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The Dynamics of Teachers' Aesthetic Engagement
With Children's Literature

A DISSERTATION

submitted by

Susan C. Griffith

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

LESLEY UNIVERSITY
October 2001

Abstract

This research study seeks to bring the missing voices of teachers into the conversation about teaching and learning children's literature at the college level. Grounded in an empirical base that affirms a need for this perspective, the study investigates and describes the dimensions, patterns and variations that constitute the dynamics of engagement that characterize teachers' experiences with children's literature as aesthetic experiences of adult reading.

Based in Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978) articulation of reader response theory, the investigation focuses on two distinct sets of experiences of eleven middle school teachers of language arts: 1) critical incidents, or contemplated readings of children's literature; and 2) think alouds, or initial readings of children's literature. The ensuing exploration follows the teachers' own sense of significance through the data to create twelve critical incident portraits and a three component narrative description of the think aloud process. Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) model of aesthetic experience and Appleyard's (1991) conception of the purposes of adult fiction reading guide the analysis of these verbal reports. The resulting delineation describes dimensions, points of engagement, purposes, goals and reasons for reading that comprise the dynamics of aesthetic engagement particular to teachers reading children's books.

The teachers' experiences with children's books are complex, fluid, vital and varied. They perceive a dichotomy between personal and professional purposes in reading, see children's literature as a shared literature and prefer to make meaning of literature through affinity. Their aesthetic experiences are richer when their instructional perspectives are integrated with the perceptual, intellectual, emotional and imaginal

dimensions that may also be part of aesthetic experience. Even as expert readers, they still benefit from external attention in their experiences with children's literature, particularly when faced with challenges arising from dissonance.

This study of the dynamics of teachers' aesthetic engagement with children's books offers a broader, more refined framework for understanding the aesthetic reading fostered in children's literature courses at the college level. In so doing, it emphasizes the importance of reframing the perceived dichotomy between professional and personal reasons for reading children's literature and raises questions related to teachers' capacities to delve more deeply into children's literature.

Wind on the Hill

No one can tell me,
Nobody knows,
Where the wind comes from,
Where the wind goes.

It's flying from somewhere
As fast as it can,
I couldn't keep up with it,
Not if I ran.

But if I stopped holding
The string of my kite,
It would blow with the wind
For a day and a night.

And then when I found it,
Wherever it blew,
I should know that the wind
Had been going there too.

So then I could tell them
Where the wind goes . . .
But where the wind comes from
Nobody knows

A. A. Milne

With love and appreciation for
the friends who are my family,
the family who have become my friends,
and especially for Ray,
who is the best of both
with humor and without fail.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Teaching Children's Literature

Teaching children's literature to preservice and inservice teachers in a teacher education program is a complex process, one that is a source of ongoing discussion for me and other instructors of children's literature. In informal discussions held three times a year over the past six years, instructors of children's literature living in the Boston area have talked about, contemplated and questioned the effectiveness of the pedagogy that informs our teaching. Many of the challenges we bring to the group for discussion spring from the wide array of goals set for the course by us, by the teachers enrolled in our courses, and by the requirements of the educational programs within which we work.

Course goals include the study of the literature itself, provision of an historical perspective on the body of literature, exploration of work in all genres of fiction and nonfiction, overview of books published for preschool through age fourteen, and development of criteria for evaluation based on literary elements and curricular needs. Although the course, unlike most others, is not technically a methods course, expectations still encompass some focus on strategies for teaching children's literature to children. This unwieldy set of goals sets a strained tone for the course. With so much being asked at one and the same time, instructors¹ must look closely at what is most important for students to learn.

¹ For purposes of clarity, the following terminology will be used throughout this paper: 1) "Instructor" is a teacher of children's literature to adults at the college level. 2) "Teachers" are adults enrolled in college level children's literature courses.

For me, the essential task is to engage students deeply in reading and making personal meaning of literature written for children. Profound, personal experience of children's literature, in general, and of the books they will share with children in particular must be a part of teachers' experience before they can introduce books to children (Chambers, 1985). In order to guide children in reading literature, teachers "must first have started to chart their own unforgettable journeys" with books (Williams & Owens, 1997, p. 418).

I believe that teachers' experiences with literature set the parameters for their work with children and literature: "When the teacher's experiences with literature are limited, what she communicates to children will also be limited" (Day, 1991, p. 187). Moving teachers to more thoughtful, deep and analytical responses to children's books is central in building the foundation of experience and the repertoire of books they need to create rich and varied literary experiences for children (Pavonetti, 1997).

Profound experiences with children's literature in my classroom grow from the idea of reading as a transaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). Like Rosenblatt (1983), I see an aesthetic approach to reading as basic to the full and conscious experience of literature. Aesthetic transactions with texts emphasize awareness of feelings, emotions, thoughts and sensations while reading. They "lead to personal involvement in . . . lived-through situations, characters and experiences" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p.125).

Sharpening teachers' awareness of their lived-through experiences of children's books is key in enlarging the scope and depth of their experiences with children's literature (Greene, 1995). Encouraging reflection on their own reading process makes

teachers think about reading in new and productive ways, favorably affecting all categories of their reading behavior (Cramer & Blachowicz, 1980; Searls, 1985; Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Andrews-Beck & Rycik, 1992; Salvio, 1995). This kind of metacognitive process is a crucial step in charting unforgettable journeys with children's books.

Learning about Children's Literature

Teachers, however, enter the children's literature college classroom with goals of their own. While I am prepared to guide them toward profound aesthetic transactions with children's literature, they often come prepared to learn what contemporary children are reading and how to use children's books as instructional tools for implementing curriculum (Hade, 1994; Kutzer, 1981; Pflieger, 1994). Learning about the literary and aesthetic aspects of children's literature is a challenge for students who see children's literature as a tool for learning to read, or for making connections across the curriculum (Hade, 1994; Kutzer, 1981; Pflieger, 1994). Conceptions of children's books as "cute" can block efforts to move students towards a deeper, more critical stance towards the literature (Taxel, 1987).

The multiple goals for the course, their own pragmatic perspectives and my emphasis on aesthetic transactions can obscure the path to heightened awareness for teachers in my children's literature courses. The range of possible perspectives they could bring to the literature is not clear to them and their preferred perspective is not privileged in the classroom: What stance should they adopt then? Should they be

reading as adults? Responding as they think children would? Looking at the material as practitioners of a profession?

Most often, they respond by unconsciously slipping from stance to stance. Sometimes they use one, sometimes another. This can make discussion varied and lively. More often than not, however, I have observed that it stalls discussion. Without consciousness of the different stances they may bring to the books, students become frustrated with the process. Progress toward deeper understanding of the books, themselves and each other slows.

