairies' weather feathers and brings crazy, wicked weather to all of Fairyland. It is up to Storm and the other weather fairies to save the day and bring back the beautiful weather. By writing this series, Meadows portrays Mother Nature and weather as being something controlled by fairies. This gives children a false sense of information, as fairies do not cause the weather. Meadows uses abstract and unrealistic cartoon drawings and simple diction making it age appropriate for four to eight year old children. She evokes a lot of emotions in her intended audience by getting kids involved in and excited about weather, although it is on false pretences. This of course makes it an unreliable source of information for children, as fairies obviously do not control the weather. This book’s purpose is primarily entertainment.

**Bambi**

*Bambi*, written in association with the movie by Walt Disney, is about the changing seasons and effects this change has on the animals living in forests. The main characters in the story are deer (fig. 4).

Also, it portrays the fear of “Man” and the consequences that “Man” brings like hunting and forest fires for example. The book portrays the theme that if “Man” isn’t careful he could destroy forests and the animals that live in the forest could be come extinct. The use of simple diction in this piece allows for easy reading for children and the recognizable Walt Disney characters help the children to identify with the story. Many emotions are evoked in this book especially when Bambi loses his mother to “Man” and later when he grows up to take over as the Prince of the Forest. The use of logos helps the reader realize the seriousness of how much harm “Man” can cause in the forest and to animals living there. The reader is also exposed to ethos, as Walt Disney is well known and trusted with families.

Figure 4: An illustration typical of children’s literature from the pages of *Bambi.*
**Pigs**

Robert Munsch’s book, *Pigs* (fig. 5) is a story about a young girl who needs to catch a herd of pigs wreaking havoc all around town. The theme Munsch invokes in this story is that we should respect all animals, as they are intelligent creatures even though they may not look like it. Munsch uses repetition of words and phrases to help children gain confidence in their developing reading abilities. “Pigs” also uses brightly coloured, sparsely detailed pictures, and large, clear font making it easy for his intended audience to read. Readers are also exposed to abstract, crazy pictures where pigs are personified. For example, they are able to drive a bus in one situation. Munsch uses a very comedic and funny tone in this book that evokes silliness within the reader. Munsch also shows a lot of ethos, as he is a well-liked, reliable author that many parents trust to let their children read. There isn’t very much logos in this book as it focuses more on entertainment for children.

![Figure 5: The cover of Pigs](image)

**After the Dinosaurs**

*After the Dinosaurs* written by Stan & Jan Berenstain uses rhyming text and illustrations to depict a broad range of prehistoric mammals. The book teaches children about the days of dinosaurs and how the world was very different in prehistoric times. Berenstain uses rhyming couplets and teaches children how to say the difficult dinosaur names by dividing the names up by sounds. The writing style uses large, clear font making it easy to read and accompanies this with several colourful pictures of dinosaurs. Berenstain uses a fun, educational tone to teach children as opposed to a lecture style of writing. There is a lot of pathos in this piece as it speaks to children’s imagination but equally there are several examples of logos as the audience is learning about dinosaurs.
The Berenstain Bears: Blaze a Trail

The Berenstain Bears: Blaze a Trail (fig. 6) written by Stan & Jan Berenstain is about bumbling Papa Bear trying to help the bear scouts earn their merit badges in hiking. Through Papa Bear’s clumsiness he teaches the bear scouts and children reading how to stay safe when hiking through the woods and what to do when in that environment. Berenstain uses simple diction and rhyming words. This allows for the children reading this to easily and effectively learn about the woods and the environment in general. The use of several brightly coloured photos and pictures, depicting Papa Bear’s clumsy actions, show children what not to do when in the woods. Again, animals are personified with human characteristics. Berenstain uses a comedic and playful tone making it entertaining yet educational for younger readers. By having the cubs being scouts, it evokes emotion from children who are in scouts or girl-guides themselves, as they can use the information gathered from this book to perhaps gain merit badges of their own. We are also exposed to logos again, as the reader learns how to survive in the environment and keep it clean and safe.

Why Does Litter Cause Problems?

In the book Why Does Litter Cause Problems? Isaac Asimov teaches children taught about the different ways litter affects the environment. Asimov goes into further detail how litter makes an ugly mess, is a potential safety hazard, spreads germs, can be harmful to animals and he also shows how to solve the litter problem. The theme of this piece is to keep our environment clean and litter free. Asimov uses fairly simple diction with few scientific words bolded for emphasis. This book uses drawn, sketched, and real photographs of litter and the environment. The artistic medium focuses on the real problem that litter causes through the realistic photographs. Asimov uses a serious and educational tone to send the message of how important it is to not litter. Asimov appeals to the attitudes of his audience through graphic photos illustrating what happens when one litters and the consequences it can bring like for example, harming animals. There is also a lot of logos used in this piece, as it is the basis of the book. Asimov uses scientific jargon and educates his audience about littering and the effects it has on our environment.
SHHH!

The lack of impact this little shrew had on the public is obvious. No one pays attention to him or what he wants to say. His goal is to tell everyone to lower their voices to make the world quieter and more peaceful. This reflects on human as well. Our society’s environment is constantly bombarded with noise everyday, from vehicles to construction. Just like humans, when someone wants to propose an idea to the public, often, they cannot do it alone. They need people to back them up and support them, just like the shrew in the story. The graphics for this book were surrealistic and the water paintings used were very colourful. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Logos appears as the author intones that there is too much noise in the environment today. Automobiles, construction, outdoor vendors, etc. all contribute to the unnecessary noise created in the environment. Pathos was used to encourage the readers to feel bad for the shrew, because nobody heard or cared what the shrew wanted to say.

101 Dalmatians

Children are able to comprehend the messages that are being delivered by this story. Animals are often killed for their furs in order to make clothing. This act is presented in a negative way. It is a sacrifice of animals fulfilling unnecessary desires. This book also emphasizes the power of unity. Dogs from all over the city join together to rescue the Dalmatians captured and intended for fur clothing. This same concept can be applied to our society in that togetherness is key to success. The visuals are surrealistic, colourful and detailed. The genre is fiction and the tone is full of excitement and intensity. Logos in this story is used to tell readers that dogs’ fur can be used to make fur coats. Pathos is used evoke sympathy for the dogs that are held captive.