Telling students they have multiple perspectives, pointing out stances as I perceive them, or asking them to assume one viewpoint or another are strategies I have used to heighten students' awareness of their own experience of reading. These strategies, like similar strategies built solely from my viewpoint as instructor, have proven to be of limited value in unraveling the knot created by mine and the teachers' seemingly cross-purposes.

Addressing the Challenge

Like other instructors of children's literature (Kutzer, 1981; Nodelman, 1986; Taxel, 1987; Sadler, 1992; Hade, 1994; Pflieger, 1994; Vallone, 1998), I have found that the ideas and experiences teachers bring with them to the study of children's literature limit, expand, and shape their learning about it. Like me, these instructors (Chambers, 1985; Griffith & Frey, 1992; Hade, 1994; Nodelman, 1986; Taxel, 1987) have consciously and thoughtfully articulated their own perspectives very well. In doing so, we describe the pragmatic purposes teachers bring with them to the children's literature

classroom, defining them as a source of challenge in our teaching. Beyond this description and definition, little elaboration is offered.

Keener and fuller knowledge of teachers' perspectives on their own experiences with children's books is needed. The missing voices of teachers must be integrated into the conversation about teaching and learning children's literature. As with all readers, the knowledge and experience they bring to reading children's literature filters the meanings and interpretations they construct from it (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). With clearer, more precise descriptions of the filters teachers use in reading children's literature, more effective and appropriate pedagogy can be developed for college classrooms. Teachers' experiences with children's literature will be broadened and deepened and, in turn, the literary experiences they share with children will be richer, more profound and more varied.

Summary

Instructors of children's literature aim to move teachers to more thoughtful, deep and analytical responses to children's books. They find that teachers' more pragmatic desires often present barriers to just this kind of experience and define the discrepancy of purposes as a source of challenge in their teaching.

Teachers studying children's literature do so in the midst of a plethora of goals, many of which may not seem to represent their own desires. While instructors of children's literature have clearly-articulated perspectives on teaching children's literature, the voices of teachers on their own experiences with children's literature are missing from the conversation. Since the knowledge and experience that teachers bring with

them to the study of children's literature is key in shaping the content, scope and depth of their learning, instructors need to know more about teachers' perspectives on experiences with children's literature in order to develop more effective, appropriate pedagogy.

The tension inherent in the apparent conflict of purposes between children's literature instructors and the teachers who are their students is the spark and the backdrop for this research study. The study seeks to bring the missing voices of teachers into the conversation about teaching and learning children's literature. It does so with the conviction that learning more about the actual perspectives of teachers will ultimately lead to deeper engagement with literature for them and the students they teach.

Perspective on Literary Experience

Along with a host of other kinds of encounters with the arts, reading literature offers the opportunity to look at things as though they might be otherwise (Greene, 1995). In the contemporary world, few people learn "to read music or play an instrument, draw or paint proficiently, or act, or dance on stage. . .[yet] everyone who is educable is expected to learn to read and write" (Zill & Wingle, 1990, p. 3). Reading literature is potentially the most accessible encounter with the arts.

Reading literature nurtures the imagination, a capacity essential in understanding oneself, others and the world we live in. Imagination makes empathy possible. "It allows us to break with taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions" (Greene, 1995, p.3).

Reading literature with children in schools—places at least nominally committed to reading and writing—is a ready opportunity for this kind of experience; it is an opportunity that takes on urgency in light of the importance of imagination and the scarcity of other experiences with the arts. Teachers in classrooms with the young are key in passing on the pleasures of reading literature and enjoying stories with children. They hold the potential for nurturing imagination in their hands. What they choose to focus on in reading and writing, the approaches they take to literature, the books they choose to read with children—all shape the quality of the literary encounters with the arts their students might have.

I teach children's literature to preservice and inservice teachers. My philosophy of teaching recognizes the power of literature to release the imagination; it affirms the importance of teachers in leading children to imaginative literary experiences. Inspired

by James Baldwin's assertion that "Literature is indispensable to the world . . . The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks at reality, then you can change it" (cited in Watkins, 1979), I aim, in short, to help the teachers who study with me, and the children who study with them, to change the world through reading and sharing children's literature.

Perspective on Children's Literature

Bruno Bettelheim explored the significance of fairy tales in the psychological development of children in his groundbreaking work *The Uses Of Enchantment* (1976). The seriousness of Bettelheim's discussion of stories for children brought popular attention to the importance of these stories in human development. Those who dismissed fairy tales as mere child's play were challenged to rethink their positions. Those who considered the violence and gruesomeness of the tales unfit for the young were given food for thought. And, those who remembered the power of the stories from their own childhoods were affirmed in their beliefs.

Bettelheim's extensive and intensive interpretation of the meaning of fairy tales in the lives of children builds on ideas about art and response to art expressed in the introduction to the book. Seeing fairy tales as a form of great art, he contends that their deepest meaning will be different for each person and different for the same person at various moments in life (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 12). In so doing, he suggests two ideas that inform this research study: 1) Children's literature can be meaningful throughout the life span; and 2) Children's literature is a form of art.

Children's literature is "the only literary category that defines an audience rather than a subject or an author" (Sale, 1982, as cited in Stahl, 1992, p. 12). The definition of it by audience is problematic and "it can be (and has been) argued that the best children's literature is not exclusively for children. Certainly, as Sale and C.S. Lewis have argued, nothing is so fatal in the writing of children's literature as contriving an image of the typical child reader and aiming to please that fictional being" (Stahl, 1992, p. 12).

Children's literature is part of a larger body of literary work that comes forth from the creative expression of writers. Writers of books for children, like their counterparts who write literature for adults, select and use words to create the elements of story. They, like other artists, make choices about the use of artistic techniques, with each decision contributing toward the "imagined, perfect, inseparable whole" (Raskin, 1978) that brings forth their vision.

The designation "for children" has most often been assigned by adults who write, edit, publish and review children's books. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a few books have crossed the audience line through the reading preferences of adults or children. For example, nineteenth century classics such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or *Little Women*, which were published for adult audiences, are now considered part of the body of children's literature. More recently, the Harry Potter Series, intentionally written and published for children, has enjoyed widespread popularity with adults.

My own readings of children's books, which are most often personally meaningful, support this idea. My experience and observation of students in the college classroom does as well: As they read familiar classics, picture books, and contemporary fiction written for children of all ages, students discover and re-discover the meaning the works have for them now as adults and teachers of the young.