Elmer and the Hippos

The use of Elmer’s and the other elephants’ trunks to knock out the rocks helps the hippos restore their river. This is a story that is very educational to children. This book helps children understand that certain animals require water more frequently and in different than other animals. In this case, elephants and hippos are two species that both require water to stay alive, but hippos need water more so than elephants. There is also the teaching of how certain animals have particular body characteristics that help them accomplish specific tasks. Elephants have a long, strong trunk. It can squirt water and pick up food. In this story, elephants use their trunks to help the hippos remove all the rocks that were blocking the water flow into the river. Visuals are aided by surrealistic paintings that are bright, colourful and detailed. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Both logos and pathos are applied in this story. Logos is used to tell readers that hippos need water to survive and that an elephant’s trunk is a very powerful feature. Pathos is developed when the elephants help the hippos.
**Too Much Garbage**

This story is about two young boys who go to take out their garbage only to find that the street is covered with junk. They are astonished and realize they must take action. Our society today has a system that strongly encourages citizens from littering. On certain days, workers come to people’s houses to pick up garbage and recyclables. However, in certain areas of a city, garbage may be found on the streets and in the park. Children are able to realize that clean streets do not happen effortlessly. Everyone is responsible for his or her part in keeping the community clean. This story revolves around the themes of parent-children love and the portrayal of a thunderstorm with the use of a very simple vocabulary. Meadows uses onomatopoeia like “tip tip, tap tap” to depict the noise the girl is hearing. This book focuses more on the visuals than the written components since there are only 4-6 simple words per page. It is illustrated with colourful water-paintings expressed in an impressionist element. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. This story uses pathos to sympathize the little girl for her fear of the environment.

**In My Garden**

This story is about a little girl who introduces all the animals, toys and furniture she finds in her garden. The information displayed in the book allows children to comprehend the kinds of things that can be found in a garden. The story is written in very simple vocabulary, which consists no more than four words per page. The graphics are realistic with very detailed drawings. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted.

**This is a the Sunflower**

This book (fig. 7) is a cumulative verse describing how a sunflower in a garden blossoms and, with the help of the birds, spreads its seeds to create an entire patch of sunflowers. Children are able to understand the lifecycle of this plant and certain things about how nature works like how and where specific things will grow. The visuals are surrealistic and are very colourful. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. The only element of the rhetorical stance used is logos. Logos is used to educate readers all about sunflowers.
A Tree is Nice

This is a story describing all the ways in which a tree can be beneficial. It is an educational book that allows children to look at trees in perhaps a new way and to help them understand that trees serve many purposes. This story uses many descriptive words, around four total per page. The visuals are impressionistic with the paintings being very colourful. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Logos is used to deliver information to children all about trees.

Mushroom in the Rain

Several insects and animals try to find shelter during a rainstorm. They all end up squishing together under a tiny mushroom. They realize that mushrooms grow when it rains. This story allows children to gain a deeper understanding of fungi. The main theme of this story is learning how nature works. This book is characterized by the use of simple vocabulary and around eight sentences per page. The visuals are surrealistic, using very simple illustrations. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Logos was used to let readers know that mushrooms expand under rain. Children are able to understand why all those animals were able to fit under that tiny mushroom and conclude that fungi expand under water.

The Way the Storm Stops

This story is connected to thunderstorm and the fear most children have towards such an event. Thunderstorms are often portrayed in such a way that encourages children
to fear them. The story talks about the sound it makes and the flashes of the lightning and subsequently how the storm loses energy and gradually fizzes out. This story revolves around the themes of parent-children love and the portrayal of a thunderstorm with the use of a very simple vocabulary. Meadows uses onomatopoeia like “tip tip, tap tap” to depict the noise the girl is hearing. This book focuses more on the visuals than the written components since there are only 4-6 simple words per page. It is illustrated with colourful water-paintings expressed in an impressionist element. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. This story uses pathos to sympathize the little girl for her fear of the environment.

**Little Quack**

A mother duck takes her five ducklings to the water for the first time and struggles with the youngest one. The duckling fears the water but eventually overcomes this reservation and swims in the water with the rest of her family. This book correlates to most people’s fear of the unknown. There are several themes circulating in this story; courage and animals’ infancy. This book uses extremely simple vocabulary. The pictures are surrealistic and are painted on canvas by bright and vivid acrylic colours. The genre is fiction and is written with a light-hearted tone. Pathos is used in Little Quack to make readers feel sympathetic for the little duck who struggled. Logos is also used to tell readers that animals like ducks don’t live on land forever. After a certain amount of time, they move from their nest to the water. The ducks moving into the water is like human learning to walk.

**Raccoon On His Own**

A Baby raccoon is stranded on a boat and separated from his family. The baby raccoon sails around the lake and sees many different animals. Finally he manages to return back to his family. The book teaches children that the baby raccoon was scared of being alone because there were many different species of animals that he had never seen before and he feared they might be predators. Raccoon on His Own uses very simple vocabulary, around 3-5 sentences per page. The visuals used are realistic paintings that are detailed and colourful. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Logos exists in letting readers know the purpose of a mudslide. Also, there is the understanding that there are many different animals outside the raccoon species. Pathos is used when the raccoon is sad and lonely without his family.

**Thunderstorm**

This story is about a little girl who is afraid of a thunderstorm. However, her fear quickly subsides when she realizes that she needs to comfort her dog that is hiding under her bed. The story talks about the sound a thunderstorm makes and the flashes of the lightning that result. Children are also exposed to the concept of being brave to protect the ones you love. The diction is very simple vocabulary and the author uses rhyming words. The visuals are impressionistic with drawings that are very colourful. The genre
is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Pathos is used to evoke the sympathetic feelings for both the little girl’s and the dog’s fear of thunderstorms.

**Earthquake!**

This story is about a duck that feels the earth beneath him rumble. Startled, he quickly runs to tell all the other barnyard animals that there is an earthquake coming. In the end, they find out that the shaking ground was caused two moles digging a hole. This story alludes to human’s fear of nature, especially of those things in nature that are uncontrollable and vastly powerful. This book contains 10 sentences per page. The visuals are realistic, using graphite and transparent dark, watercolours. The genre is fiction and the tone is humorous. Pathos is used as readers sense the fear of earthquake lingering among all the barnyard animals.