Children's literature encompasses a broad range of genres and styles just as adult literature does. Like literature written for adults, the range of its quality within those genres and styles stretches widely. Some children's books are excellent examples of literary expression, some are not. No matter what the considered opinion of their quality,

books written for children offer the same potential for sparking profound transactions as literature written for adults.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The framework for this study builds on ideas and theories offered by studies of teaching and learning children's literature, research on reader response, the small body of information about adults as readers and the field of aesthetics. These sources of knowledge bring forth ideas that build on and extend the perspectives on literary experience, on children's literature and on the teaching of children's literature already presented here.

Research on teaching and learning children's literature highlights the importance of teachers' prior reading experience yet subtly privileges participants as teachers over participants as readers. Information about the capacities of mature adult readers presents images of adult readers that reinforce the importance of teachers' capabilities as readers in their teaching. Reader response research lays the ground work for the examination of teachers' experiences with children's literature as transactions between readers and texts. The field of aesthetics encompasses these experiences as aesthetic experiences, extending and further delineating conceptions of the process of engagement. Taken together, these ideas become relevant and evocative lenses for the study of teachers' perspectives on their experiences with children's literature.

Readers as Teachers

"We will only be powerful teachers on a topic if we are powerful learners of that topic" (Calkins, 1996). This seemingly simple idea fueled major changes in the way teachers write and teach writing in the schools. Like the teacher-writers who study their own writing process to improve the teaching of writing, teacher-readers have begun to look closely at their own reading.

Teachers now form reading groups for professional development (Cardarelli, 1992; Vardell & Jacobsen, 1997) to broaden their own reading horizons and to become conscious of their own reading process. They also participate in children's book discussion groups, many of which are affiliated with Teachers as Readers, an initiative formally established by the Association of American Publishers in 1991 (Vardell & Jacobsen, 1997, p. 17).

While formal and informal professional development efforts have turned attention to the importance of teachers' own reading process, only a few research studies directly related to teaching and learning children's literature examine teachers' personal reading histories, preferences or habits (Zancanella, 1991; Day, 1991, 1997; Salvio, 1995). These suggest that what and how teachers read personally influences their teaching (Shirley, 1977; Zancanella, 1991; Day, 1991, 1997; Salvio, 1995), affirming that reading experience is an important part of background knowledge that relates to present behavior and experience.

Researchers (Watson, Sharp, & Snider, 1981; Thompson & Meeks, 1990; Luke, Cooke & Luke, 1986; Klassen, 1993; Mathis, 1994; Many, Gerla, Wiseman & Ellis, 1995; Smith, 1995; Wolf, Mieras & Carey, 1996; Wolf, Carey & Mieras, 1996; Hart &

Rowley, 1996; LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997; Zaleski, 1997; and Wollman-Bonilla, 1998) implicitly emphasize the importance of teaching experience over capacities as mature readers in the way they describe participants in their studies. The primary descriptor for participants is preservice or inservice teacher, with grade level taught and years of experience sometimes noted.

Describing participants in terms of their characteristics and capabilities as mature adult readers in addition to their characteristics as teachers offers a way to shift the emphasis to bring new insight. Looking closely at research on mature adult readers provides knowledge and language for doing so. With this knowledge in mind, the conception “teachers as readers” becomes “readers as teachers”² and new areas of inquiry can be explored.

² The subtle and important influence of this kind of reversal of terms stems directly from the conception of “women as teachers” explored by Donna Barkman and Susan Weseen in their feminist teacher education courses for Bank Street College of Education

Images of Adult Readers

Research on adults' reading (Appleyard, 1991; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) suggests that adults' capacity for reading deeply and flexibly develops over time and continues developing well into adulthood. Studies of adolescent, young adult and adult response to literature affirm that response to literature changes over time and that these changes can be related to age or experience (Beach & Brunetti, 1976; Odell & Cooper, 1976; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1981; Hillocks & Ludlow, 1984; MacLean, 1986; Beach & Wendler, 1987; Coles & Wall, 1987; Langer, 1989; Vipond, Hunt, Jewett & Reither, 1990; Garrison & Hynds, 1991; Scanzello, 1992; Feldman, Kalmar, Bruner & Renderer, 1993; Sebesta, Monson & Senn, 1995; and Lehman & Scharer, 1996).

Taken together, these studies create a consistent impression of adult readers and the skills they bring to their responses to literature. The studies which present response skills as hierarchy (especially Hillocks & Ludlow, 1984; Sebesta, Monson & Senn, 1995) suggest that the mature reader is a person who has mastered skills in succession and now operates at the top of a progression. Vipond, et. al. (1985) and Langer (1989) create images of a pool of skills; mastery and maturity are indicated by the ability to use the entire range of skills when and where needed.

Proficient Readers

The idea that readers "learn to develop a store of qualitatively different options to use in particular circumstances for particular purposes" (Langer, 1989, p. 20) underpins Keene's and Zimmerman's (1997) distillation of reading comprehension research. Their

synthesis of the research identifies eight skills³ important in the growth of reading comprehension. It documents their experiences working with groups of school-age readers in using these skills. The synthesis also demonstrates the author's use of these skills in written reflections on their own adult reading and in their own think-aloud modeling of comprehension skills, an essential component of the approach to instruction they advocate.

The juxtaposition of Keene's and Zimmerman's (1997) work with children and their own reflections on personal reading supports the idea that the pool of skills needed for reading comprehension can be utilized at any age with any amount of experience. They call readers who move flexibly among reading comprehension skills "proficient readers." In citing the work of Duffy, et. al. (1987) and Paris, Cross & Lipson (1984) they emphasize the flexibility and reflective thinking characteristic of proficient readers:

Researchers have confirmed what teachers of reading may have observed in themselves and in their students, namely that thoughtful, active, proficient readers are metacognitive; they think about their own thinking during reading.

Proficient readers know what and when they are comprehending . . . and can use a variety of strategies to solve comprehension problems or deepen their understanding of a text (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997, p. 22).

³ a) Activating relevant, prior knowledge before, during and after reading; b) Determining the most important ideas and themes in a text; c) Asking questions of themselves, the authors and the texts they read; d) Creating visual and other sensory images from text during and after reading; e) Drawing inferences from text; f) Retelling or synthesizing what has been read; g) Utilizing a variety of fix-up strategies to repair comprehension when it breaks down.

Pragmatic Readers

Based in the reader response view (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978) of reading as a transaction, Appleyard's (1991) theory and synthesis of the research (Table 2.1) sees achieving literacy as a social process that is part of the active search for meaning in the environment.