**The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark**

This story is about an Owl who asks the humans what is so good about night-time. All the positive answers he gets back slowly allow him to overcome his fears of flying in the dark. The main theme involved is bravery by overcoming the fears of flying at night. Each page consisted of around 6 sentences, which is a bit more than the usual simple structure of children’s literature. The pictures in this book were realistic. The paintings used dull colours, but were detailed in their strokes. The genre is fiction and the tone is light-hearted. Logos and pathos were used for the rhetorical balance. Logos was demonstrated through making readers realize that owls are night birds and that that is the time they hunt for food. Pathos was used through the sympathetic feelings generated by Plop for being scared of the dark.

*Researcher: Joseph Proulx*

**Hide, Clyde!**

*Hide, Clyde* is the story of a chameleon that cannot camouflage like the rest of his kind. Chameleons camouflage in order to hide from predators like alligators that pose a danger to them. Clyde, despite his lack of talent in that regard, is apt at catching any insect with his tongue. One day he tries to catch a giant bee, but he is instead pulled away on a long flight and ends up in a human house. He explores, but then suddenly hears the approach of an inhabitant. Struck with fear, Clyde manages to camouflage against a pink sock in the laundry room. Finally able to change colour and therefore no longer shunned by his kind, he rides home with the bee again and lives happily for all eternity. The book uses pathos evoking sympathy for Clyde’s plight and teaches children about the food chain (insect, chameleon, alligator) as well as the need for wild animals to avoid human habitat. As well the book uses very vivid colourful exaggerated cartoon images of animals and different settings.
Froggy Eats Out

Froggy is a young frog that is very hungry. It happens to be his parents’ anniversary and he and his parents go out to a high-class restaurant to eat. He is ill behaved and proceeds to make a huge mess with his food and embarrass everyone around him. Suddenly he spots a cute girl frog he knows, Froglina, and becomes embarrassed, spilling spaghetti all over himself. His parents give up on the situation but in good spirit take him out to a fast food restaurant. This book is highly pathos driven, and many parents and children reading this book together may be able to relate to this situation. It helps teach children the forever-mentioned golden rule: what goes around comes around, and reminds them that manners are important to maintain.

Bear Wants More

A bear wakes up from his winter hibernation extremely hungry. He leaves his den searching for food, encountering all of his animal friends periodically along the way. They help him find things to eat, and he promptly devours everything edible he comes across. Arriving back at his den, he meets the other animals that have gathered for a surprise party. He stuffs himself with honey cakes but consequently, when he tries to return to his den, he gets stuck in the entrance. His friends rescue him, and he promptly falls asleep, full and satisfied. However the animals that facilitated his party are left with nothing to eat and everyone is still hungry. This book is unrealistic in that it portrays all animals in the forest as friends, when in reality many of them are constantly seeking to devour each other. It also shows children the folly of being greedy through the disappointment of the bear’s friends when he eats all the food. In contrast to this greed, it displays equally the good will that should be showed and shared between friends.

[Young Adult Literature]

Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone

Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone is a well-known novel that tells the story of a young boy’s adventures during his first year as a student at Hogwarts, a school for wizards. Many endeavours undertaken by he and his friends occur within the grounds of the castle-school, in a place known as the forbidden forest. This forest is filled with exotic yet sometimes extremely dangerous magical animals and mythical beasts, such as centaurs and unicorns. This fantastic portrayal of the environment is what specifically concerns this report. Though many creatures in the forest do not exist in reality, there is common ground to be found in the idea that a forest is filled with things that pose a potential danger to humans. This natural environment should be treated with respect and not encroached upon by ignorant people. This is also true in real life, and individuals with no knowledge or respect for nature will often run into trouble out in the wilderness if they are not careful.

The Amber Spyglass
*The Amber Spyglass* is the third instalment in a trilogy. It is characterized by a complex and many-layered plot involving a fight between the oppressive forces of Heaven and a rebellion of free peoples from a myriad of different worlds. Two children are central to the plot and are prophesied as the only ones who can end the conflict. Of interest to this report is a specific world where a significant amount of the story unfolds. Here there exists an intelligent species within a complex society that remains intimately tied to nature. Their livelihood depends on giant seedpods from gigantic redwood-like trees. Due to the terrible conflict across the universe, the celestial pollen that pollinates the flowers of the trees is becoming sparse and the trees, and therefore the continued societal thriving of the people who depend on the seedpods is in jeopardy. When the children finally fully understand the nature of the universe and how everything depends on this celestial pollen, as showcased by their observation of the trees’ decline, they achieve the prophecy and bring an end to the conflict.

Though the complicated plot is of little relevance, the fact that the interdependence of many species in different worlds (representing different ecosystems) on one specific element (this could symbolize water) is very relevant. This portrayal of environmental conservation as key to the thriving of every species in the world is communicated effectively to young readers.

**Mossflower**

*Mossflower* is an early instalment in the ‘Redwall’ series by Brian Jacques. The novel revolves around a community of animals in Mossflower forest living under the tyranny of a wicked wildcat, Tsarmina, and her army of rats, weasels, stoats and ferrets. Martin the Warrior, a brave and fearless mouse, undertakes an epic quest to reconstruct his broken sword and leads the forest animals to a bloody victory over the evil and oppressive wildcat tyrant. This book is based entirely on the concept of anthropomorphism, pitting good animals that want to preserve their forest habitat and way of life against evil animals that eventually plan to burn down the forest in order to destroy their enemies and rule ruthlessly from their stone fortress. Older children reading this book will gain sympathy for the good animals and understand the necessity of the forest and its many different habitats that are home to a wide variety of animals.

**Silverwing**

*Silverwing* is a story about the adventures of a runt silverwing bat, Shade, who ends up separated from his colony and struggles to find his way back to his people and his father. He joins forces with a female brightwing bat named Marina and together they must overcome several obstacles and escape from many different predators of malevolent intent. This novel, by Kenneth Oppel, is based on one of Aesop’s fables. All of the animals in *Silverwing* are personified and have complex problems and human-like personalities. This book educates readers fundamentally about bats and different predators and about their complex relationships within a given natural habitat. Although
this novel is very unrealistic, the story evokes sympathy towards bats and other animals represented by various characters.

**Watership Down**

*Watership Down*, by Richard Adams, is a famous novel about a group of rabbits and their adventures. Though anthropomorphized through their ability to think and communicate like humans, the rabbits in this story are physically and instinctually akin to their natural counterparts and do not wear clothing or use human technology. Fiver, a rabbit with prophetic abilities, senses the coming destruction of his warren and he and his brother, together with a group of friends and followers leave, after having no success in convincing their leaders of the need to evacuate. They eventually establish a new warren at Watership Down, but first struggle through a series of obstacles and misadventures while being menaced by various other rabbit factions and warrens with conflicting interests. The portrayal of the environment in this novel surrounds the rabbits and their tendencies. A story that many see as paralleled by *Silverwing*, the anthropomorphism of rabbits evokes sympathy among readers and gives insight into the nature of rabbits in their natural habitat.

**Adventures of Huckleberry Finn**

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, is considered one of the first great American novels. It appeals to a wide age group but one of the target demographics is young adult. The story begins as two best friends, prior adventures recounted in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, are each contemplating uses for the large sum of cash they have recently come to possess. Huck is under the care of two women trying to civilize him. He is then kidnapped by his abusive lowlife of a father and fakes his own death, setting off down the Mississippi River to escape. He meets up with Jim, a slave he knows, and the two set off together down the river on a raft, both running for different reasons but sticking together through a series of adventures.

The book is known for its heavy social critique directed towards commonly held attitudes of the day, especially rampant racism in the southern United States. The picturesque Mississippi setting evokes a strong kinship between reader and river, perhaps prompting modern readers to take interest in the current squalid environmental conditions in America’s greatest waterway. Young readers gain a great deal of perspective on social attitudes of the past and their influence on society as well as an appreciation for the natural setting of the novel.

**Frozen Fire: A Tale of Courage**

*Frozen Fire*, by James Houston, is a novel intended specifically for young adults. It is the riveting story of two young boys, Matthew, a boy from southern Canada, and Kayak, a native Inuit. They become friends, and confident in their relative familiarity with the bone-chilling north, set out on a secret mission in search of Matthew’s recently disappeared father. He is a prospector and his search for gold in the north has led him astray. The boys become stranded and are locked into a desperate struggle for survival in
the unforgiving north. They eventually stumble across a river that is, to their surprise full of the gold Matthew’s father was searching for. Lost, hungry and bitterly cold, they are struck by the irony at the uselessness of the wealth they have discovered. Matthew struggles with this idea, but kayak ignores the gold and instead fishes out a small disc shaped rock to act as flint. They are eventually forced to take shelter for the night. Upon successfully landing a seal with kayak’s natural skill as a hunter, they gain renewed hope. Kayak uses the seal fat and sinew to fashion a sort of candle, and with the flint rock from the golden stream, manages to light it and keep it lit for the night, preventing them from at this point certain death. The boys eventually make it to safety but are unable to relocate the gold they had found.

This book is an effective and fairly educational depiction of the Canadian arctic in all of its terrible beauty, with a strong lesson about the distorted notion humans have of wealth at its core. The gold is useless to them, they cannot eat it, it will not keep them warm, but a common and worthless flint rock found in the riverbed saves their lives.

**Robinson Crusoe**

*Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Dafoe, is a world famous English novel dating from 1719. The title character, through a series of adventures at sea, eventually ends up on a slave running mission from Africa to America, when he is shipwrecked by a storm and ends up as the only survivor. The ship is wrecked close to an island and Crusoe manages to salvage food, arms, tools and other supplies as the ship is gradually sinking. He is stranded on the island for twenty eight years, learning to care for himself and acquiring a wide variety of skills such as hunting, pottery, farming etc. He has several encounters with aboriginal people of the mainland, who periodically come to the island to eat any castaways stranded there. Finally an English ship arrives, and with the help of Crusoe, the captain quells the mutiny aboard. Crusoe re enters society with the news that his plantation that he had obtained before his misfortune is prosperous and has made him rich.

This novel contains many archaic attitudes such as the perception of natives commonly held in the time of publication. In the case of the cannibal natives however, Crusoe realises that although they threaten him, he has no right simply to kill them, as they are simply following practised traditions and habits common to their people. As a story, the generally simple diction makes it widely accessible, especially to children. The novel’s primary function beyond entertainment is the depiction of a wild semi tropical island in all of its glorious utility. Crusoe is able to carve a relatively comfortable, if laborious existence out of the land and finds usage for sorts of plants and such. It informs readers of all the many things nature can and does provide humanity with and how dependant we are on nature when fundamentally considered.

**Prince Caspian**

*Prince Caspian* is the fourth instalment in the well-known series of children’s novels, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. ‘Narnia’ is a magical world with talking, intelligent animals that is accessible only to a special kind of children at certain times when it is in dire need. Many characters reappear throughout the series, and in this instalment the
reader is reacquainted with the four Pevensie children from the Narnia classic, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. They return to Narnia to find it without much of the old magic it was characterized by. Instead it is being gradually overtaken by a race of ignorant people foreign to its majesty, the Telmarine. The rightful king of Narnia, has been usurped and murdered, and the rightful heir, Prince Caspian has been forced into exile by his wicked ruling uncle. The Telmar do not believe in Narnia and shun nature and the talking animals that make it a wonderful place. The return of the Pevensie children brings hope to the embattled Narnians. Together, with support from their lion-deity Aslan, they overthrow the wicked Telmarines.

This book installs a great respect in children for the magical world of Narnia, a society of animals and mystical creatures like giants, dwarves, and centaurs. It is allegorical in decrying those who lack respect for the natural beauty and glory of the world and who seek to overtake, destroy and enslave such splendour. Of course it is far from reality, in its fantastical portrayal of events, but this caters well to the vivid and expansive imaginations of children.
Rhetorical Analysis

Content Expert: Judy Tong

Editor’s note

Judy’s research and subsequent analysis of recurring trends led her to the discussion of ideas surrounding animals’ perception of their own environments and their interactions with nature based on such. As well she noticed there is a great deal of literature aimed at young children with primary purpose being simply education on a given subject’s fundamentals.

Animal Perception Within Children’s Literature

Among the artefacts selected and analyzed, there existed specific recurring themes. The connection to the environment was ubiquitous. The primary ideas represented in these books were animals overcoming their fear of nature, unity amongst animals and finally, simple educational analyses of things found in nature.