Table 2.1
Becoming a Reader

Role	Characteristics
Player: Early Childhood	In the preschool years the child, not yet a reader but a listener to stories, becomes a confident player in a fantasy world that images realities, fears, and desires in forms that the child slowly learns to sort out and control.
Hero/Heroine: Later Childhood	The school-age child is the central figure of a romance that is constantly being rewritten as the child's picture of the world and of how people behave in it is filled in and clarified. Stories here seem to be an alternate, more organized, and less ambiguous world than the world of pragmatic experience, one the reader easily escapes into and becomes involved with.
Thinker: Adolescence	The adolescent reader looks to stories to discover insights into the meaning of life, values, and beliefs worthy of commitment, ideal images and authentic role models for imitation. The <i>truth</i> of these ideas and ways of living is a severe criterion for judging them.
Interpreter: College and Beyond	The reader who studies literature systematically, typically the college English major or graduate student or teacher, approaches it as an organized body of knowledge with its own principles of inquiry and rules of evidence, learns to talk analytically about it, acquires a sense of its history and perhaps even a critical theory of how it works.
Pragmatic Reader: Adulthood	The adult reader may read in several ways which mimic, though with appropriate differences, the characteristic responses of each of the previous roles: to escape, to heighten consciousness of the world, to gratify a sense of beauty, to challenge oneself with new experiences, to comfort oneself with images of wisdom. What seems to be common to these responses is that adult readers now much more consciously and pragmatically choose the purposes and uses they make of reading.

From Appleyard, J. A., S. J. (1991) Becoming a reader: The experience of fiction from childhood to adulthood. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 14 -15.

Drawn from an extensive review of theories of development, a synthesis of research on response to literature over the life span, and interviews about fiction reading

with readers from preschool through adulthood, Appleyard (1991) organizes the experience of reading fiction into stages or roles. Movement through the roles is progressive and more or less age-related. Appleyard says: "Reading works best at every level when it subsumes and integrates the accomplishments that each of the lower levels made possible" (Appleyard, 1991, p. 178).

The pragmatic reader is the adult reader, a reader who has progressed through the previous stages and now has choice in purposes for reading. Whatever the chosen purpose—to escape, to become more conscious of the world, to challenge or comfort oneself with powerful images—. . . adult readers now much more consciously and pragmatically choose the uses they make of reading" (Appleyard, 1991, p. 15). Like Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's (1986) constructed knowers and people in Kegan's (1982, 1994) fourth order of consciousness, pragmatic readers incorporate all ways of reading into their repertoire, have a clear sense of how their purposes contribute to their reading and are able to move among positions and viewpoints to construct meaning.

Summary: Images of Adult Readers

Research on reading comprehension (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) identifies the ability to think about thinking during reading and to use comprehension skills flexibly as characteristic of proficient readers. Flexibility, choice and metacognition are also emphasized in the descriptions of mature readers offered by Appleyard (1991).

Keene and Zimmerman (1997) present an image of proficient readers as the outcome of the cumulative acquisition and sharpening of skills, skills that grow in clarity and flexibility with practice at every stage of life. Appleyard (1991) places his image of adult, i.e. pragmatic, readers within a progression of experience beginning in childhood. Adults, as characterized by the final stage in each progression, are aware of their own thinking and make choices about how they will read and respond to stories.

Whether achieved in a progressive, hierarchical fashion, or cumulatively—one skill at a time without set order—both see expert readers in adulthood as readers who have a broad range of skills to draw on, exercise choice in using them, and use them with self-awareness and reflection.

Reader Response Research

Research on response to literature dates back to Richards (1929) study of the "misreadings" of Cambridge University undergraduates in response to poetry. Ten years later, in reaction to the then-current text-based schools of criticism, Rosenblatt (1938) posited that meaning emerges from the transaction between the reader and the text. The meaning readers make of texts grows from an "intermingling of reader and text" (Garrison & Hynds, 1991, p. 262) rather than from readers' attempts to unlock meaning through a text's formal elements or through consideration of its author's purpose.

Seeing the elements of literature as theoretically distinguishable but actually inseparable from each other, Rosenblatt (1983) held that the meaning evoked from a text was influenced by the stance a reader adopted in reading it. Readers primarily adopted two kinds of stances while reading: efferent or aesthetic. An efferent stance emphasizes taking information away from a text; an aesthetic stance emphasizes becoming aware of feelings, emotions, thoughts and sensations experienced while reading. Most reading takes place along a continuum from efferent to aesthetic, but an aesthetic stance is basic in literary reading.

Aesthetic reading does not seek to take away a correct interpretation of the text or of an author's purpose. Rather, aesthetic transactions with texts "lead to personal involvement in the lived-through situations, characters and experiences" (Rosenblatt, 1983, p.125). The lived-through experience of a literary text creates meaning for a particular reader, at a particular time, with a particular text. It offers opportunities for critical reflection both on the author's art and on the significance of the text for readers' own lives (Rosenblatt, 1983).

Recognition of the importance of both the lived-through experience of literature and its critical formal elements characterizes all explorations of reader-response during the twentieth century. “A close look at this body of reader-response theory, “ Sullivan (1995) says, “ reveals various tiers, some of which foreground the reader (Bleich,[1978]; and Holland, [1975]); some the text (Iser, [1978]); some complex interpenetrations of shared conventions and assumptions (Fish, [1980]) . . .” (p. 80). But, Rosenblatt's ideas, as expressed in her early and subsequent work (1938, 1978, 1983, 1985), are “probably the fullest development of the reader-response direction, one that comes closest to a complete integration of text and reader” (Berleant, 1991, p.121)—one that recognizes that aesthetic reading can be seen as a series of more or less discrete steps, but is, experientially, a dynamic process more like performing art than linear progression (Rosenblatt, 1938).

Shifting Focus of Reader Response Research

Rosenblatt's work has been taken most seriously by educators interested in the teaching of literature to young people (Karolides, 1992; Clifford, 1991). Broadened and refined by others (Squires, 1964; Purves & Rippere, 1968; Applebee, 1978; Langer, 1995; Britton, 1993; Beach, 1993), her articulation of reader-response criticism has grown to form the theoretical underpinnings for children's literature study in teacher education programs at the college level and for studying literature with children in elementary and middle school classrooms.

A review of reader response literature offers an overview of hundreds of studies, the majority of which are organized into categories which reflect Rosenblatt's early work

on the reading transaction and her later work related to the concept of efferent and aesthetic stances (Beach & Hynds, 1991). The studies focus on response categories, levels and processes; on characteristics and habits of readers themselves; on stances, or the knowledge and purpose readers bring to reading; and on the elements of texts that influence readers.