Animals are often portrayed in children’s literature as afraid of nature and whether they are frightened by things like thunderstorms, earthquakes or by the dark, among other things, children are able to relate to these animals. Thunderstorms and the dark are both often associated with being night, or when the sun is obscured. However, thunderstorms can also be perceived as something that people may enjoy watching. In such stories as mentioned above, animals are consistently presented with an obstacle that they must overcome. In this case, they are faced with conquering their fears of nature. For example, in The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark, a little owl flies down and asks children about the night and, after being informed of what great things the night holds, he finally realises that there is nothing to be scared of. This little owl holds many of the same concerns regarding darkness and night that children themselves tend to have. Another example of such a fear is found in Raccoon on His Own. A young raccoon finds himself alone on a street without his parents and gets into all sorts of trouble. Again this type of behaviour is seen in young children.

Another theme common to many books can be found in 101 Dalmatians and Elmer and the Hippos, the theme of unity. A sense of unity and teamwork is cultivated when many different animals assist the Dalmatians’ escape and again when elephants help a group of hippos restore their river. These stories are all clearly linked to the environment, while they both aren’t entirely realistic in their portrayal of it. In Elmer and the Hippos, elephants use their trunks to remove all debris damming the hippos’ river. This act ties in to the fact that many problems in the environment are due to natural environments being destroyed, which then limits food and water availability for animals as well as making scarce ideal shelter. This is further illustrated in the story Too Much Garbage, in which two boys take out their garbage to find that the streets and parks were filled with garbage and they decide to take action. These stories all show the power of uniting together to make something happen. Children’s literature helps lay a solid moral foundation among readers concerning the necessity of assisting others to accomplish tasks and in general propagates the idea of goodwill as a personal virtue.
Finally, a large number of children’s books are simply educational. Such books are identifiable by their lack of main characters and no actual plot. These books serve to educate the reader about specific aspects of the environment. In *This is the Sunflower*, the reader is taken through the life of a sunflower from seed to full grown plant. Children learn the different stages of life through which the flower goes. Another example, *Tree is Nice*, focuses on the all the different ways in which trees are beneficial to humans and animals alike. Both of these stories revolve around the life cycles of specific plants and more generally give children insight into how nature functions. There are no obstacles to overcome, compared to other books discussed, but in this case the goal is simply education on a specific topic.

*Content Expert: Matthew Worsell*

Editor’s Note

Matt’s research led him to the identification of three prevalent themes that are often found in children’s literature. Opposition is often cultivated between humanity and nature as a blind undirected force, as well as between humans and animals. Finally many books focused primarily on animal development, detailing natural lifecycles etcetera.

**Contrast, Opposition and Symbolism in Children’s Literature**

There exists within children’s literature a wide variety of different themes that merit further analysis. One recurring element is how the environment is being portrayed. This environmental aspect can be broken down into three distinct themes: animal versus man, man versus nature, and animal development. Each of these themes function within children’s books to educate and encourage thought about the interconnected nature of human kind and the natural world.

A main theme that appears in children’s literature is the way in which animals are adapted to their specific habitats and life needs and how humans can affect this harmony. In the book *Backyard Bear*, we see how a black bear in Western Canada, or in the Western United States, stumbles into human civilization because of construction and industrialization occurring in his natural habitat. The bear wanders through neighbourhoods and goes through people’s garbage; such an event can be and is perpetuated by human development or high bear populations in certain areas. The bear is then relocated by environmentalists, as it would usually be in reality to show children that although seemingly cute and cuddly, bears belong in their own habitat. Compared to say *Goldie Locks and the Three Bears*, where bears are given human characteristics, this displays the real life problems and consequences of human-bear interaction in society in a way that children are receptive to.

Another book, *Egad Alligator*, tells the tale of an alligator who desperately wants to explore the world. He leaves his home in the swamp but every time he sees a human, they scream “Egad alligator” in fright. The alligator eventually understands that he does not fit into human society and returns to his home, with a new respect for it. This is an
effective way to demonstrate to children how specific animals belong in specific ecological areas, as well as showing the value of one’s home.

A realistic book, *Jaguar*, shows nature being viewed from both a jaguar’s perspective and a human’s perspective. The jaguar struggles to survive in the wild, while it menaces and is menaced by different jungle creatures. For example a monkey faints at the sight of the jaguar and becomes the jaguar’s meal, although you do not actually see the jaguar eat the monkey. Oppositely, when the jaguar is swimming across a river, vicious piranhas attack it. Throughout the book it is shown how animals adapt and survive off of one another in their natural environments.

A book that contains several metaphors regarding society’s encroachment of the environment delivered in a very effective manner is *The Lorax*. The character known as the Lorax wants a large company owned by a man called the Once-ler to stop producing Thneeds, a generally useless garment symbolizing mass production and materialism in society. The manufacturing process requires ‘Truffula’ trees in abundance and hence is destroying the environment, which in turn causes animals to leave the forest and migrate to far off, less damaged areas. In the book ‘Truffula’ trees symbolize the environment, while the Once-ler and his family represent industrialization and corporate greed, and the Lorax serves as an environmental protection agent who “speaks for the trees”. The sense of reality communicated by this book is strong as it explains the importance of keeping the natural environment intact. By the book’s conclusion, the reader sees that Once-ler does indeed regret destroying the forest. The *Lorax* shows children that big corporations with environmentally damaging practices need to realize that protecting environment is of benefit to humans and animals alike.

In some children’s books it is shown how people adapt to the environment when the weather changes and in certain climate conditions. *When Autumn Comes* is a story about the transition from summer to fall. Children learn from this book the importance of the fall season in regard to how people prepare their homes for the coming winter. It discusses the numerous jobs and responsibilities people take on during the onset of autumn like the harvesting of crops, preparations for specific holidays and much more.

*Snow Day* is about a snowstorm that strikes a small town causing the declaration of a snow day. The reader gains perspective on how children and adults perceive the immense amount of snow. Children are exuberant at the huge amounts of snow and all the winter activities now possible to engage in. The parents however are less than happy, full of worry about road safety and snow removal. As one can see, there is a big difference in weather perception between children and adults. This book shows children the benefits and accurately portrays the wonder of a snow day while contrasting these ideas with the reality of such an event and the dangers it can pose.

In *Jaguar*, the man in the book is portrayed as a hunter, trying to hunt down the jaguar because he perceives the jaguar as a threat. Eventually, he learns that he should not kill what doesn’t affect him. The lesson is that all animals are intimately connected within a given environment and humans should not arbitrarily interfere. Animals in the environment need the jaguar’s presence to maintain a stable environmental balance.

Animal development is an important aspect of children’s literature because it helps children gain knowledge of certain animals and how they interact and grow within a given habitat. In *The Crunching Munching Caterpillar*, a caterpillar wishes that he could fly. Throughout the book the caterpillar talks to a bee, a sparrow, and a butterfly
that each explain to him how wonderful it is to fly. The caterpillar grows by continually
eating leaves and eventually he evolves into a butterfly. Not only do children see how
caterpillars develop, they are taught about different attributes that different insects and
animals have and aspects of their respective life cycles. Another book that involves
animal development is Ruby Flew Too, a story about a duckling learning life-skills but at
a slower rate than her brothers and sisters. The book gives a good understanding of how
a family of ducks interact in their pond, a duck’s typical habitat. The reader sees how
ducks eat, swim, and fly and learns a great deal about a duck life cycle. This is an
important teaching tool for children not only to showcase the development of ducklings,
but also to show that even if one learns at a slower pace it is still possible to succeed.

As a result of children’s literature, the environment is portrayed in an educational
and realistic, if often symbolic manner. In Backyard Bear we see how a black bear
infiltrates society because of human development infringing upon the bear’s habitat.
Egad Alligator shows how alligators are unable to adapt to the presence of humans in
their environment. In Jaguar we see how a jaguar interacts with other animals in its
natural environment, a jungle, and the dangers it must face. The human in Jaguar is an
important figure because he shows how important it is not to hunt animals because they
may be perceived as dangerous based on their place in nature as predators for example.
The Lorax explains how rampant industrialism affects the environment by destroying
forests, polluting water and air. It shows how animals have to leave their habitat, and how
the spokesperson for the environment, the Lorax, does not get to have his say. When
Autumn Comes and Snow Day help the reader understand the importance of seasonal
changes in climate and how people react and adapt to different weather. The Crunching
Munching Caterpillar and Ruby Flew Too are educational in that they showcase the
development of caterpillars and ducks as well as what type of environment surrounds
them. Overall, children’s literature that involves the environment is educational in terms
of animals, people, industries, and weather.

*Content Expert: Leanne Roth*

*Editor’s Note*

Leanne focuses in her analysis on the nature and use of anthropomorphism within
children’s literature, the significance of illustrations; how they effectively join with the
text to create the genre, and finally, like matt, she discusses the use of a well established
contrast between human society and the natural environment.

**Anthropomorphism, Contrast and Effective Illustration in Children’s Literature**

Children’s literature is a genre of writing targeted, obviously, to children with the
goal of entertaining young people as well as educating them about certain fundamental
aspects of life. This genre, charged with simplifying complex ideas and communicating
them effectively to children, often tackles questions with environmental significance.
Such questions are addressed in a manner that children can understand through the use of
effective illustration to accompany text, the employment of anthropomorphism and the
use of well established contrast between human society and the natural environment.
The use of bright colours and a general level of simplicity characterize illustrations used in children’s books. Some narrative-based books, like those in the series *The Berenstain Bears*, use cartoon drawings to help communicate themes and ideas. However, more educational books, like Asimov’s “Why Does Litter Cause Problems,” often incorporate actual photographs to demonstrate the importance of taking care of the environment. By using mainly pictures that are clear, with basic detail, authors and illustrators can communicate their message quickly and effectively in a manner that is still pleasing to the target audience (fig. 8). Some books contain much more complex illustrations with a high degree of detail; children are receptive to these as well, but the tendency across the realm of children’s literature tends to be simplicity.

Often, authors portray the environment unrealistically. For example, the book “Storm the Lightning Fairy” attributes different weather conditions to the whim of fairies that control climate. By doing this, the book can be said to provide young children with false knowledge concerning weather trends. There is a simple explanation for such a question. Sometimes questions can be too complex for children of a specific age group to understand and therefore such literature provides them with an easy alternative that caters to and helps develop their sense of imagination. This tactic of inventing a story to explain the something complex to someone ignorant has endured all of human tradition and is seen throughout history. Children’s literature has a function to entertain and this book does exactly that, with the knowledge that children will learn the truth as they grow up.

Anthropomorphism, the attribution of human traits to nonhuman things, typically to animals in this case, is an effective strategy used by authors to immerse children in the story and provide characters with more effective communication abilities. Children can easily relate to animals that are more like themselves and generally tend to enjoy the concept of talking creatures that interact in a more complex, more human manner. Children can empathize easily with talking, thinking, feeling animals and therefore will likely demonstrate greater concern for the environment. Anthropomorphism can, based on how specific animals are portrayed, generate an unrealistic vision of the environment. This is of slight concern because children should not be mislead in regard to the dangerous nature of many wild animals, but such personification is offset by other, more realistic children’s books and general education by parents and teachers.

Humankind and Nature are often contrasted in children’s literature. Humankind is often portrayed as an invader in serene natural settings with the intention to develop wild places and threaten animal populations by destroying habitat and polluting the environment. This is an effective educational tool. Although clichéd, it is true that children are our future. They should be taught to be concerned about their impact on nature and the consequences a negative impact has on environmental stability and in turn, societal stability so that they might, as adults, exhibit greater care and more intelligence when dealing with environmental issues than past generations have.

There is a necessary and essential place among children’s literature for books with a primarily educational purpose. Educational children’s books effectively use logos, pathos and even ethos to communicate ideas. Ethos is cultivated in some books through the use of scientific jargon to help illustrate specific points. For example, in “After the Dinosaurs” dinosaur names, which tend to be long and complex, especially for children, were sounded out to help children say them correctly. Logos exists in abundance in educational books as they rely heavily on factual arguments to inform the reader on
whatever topic. As in all children’s books, pathos is developed through the use of emotive language and illustration.

Through analyzing the content of many children’s books, it is clear that there are prevalent themes and writing styles that characterize children’s literature and render it effective as an entertaining educational tool for young people. This category of literature is very important to society as it can directly influence and shape the minds of its young readers. Therefore understanding the methods in which ideas and themes are transmitted within the genre is essential.