Beach and Hynds (1991) note a shift from this emphasis on categories, characteristics, purposes and stances to an emphasis on exploration of meaning-making processes. Explorations of the experiential dynamics of the aesthetic reading of children and their teachers are lacking. Significant work, like Langer's (1995) on envisionment-building, look at reading literature from a constructivist standpoint, describing the cognitive processes of building meaning from the transaction of aesthetic reading. Like the larger part of the body of reader-response theory and research, this more recent work more closely allies with "staking the theoretical and research framework for the field and setting forth mental processing" (Sullivan, 1995) than with describing the dynamics of engagement—the elements, qualities, structure and process—that make up the transaction itself.

Sullivan (1995) considers this limitation of reader response theory in her study of adolescents' engagement with literature. She looks to the field of contemporary aesthetics to broaden her analytic perspective. She notes that both reader response criticism as articulated by Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), and contemporary aesthetics as put forth by Berleant (1991), emphasize lived-through experience over the formal qualities of the work. Reader response criticism, however, centers on the process of literary reading

"whereas the field of aesthetics embraces diverse artistic phenomena, including literary works *and* the dynamics of engaging them" (Sullivan, 1995, p. 79) [Emphasis hers].

Sullivan worked in three different settings with seventy-five adolescent readers of varying ranges of interest and abilities in New York City schools. Theoretically based in the work of Dewey (1934), Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) and Berleant (1991), her work analyzes individual and small group interactions with books to explore adolescents' engagement with literature of their own choosing. The characteristics of engagement that she derived reflect this broadened theoretical base and, more specifically, mirror other frameworks for aesthetic experience (Beardsley, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990).

While the characteristics delineated by Sullivan (1995) are not proffered as general or constant aspects of all aesthetic experience or literary aesthetic experience, they do help in understanding the salient characteristics of adolescent engagement with literature. Her incorporation of the broader perspective of contemporary aesthetics with the tenets of reader response criticism enlarges the lens so that the dynamics of engagement emerge and can be added to the picture of the literary reading process already so well-drawn by reader response theorists and researchers (Squires, 1964; Purves & Rippere, 1968; Applebee, 1978; Beach & Hynds, 1991; Clifford, 1991; Britton, 1993; Karolides, 1992; Beach, 1993; and Langer, 1995).

Summary: Reader Response Research

Rosenblatt's articulation (1938, 1978) of reader response criticism forms the theoretical underpinnings for children's literature study in teacher education programs at

the college level and for studying literature with children in elementary and middle school classrooms. As the development of the reader-response direction that comes closest to a complete integration of text and reader (Berleant, 1991, p.121), her theories have fueled innumerable studies of response to literature—the majority of which focus on the process of literary reading (Sullivan, 1995).

Reader response theory and research is an illuminating lens for uncovering and understanding readers, texts and the process of literary reading. Contemporary aesthetics, with its recognition of literary works as works of art and its focus on the dynamics of engagement, presents an opportunity to expand the way readers' transactions with text can be explored. Building on the shared emphasis on lived-through experience with a work of art over experience of its formal qualities, contemporary aesthetics encompasses the focus of reader response research on the literary reading process. By widening the lens to include the dynamics of engagement—or the elements, qualities, structure and process of the transaction itself—it is possible to deepen and sharpen understanding of transactions between readers and texts.

Reading Literature as Aesthetic Experience

The words "aesthetic experience" call forth many associations. The strongest is an image of a group of elite, refined, remote and wealthy people gathered round a painting in a gallery speaking eruditely about what they see, in a passionate but ever-so-polite manner. All would be sharing a moment of high excitement related to an aspect of the work of art and to their extensive knowledge of art in general. The experience is an isolated moment in time, requiring a combination of skills, knowledge, feelings and resources that make it a rarified occurrence, seemingly beyond the ken of ordinary people living ordinary lives.

The assumptions that underpin this elitist image of an aesthetic experience reflect the position of a classicist like Croce (1964), who describes aesthetic experience as pure expression of feeling without historical or critical references to reality. Aesthetic experiences refer only to themselves. They concentrate on the form of the work, requiring those who are engaged in them to set aside, or rise above, their own personal experience to appreciate the formal qualities of the work of art.

Dewey's (1934) theory of art as experience challenges the conceptions of Croce and other formalists. Beginning from the premise that art is grounded in experience, Dewey contends that art is not isolated from life but is an experience of life for both the artist and the perceiver.

The creator of a work of art and its beholder engage in similar processes which allow them to formulate and represent their emotions within, or in response to, a work of art (Langer, 1953, p. 13). They draw on meanings and values from past experiences and on skills which allow the manipulation of emotional material to give form to the

substance of experience: "What counts is what we do, not what we receive " (Dewey, 1934, p. 102). Both art and aesthetic experience are imaginative experiences that insinuate possibilities and potentialities of human relations not to be found elsewhere.

To investigate the implications that the field of aesthetics may have for the study of literary experience, reading is seen as a transaction between a reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1938) with meaning derived from both sources. Making meaning of literature is considered an active process involving discussion, writing, and contemplation. Because of this, Dewey and other expressionists form the core of philosophical works synthesized here; three of this core draw their theories specifically from engagement with literature (Greene, 1978, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978; Iser, 1978). And, because of the desire to connect the theories and models with reading literature, aesthetic experiences that grow from the perception of works of art, rather than those which arise from its creation, are described.

A Philosophical Model of Aesthetic Experience

The importance of aesthetic experience rests in its *process*, not in a single, crystallized moment of insight. In many ways, it " . . . is like the wind—we know of its existence only through its effects" (Iser, 1978, p. 70). Through it, perceptions of works of art are organized and synthesized to create meaning and significance (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1978, 1995; Iser, 1978; Sporre, 1989).

Aesthetic experiences encompass a series of actions and interactions which are first and foremost based in perception of the work of art itself (Greene, 1978). Dewey describes this perception as the interaction between "a live creature and some aspect of

the world in which they live" (1934, p. 44). Perception of a work of art is always in the present tense; it is what you are seeing, hearing, tasting or in any other way perceiving, about *this* work of art, *now*. (Sporre, 1989) [Emphasis his]. Answering the question "What is it?" for a precise moment in time is the starting point for aesthetic experiences.

Beholders then see beyond the whole to perceive its fine distinctions, elements or parts (Greene, 1978). Each of these parts has relationship to the whole as well as to each other. How does each of the parts contribute to the unity and continuity of the whole? How do they relate to each other? Identifying constant qualities of the work of art, perceiving its marginal and dominant features, and looking for disruptive aspects of the work offer ways to address these questions (Schapiro, 1953).

The self-conscious, reflexive process draws on both intelligence and emotion to build meaning from a work of art. The feelings and responses engendered by a work of art are shaped and distilled through perception of the work, its elements and the relationships among them, in concert with critical awareness of the process of perceiving these relationships. Meaning is referential to both the social context of the work and the personal lived experience of the perceiver. As meaning is constructed, social context is questioned and past personal experience restructured, revealing the significance of the work in the perceiver's life.