Figure 8: Illustrations typical of early children’s literature
**Further Discussion**

*The question of literature’s influence on children and the responsibility for content*

It is clearly evident, by this point in the analysis of children’s literature and its rhetorical stance, that the books children read have incredible influence on them. Other forms of media that children are exposed to consistently, such as television and Internet, have been criticized by many individuals in society for their blatant advertising directed at children, and as well for their content, which many say can heavily influence a child’s behaviour. Just like with any other medium, one can safely assume that children will retain and be affected by the things they see and learn in the books they read. The question that must be asked then, is whose responsibility is it to regulate what children are reading? The same must be addressed for television, and any other given medium, but this discussion concerns itself primarily with literature. The research involved in this report has shown that messages communicated through children’s literature seem to be often good natured and beneficial to the reader. However, though it is not directly indicated by this report, it can be assumed that there are children’s books that deliver controversial messages. An example is “Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak Out,” an award winning book by Canadian author Deborah Ellis that tells the story of a Palestinian girl’s decision to become a suicide bomber. This book was pulled from the shelves of many Ontario schools in March 2006 after it was deemed by officials to be delivering a message inappropriate for children.\(^2\) Though this does not directly concern the environment, it does demonstrate that there is a wide array of ideas accessible to children through literature.

This in turn raises a deeper question: should there be some form of general regulation affecting the ideas expressed in literature geared towards young and impressionable children? Since there are books discussing the positive aspects of becoming a suicide bomber, something that, especially in Canada, is viewed as absolutely deplorable, should there be some form of censorship developed to ensure children are not infected with ideas many may deem as negative? Indeed our country has seen, in its past, several examples of such censorship, generally occurring at local levels within libraries and school boards, but sometimes such issues reach higher levels. An example of this is the “very publicized attempt [by] the Surrey, British Columbia School Board to ban the books Asha's Mums, Belinda's Bouquet, and One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads because they depict or describe same-sex parents. By December of 1998, the decision to ban the books was taken to the B.C. Supreme Court and overturned.”\(^3\)

Essentially, it falls to the parent to make these decisions. It seems undemocratic and unethical to ban books because they present alternative viewpoints or different perspectives on socially challenging issues. However there have been cases where books

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that, say for example, depict people of a certain religious alignment to be inferior to others have been published and released and subsequently banned. This debate runs deep among people, and is not limited to children’s literature by any means. However, as far as literature is concerned, the only way a parent can safely assure a book is suitable for their child is by reading it themselves. Censorship is evocative of a more oppressive, less socially sophisticated society than our own, and should be avoided whenever possible.

*Portrayal of the environment within children’s literature and how it should evolve*

In considering books that have the environment as their subject, do they truly portray it accurately? Especially in modern times, the state of the environment and whether it is in danger or not is and has been the subject of a constant and heated political debate. However, the issue is, by this point, beginning to transcend political alignment and bias. Enough evidence has been amassed by scientists of every stripe to effectively show that the planet is slipping into ecological chaos. Our prolonged and sustained existence as an advanced society on this planet is being pushed deeper into question every day. It no longer matters what political party or faction an individual belongs to, they cannot ignore this issue any longer. And so it falls to the authors of children’s books, as well as to parents and teachers to educate young people, our most valuable asset, about the changing climate and worsening pollution that could shortly become, and that many consider already is, a global affliction.

Among the books analyzed, there was a consensus in theme that the environment and the animals that populate it deserve humankind’s respect and care. There are many books that tackle this issue of environmental degradation directly, and there are equally as many that are simply fantasy stories unconcerned with geo-social issues. The fantastic portrayal of the environment is not in anyway bad, because as mentioned above, such storytelling indulges the imagination of children.

But are children’s books sending the message, that the environment must be protected, in the best way? Many children’s books separate humankind and nature. Humans are depicted complex highly organized beings whereas animals, though often anthropomorphized, are generally portrayed as much simpler. This is correct, but in the separation of people and animals, there tends to occur one major fault. That is the idea of dependence. Humans are often portrayed as having a negative influence on delicate animal habitat and thereby causing ecological trauma. This again is correct, but humans are not always shown as affected by this. What needs to become more prevalent in children’s literature is the idea that everything on Earth is co-depandant. Humans acquire everything used to increase quality of life and complicate society from nature. Children’s books concerned with environmental awareness in children should seek to illustrate how, when humans create environmental catastrophe, it can and does cause them as much distress as it does animals.

Here is a hypothetical situation that could be compared to the Chinese Government’s Three Gorges Dam Project. River valleys are flooded and people are rendered homeless by large hydroelectric projects upstream. In turn, these dams create large reservoirs of relatively stagnant water which is often more likely to harbour disease. People drinking and perhaps fishing from this reservoir (while fish still remain) are more susceptible to infection, but since they live in a less developed society, have limited
access to medication that may treat or prevent disease. Human error in nature can and does often have profound effect on society.

There are countless similar examples, and it is not as though children’s literature can realistically lead to the improvement of such situations. However, it can begin to help children understand that they are just as menaced as animals by humankind’s environmental irresponsibility and not immune to problems caused by pollution etcetera. Some books demonstrate this very effectively, but the majority maintain the separation of human and animal, which is simply inaccurate.

A comparison between different subcategories of children’s literature

As mentioned earlier, this report is concerned in part with establishing a contrast between early children’s literature and literature intended for older age groups. Through the sample size of literature intended for older youth is much smaller, certain trends are observed in terms of how these novels depict the environment and what conclusions are offered regarding the use and abuse of the natural environment by humans. The books analysed are all relatively well-known stories that in some way concern an individual’s and or society’s impact on the environment. Stories like Watership Down, Mossflower and Silverwing are characterized by well established and complicated anthropomorphism allowing their respective authors to develop complex human-like problems among animal communities. Each of these stories uses the technique to closely involve the reader in a fictional animal world and it can be assumed that a relative degree of sympathy towards the protagonist animals and subsequently, their real life counterparts, is achieved.

Other stories, such as Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, The Amber Spyglass, are each part of a classic literary series and are known for their complex, many layered plots. They can be categorized as fantasy novels. The focus of both Harry Potter... and The Amber Spyglass is not specifically the environment, but each of these novels’ plots have some bearing on wild settings in which there are complex relationships between flora, fauna and intruding human depicted.

Two other novels, Frozen Fire: A Tale of Courage and Robinson Crusoe, are both tales of human beings stranded in a wild uncivilized setting and in opposition to natural forces, struggling to survive. They are opposites as far as setting is concerned, as the former is set in the Canadian Arctic, and the latter near the Gulf of Mexico. This simply adds variety to the theme of man versus nature portrayed. In each novel, the characters are successful in surviving their ordeal, but must suffer through tribulations of varying magnitude and are confronted with difficult choices testing their sense of priority and questioning their sense of priority and their sense of morality. These choices are often made in complete contrast to how these characters would react in society raising questions regarding the nature of human beings and how they act when alienated from familiar circumstances.