Dynamics of Engagement in Aesthetic Experience

A synthesis (Shelley, 1997) of six major works on aesthetic experience from a range of fields⁴ affirms a need for reflective distance and for perception of elements and the relationships among them in aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1978; Sporre, 1989). Shelley's synthesis differs from the expressionist view of aesthetic experience in relation to referential thinking, however. Where Shelley (1997) sees the removal of all extraneous thoughts as persistent and necessary to aesthetic experience, Dewey (1934) and Greene (1995) see the incorporation of personal experience and the consideration of social context as essential elements in creating meaning in the experience.

All but one set of the authors in Shelley's study—Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990)—agree that the aesthetic experience unfolds in reference only to a work of art itself. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, whose explication is the only field research-based study in Shelley's group, include thinking in reference to history, personal past experience, and artists' lives as potential aspects of aesthetic experience. Shelley cites their study as more inclusive of possible features of the aesthetic experience than any of the others included in his synthesis (Shelley, 1997, p. 37).

Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) study of the aesthetic response of museum professionals to visual art places aesthetic experience in the context of a larger category of autotelic, or self-rewarding, experiences. This study of museum professionals, which has its roots in Csikszentmihalyi's earlier work investigating

⁴ Composer, musician and critic Cone (1974); philosopher and teacher Steinkraus (1984); philosopher Ginsberg (1986); anthropologist and teacher Maquet (1986), philosopher Osborne (1986); and psychologist Csikszentmihalyi and teacher Robinson (1990).

phenomena related to aesthetic experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1986) and the nature of autotelic activities (1975), is the most recent, most comprehensive, definitive exploration of the dynamics of aesthetic engagement with any form of art to date. It, along with key studies by Housen (1983) and Parsons (1987), offers insight into the dynamics of aesthetic experiences—insight that proves valuable in looking at literary experience in general and teachers' experiences with children's literature specifically.

Autotelic experiences occur, not when people expect a result or reward after an activity is concluded, but when people enjoy what they are doing to the extent that experiencing the activity becomes its own reward (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990, p.7). Csikszentmihalyi (1975) described autotelic experiences as flow experiences because hundreds of people used the word "flow" when describing the deep involvement and the effortless progression they experienced when playing chess, climbing mountains, playing music, or engaging in any activity for its own sake.

While looking at art was not one of the autotelic experiences investigated in Csikszentmihalyi's groundbreaking work, the cluster of related sensations that were identified as the essence of flow's experiential core had much in common with aesthetic experience as traditionally conceived (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. viii). Criteria for the flow experience identified by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) are similar to those of aesthetic experience identified by Beardsley (1982) and other philosophers (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1978) (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2
Comparison of Criteria for Aesthetic and Flow Experiences

Criteria for the Aesthetic Experience*	Criteria for the Flow Experience#
<i>Object Focus:</i> Attention fixed on intentional field	<i>Merging of Action and Awareness:</i> Attention centered on activity
<i>Felt Freedom:</i> Release from concerns about past and future	<i>Limitation of Stimulus Field:</i> No awareness of past and future
<i>Detached Affect:</i> Objects of interest set at a distance emotionally	<i>Loss of Ego:</i> Loss of self-consciousness and transcendence of ego boundaries
<i>Active Discovery:</i> Active exercise of powers to meet environmental challenges	<i>Control of Actions:</i> Skills adequate to overcome challenges
<i>Wholeness:</i> A sense of personal integration and self-expansion	<i>Clear Goals and Feedback</i>
*(Beardsley, 1982, p. 288-289) #(Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 38-48)	<i>Autotelic Nature:</i> Does not need external rewards, intrinsically satisfying

From Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Robinson, R. (1990). The art of seeing: An interpretation of the aesthetic encounter. Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Trust, p. 8.

While sharing many aspects of process and structure, aesthetic encounters do differ from other activities that engender the flow experience. Flow experiences come from the engagement of people in ever-changing interaction with the environment or a process. Aesthetic experiences, however, are not interactions simply between a person and a work of art. The artists' perceptions, emotions, intelligence and desire to communicate are also part of the dynamic. It is these human qualities that present the unique set of challenges in the aesthetic encounter and distinguish it from other flow experiences.

Dimensions and Points of Engagement. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990)

present four dimensions of aesthetic encounters—perception, emotion, intelligence and communication—as paths to aesthetic experiences. Perception concentrates on the formal elements of the work, what can be seen, heard, touched, tasted or smelled. Emotion springs from references to the beholder's personal life experience and the emotional content of the work. Intelligence incorporates knowledge of the historical, biographical, or social context in understanding the work of art. Communication uses dialogue in the minds of beholders as points of engagement for the aesthetic experience; this inner dialogue aims to communicate with the artist, the times that surround the work or with oneself about the meaning of the work.

Works of art present challenges or pose problems for people. These challenges or problems arrest attention and focus it on the work. The common areas where questions or points of engagement arise parallel the dimensions of the aesthetic experience. Some people are struck by an aspect of the formal structure of the work; others experience its emotional impact first; still others notice the intellectual references it carries or its communicative possibilities. Challenges in any of the dimensions may spark entry into the recursive process of aesthetic experience.

Focusing and Meeting Challenges. Just as a work of art must present challenges to a viewer in order for aesthetic experience to be possible, people must bring skills to the encounter in order for it to unfold. The balance between challenge and skills is critical to the process. The level of perceptual skills brought to a work of art allow the comparison, contrast and evaluation of stimuli to be more or less complex. Rudimentary perceptual skills limit the ability to derive an aesthetic experience from any but the most simple

forms. Perceptual and other skills, such as emotional responsiveness, knowledge of the artist or culture, and ability to communicate, are the tools that build the experience. The more skills drawn into the encounter, the more dimensions incorporated into the experience, the deeper and more complex it will be.

While grounded in perception of, or focused attention on, a work of art, aesthetic encounters are dialectical. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson see them like a spiral in which new skills open up new areas of challenge. This process, in turn, facilitates the merging of attention and awareness that is central to the experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 119). Because aesthetic experiences tap into the inner worlds of beholders and the larger world of culture, the content of experiences—that is, the particular emotions or thoughts expressed—is infinitely varied (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 178). The structure of the experience and its process are the aspects that remain constant.

Purpose and Goals. Like flow experiences, aesthetic experiences require that attention be focused, that goals for the experience be clear and that feedback be integrated into the process as it is happening. Goals in aesthetic experiences include the enjoyment of the experience for its own sake. They may also be more specific, arising from external circumstances, like identifying the year in which a work is produced, or from internal sources: Why does this make me burst into laughter? Feedback comes through the heightened awareness of the process that encourages reflection on insights that allows people to see whether or not goals are being met.

Both flow and aesthetic experiences are processes of discovery which can lead to the transcendence of self and everyday life. As people become deeply involved in any

activity, they often have the feeling of being transported into a realm of experience beyond daily life: ". . . the confusing cacophony of everyday life is filtered out, leaving a well-ordered, manageable world in which to act" (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990, p. 88).

Enlarging Capacity for Aesthetic Experiences

Based in open-ended interviews with children, adolescents, young adults and adults about their responses to visual art, Housen (1983) found that aesthetic development continues across the life span and its progression is most highly influenced by aesthetic exposure. The construction of a structure for understanding art—the primary focus of constructive viewers—is key in the movement to subsequent stages. Whether a person builds a framework by learning how others have described art or by developing a vocabulary from their own experiences, building a framework takes time and is unlikely to develop in absence of exposure to art (Housen, 1983). Respondents in the study who lacked aesthetic exposure had difficulty developing a framework for understanding art no matter how highly developed their analytical reasoning skills were in other areas.

Parsons' (1987) study of the development of aesthetic experiences of visual art mirrors Housen's (1983). Both demonstrate that the focus of viewers' attention on a work of art shifts as their aesthetic skills and capacity grow. Each emphasizes the increasing ability to take and understand others' perspectives as a sign of growth. Each also culminates in a stage or phase in which viewers are able to use the skills and perspectives gained along the way to enjoy the work subjectively while understanding its properties and place in history; viewers in these final stages use their skills to ask the work questions and, in essence, to recreate it for themselves.

Summary: Reading Literature as Aesthetic Experience

Theoretical, research-based and developmental models of aesthetic experience present a self-conscious, reflexive and iterative process which draws on both cognitive and affective realms to build meaning from a work of art. (Greene, 1978, 1995; Dewey, 1934; Sporre, 1989; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Beardsley, 1982; Shelley, 1997). The depth and complexity of aesthetic encounters depend on aesthetic exposure (Housen, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990), perceptual skills and the number of dimensions--perception, emotion, knowledge and communication--incorporated into the experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990).

The capacity for aesthetic experience develops over time and continues developing well into adulthood (Housen, 1983; Parsons, 1987). Although all elements of the aesthetic experience may be present throughout development, one aspect or another may dominate the experience because of developmental level, circumstance or preference (Parsons, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). Growth in perspective-taking ability and reflexive thinking characterize the growth of aesthetic capacity (Gardner, 1973; Housen, 1983; Parnell, 1984; Parsons, 1987) and as these capacities grow, responses to art become more relevant to content, substance and intrinsic value of the art work (Parnell, 1984).

Aesthetic experiences are not simply interactions between a person and a work of art. They are transactions that tap into the inner worlds of beholders, the larger world of culture, and explore dimensions of the creative process of the artist who produced the work (Greene, 1995; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Housen, 1983; Parnell, 1984;

Parsons, 1987). The reflexive process and structure of aesthetic experience remains constant; the particular emotions or thoughts expressed are infinitely varied. As more skills are acquired and works of greater complexity are considered, the depth and breadth of aesthetic experiences grows. The pleasure characteristic of aesthetic and other autotelic experiences is felt whenever the skills of the beholder meet the challenges in the work of art (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990).

Chapter 3

The Research Study

Framework for the Study

This research and discussion of teachers studying children's literature derives from the perspective of instructors of children's literature courses at the college level. The discussion highlights the discrepancy between instructors' aims to deepen aesthetic reading, or the lived through experience, of children's literature and the more pragmatic desires of teachers to find literature to meet instructional and curricular needs. Teachers' perspectives on their own readings of children's literature have been missing from the conversation about learning and studying children's literature.

The experience, expectations and knowledge teachers bring with them to the study of children's literature on the college level are key in their interpretation and engagement with children's books. Their own reading experiences, especially those with children's literature, are significant components of the background knowledge they bring with them to the study of children's literature.

Some instructors of children's literature recognize the importance of reflection on personal reading histories as part of the study of children's literature; nearly all maintain that lived-through experiences with children's books are critical. In spite of emphasis on personally meaningful readings of children's books as the basis for profound transaction, research about teachers' study of children's literature places their profession as the most salient characteristic. No study of teachers' experiences with children's literature brings a conception of them as mature, adult readers to its analysis.

The study of children's literature at the college, elementary and middle school levels is most strongly informed by reader response theory as articulated by Rosenblatt (1938, 1978). In research at all educational levels, this theory has been a revealing lens that has uncovered much about characteristics, levels and influence of readers and of texts, but less so about the dynamics of the reading transaction itself.

Contemporary aesthetics, like reader response theory, recognizes literary works as works of art and emphasizes the lived-through experience with a work of art over the experience of its formal qualities. These aspects merge with its particular focus on the dynamics of aesthetic engagement to encompass the focus of reader response theory. Widening the theoretical lens of reader response research to include contemporary aesthetics offers new avenues of inquiry for studying reading transactions. With the conception of dynamics of engagement offered by contemporary aesthetics, it becomes possible to examine the elements, qualities, structure and process of the reading transaction itself in a way that logically and significantly expands the body of already-existing knowledge.

Prior experience with children's literature is key in teachers' study of children's literature. Understanding teachers as adult readers who draw freely on a broad range of skills with self-awareness and reflection brings an opportunity to view their lived-through experiences of children's literature from a new angle. Focusing on the dynamics of engagement with literature as art offers a fresh perspective for understanding the transaction between teachers and children's books. A study of teachers' experiences with children's books that acknowledges the teachers as mature readers and investigates the dynamics of the reading transaction itself is called for.

Design and Research Methods

Statement of the Question

With the importance of literature in the lives of teachers and children and the challenges of teaching children's literature in mind, this study focuses on the dynamics of engagement with children's literature as a component of the background knowledge that teachers as adult readers bring to the study of children's literature. Specifically, it addresses the following two questions:

- How do teachers describe the dynamics of their experiences reading children's literature?
- What are the dimensions, patterns and variations of the dynamics of engagement in teachers' readings of children's literature when their experiences are viewed as aesthetic experiences and as adult experiences of reading?

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative research study investigates participants' frames of reference in their readings of children's literature in order to understand more fully the framework that informs their study of children's literature. The purpose of this exploration and description of the dynamics of teachers' readings of children's literature is not to describe the exact nature of these transactions (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). Rather, through comparison, the purpose is to discern conceptual similarities, refine the discriminative power of categories, and discover patterns that aid in understanding and deeper thinking about these dynamics (Tesch, 1990 as cited in Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991, p. 178).