Anthropomorphism, environmental complexity and the opposition between human and nature are themes and techniques found to be prevalent among early children’s literature and have been extensively analyzed already in such a context within this report. Through the examination of literature generally aimed at older children, it seems the same ideas found in early children’s literature are common to this genre as well. They are transmitted differently, being developed in a more complex and
informative manner and involving more intricate and sometimes ambiguous notions of morality compared to in early children’s literature, but the fundamental concepts remain identical.

What does this mean? Essentially, from the parallel thematic paradigms of each genre one can extrapolate that these techniques are common to literature in general. Nature and humankind have been intimately connected the entirety of existence and humankind often tends to finds itself at odds with nature struggling to survive or carve out more than a meagre hand to mouth lifestyle from the environment. It is only logical then that throughout history and still today stories from myths to educational anecdotes rely on the environment for inspiration, as a theme and as a tool, to illustrate various aspects of life.
Conclusion

Children’s literature has proven to be a literary genre with an abundant and telling array of thematic and rhetorical tendencies that shed much insight into the nature of literature in general and enable a functional analysis of its purpose and the direction in which it leads its readers.

Through the analysis of a sample of just under fifty artefacts from the genre, there arose prevalent ideas and methods of expression for such ideas. This report is concerned specifically with the literature’s portrayal of the natural environment, and it seems that a very large number of early children’s books utilize different aspects of the environment as a vehicle for narrative. Many books use animals as characters, and render such a concept more accessible to young children through anthropomorphism. The portrayal of animals and nature within children’s literature is effective because authors employ contrast well. Humankind and society are often discussed in contrast to the natural world and the animals in it; sometimes, even animals are portrayed in opposition to nature as an uncontrollable omnipotent. Whatever the case, this literary polarity helps cultivate action within a story and illustrates the difference between animals and humans, as well as their separate reactions to natural phenomena.

Children’s literature can sometimes not include any real form of narrative. Many books are written simply as educational tools to inform children on whatever subject. Books dealing with the environment are often like this, telling children about the various lifecycles of plants and animals, or perhaps of the environmental consequences of polluting. These ideas can be expressed through a story, but are equally often simply detailed to readers.

Regardless, any good piece of children’s literature will invariably include illustrations. These can vary widely in terms of style and detail, and even in form. Sometimes books are illustrated with paint, sometimes with pencil, and often, especially nowadays, they are illustrated digitally with the aid of modern graphic creation technology.

There is a balance achieved in any children’s book between logos, ethos and pathos, as explained in the ‘Background’ section. Children’s books rely heavily on pathos, as children are imaginative emotional creatures with little skill in critical thinking but a great deal of curiosity. Sometimes children’s books rely on logos, in that they simply explain a concept to a child through simple diction and telling illustration often with a good deal of simplification to cater to a child’s natural ignorance. Ethos is less important when considering this literary genre, as children generally care more about content than author. However there are certain authors who are known for their skill at writing children’s books. Familiar names, as with anything, lead to an increased sense of ethos. Authors like Robert Munsch and Dr. Seuss are marked by their high ethos.

Through this report it has been established that the environmental vision cultivated by present day children’s literature is good-natured and generally beneficial to children and society. Despite this positivism, humans and animals are consistently portrayed as foreign to each other and humankind is often alienated from the environmental problems it tends to cause. Children’s literature could be slightly more realistic and accomplish much in terms of altering humankind’s distorted image of itself.
as generally above environmental consequences by showing how humans are intimately connected to the natural environment.

It is also established that, despite controversial messages that may be present in some children’s literature, the large majority of books deliver innocuous material. It is ineffective to prohibit the circulation of certain children’s books and censure their presence in society because they present an alternative viewpoint. Dialogue that occurs between people who don’t share whatever belief, can, especially if they are children, lead to more learning.

In comparing early children’s literature to literature geared towards older age groups, it becomes apparent that the same overall thematic directions are taken and many of the general ideas present in regard to the environment are fundamentally alike in both genres. The primary differences, shown by this limited analysis, are in complexity and delivery. Illustrations are very limited in the latter, whereas in the former they are abundant. The authors of each category are consistently delivering the same elementary concepts but use different tools and separate rhetorical stances in doing so.

The strengths of this study lie within the nature of the material researched. Among the huge variety of children’s books and the fairly large sample taken, thematic and rhetorical tendencies were extremely evident and allowed a cohesive and extended analysis.

The report does indeed exhibit a few specific weaknesses. The research undertaken was general, and there was not enough distinction as to what each member should research. The research could have been divided into categories with different content experts examining different aspects of children’s literature. There also could have been more focus directed at specific rhetorical strategies employed within children’s literature, such as a more in depth examination of illustration techniques, or perhaps a closer examination of the text itself, as opposed to simply a general thematic and rhetorical overview.

In conclusion, children’s literature is marked by a concentration on fundamental ideas and an appeal to the natural curiosity often through fantasy.
Bibliography

Primary Source Material


Cowcher. *Jaguar*. Minneapolis: Abdo, 2002


*Secondary Source Material: History of Children’s Literature, Annotated*


   What is extremely useful about this source is its lengthy and descriptive history of children’s literature throughout time. It goes through the development of literature step by step and makes it very straightforward and easy to follow. The history of illustrations in children’s literature, and the background information regarding children’s literature awards are also helpful and extremely informative.


   This book sheds light on a lot of different areas of history concerning children’s literature, which was helpful in gathering information for the final report. It is useful when making connections to other genres of children’s literature. Although not mentioned significantly in the history section of the report, this variance offers important stepping stones to understanding the history of children’s literature’s. Although it is not cited as often as the other three sources, it was extremely helpful in developing a clearer picture of where children’s literature began, and where it may lead.


   Again, the very descriptive and in depth history of children’s literature is useful and appreciated. The development of genres within children’s literature is clearly identified and outlined in the text, which is a helpful when piecing and matching together different eras to the development of a certain genre. The history and development of thoughts and ideas surrounding how children’s literature viewed throughout history is another significant part of this source, as well as the illustration-history part of the book.
There were very few times that we used this source against the third edition. However, although staying true to the text in the third edition, it makes certain concepts such as the golden age of children’s literature and Puritanism a bit more rounded and easier to understand.