Background for the Study

This study was originally conceived as part of a larger research study of background knowledge that teachers bring to the study of children's literature. With direction from the research conducted in children's literature courses (Watson, Snider, & Sharp, 1981; Luke, Cooke & Luke, 1986; Thompson & Meeks, 1990; Day, 1991, 1997; Salvio, 1995; Wolf, Mieras & Carey, 1996; Wolf, Carey & Mieras, 1996; and Wollman-Bonilla, 1998) that study investigated three areas of background knowledge identified as important by children's literature instructors (Kutzer, 1981; Nodelman, 1986; Taxel, 1987; Hade, 1994; Pflieger, 1994; Vallone, 1998): teachers' prior experiences with children's literature, their ideas about the purposes of children's literature and their conceptions of childhood innocence.

Evidence of background knowledge in the teachers' experiences reading children's literature was initially examined and classified into categories. These categories described the type of background knowledge that was a source of connection with a children's book. Keene's and Zimmerman's synthesis of reading comprehension research (1997) provided structure for analysis in terms of the type of content in the references.

Like other reading comprehension researchers (Maria, 1990; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991), they define background knowledge broadly as prior knowledge and prior experience. Within this large umbrella, they offer two pictures of what the connection between text and reader's background knowledge might look like: The first, drawn from work with young readers, connects the text straightforwardly with

three subsets of background knowledge within a reader. The second, based in contemplation of a single passage from a novel, presents the connection metaphorically as winding paths through the garden of background knowledge growing within the reader.

Working with teachers and staff developers in the Denver area, Keene and Zimmerman (1997) found that, when readers face unfamiliar texts, the connections they make with their own background knowledge generally takes three forms: text-to-self, text-to-world, or text-to-text. Using these three distinctions, they show young readers how their own personal experience, knowledge of the world and knowledge of other books helps in understanding what they read. They found talking about these three subsets of background knowledge to be genuinely useful in developing reading comprehension for the young people they were teaching.

Keene also illustrates how making connections between the new and the known works on a personal level, for herself—someone who is an experienced, proficient reader. In a description of her reading of a passage from the adult novel *A Leak in the Heart* by Faye Moskowitz (1985), she calls forth conversations from Sunday dinners in childhood, stories of an aunt's life, and an exploration of the same passage with teachers at a professional conference. She finds that the three images converge into a strand of connected recollections that show how “[m]y experience of the piece is different because of my experiences; my experiences are now linked because of these lines. At some level, the fabric of my memory is permanently changed because of this passage from *A Leak in the Heart*” (p. 50).

Keene says Moskowitz' book (1985), like many others in her life, "take[s] me down dozens of rambling paths, lined with memory, knowledge and experience" (p. 71). This vivid, natural image of the connections between text and a reader reflects more closely the sense of intermingling that characterizes reading researchers' and theorists' representation of reading as a transaction (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978; Maria, 1990; Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Both images—of paths lined with background knowledge, or of links to categorical subsets—present background knowledge as an entity within a reader that is activated, straightforwardly or circuitously, consciously or subconsciously, in the act of reading.

Influenced by the consensus of reading research on the importance of background knowledge and by Keene and Zimmerman's (1997) ideas on the shape and form of that knowledge, analysis in the larger study began with categorizing and describing background knowledge on the readers' side of the transaction between teachers and children's books. Modeled on the instructional subsets developed for background knowledge by Keene and Zimmerman (1997), the initial analysis sought to group participant responses into three areas—text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text. Reflecting on the teachers' responses categorically proved limiting to interpretation.

The distinctions were too rudimentary for the rich experiences of these teachers, all of whom have a lifelong relationship to reading and literature. Labeling references as text-to-text was perhaps the most easily done and produced a concrete set of data—i.e. a group of places where the teachers talked about other books and a list of books they talked about. Text-to-self and text-to-world each encompassed a vast array of data, much of which overlapped or fell uneasily into one category or the other. The exercise raised

more questions about the boundaries and efficacy of the categories than about the nature and content of what the teachers themselves had to say.

The difficulty is exemplified by one of the participants who is asked to name a children's book that calls forth a text-to-self connection: "Text to self, personal connection. I have a difficult time with that whole notion of text to self. And I think it's because it's drawing lines in terms of negotiating meaning. Where do you delineate self?" (Dee 1, S2, P87) The instructional categories seemed to be drawing lines in negotiating meaning. The teachers' critical encounters proved too fluid and subtle for the process.

The teachers' descriptions of their connections were more like the rambling paths of Keene's encounter with the passage from *A Leak in the Heart*. Free-form and exploratory, their reflections went back and forth covering old ground and incorporating more recent thought and experience. Their remarks did touch on memory, experience and knowledge, just as Keene's did. But, in looking at the teachers' reflections as a whole, the content and nature of their particular memories, experiences and knowledge—the entity of background knowledge that was expected to be described—were not the most striking or interesting elements to emerge from the data.

What emerged as important from looking closely and analytically at all of the teachers' experiences with children's literature was not the picture of the entity of background knowledge on the reader's side of the transaction. What emerged as more important was the path into the book and through the background knowledge—in short, the dynamics of engagement themselves.

Investigating teachers' experiences with children's literature from the vantage point of dynamics of engagement opened rich avenues of inquiry. The analytic scope of the research study was shifted and refined to reflect this discovery. The dynamics of engagement of teachers' aesthetic transactions with children's literature became the focus of this study.

Operational Definitions

- Children's literature is that body of literature written and published for children from preschool through middle school age (ages 3 through 14). By implication and through the teachers' responses in the interviews and research activities, fiction published for children emerged as the operational definition of children's literature.
- Children's literature is a part of a larger body of literature which is art.
- Reading children's literature is part of a larger body of aesthetic experience.
- Aesthetic experiences are self-conscious, reflexive and iterative experiences which draw on both cognitive and affective realms to build meaning from a work of art.
- Dynamics of engagement are the elements, qualities, structure and process of the transaction with a work of art—for the purposes of this study, that transaction is between readers and children's literature. Emanating from both the reader and the text, these dynamics reflect the particular response of a particular reader at a particular time.

Participants

The study aims to describe the commonalities and patterns in the dynamics of engagement that characterize a group of teachers' children's literature reading experiences; as such, the sample was chosen more for what the teachers have in common than for their differences. Eleven language arts teachers from three middle schools in urban and suburban communities were recruited to participate in the study. Middle school level teachers were chosen because the literature they are expected to be familiar with in their work covers a spectrum of issues, subjects, styles and readability levels. This variety of subject and form offered the potential to elicit the use of a wide range of reading experiences with children's literature creating a broad field from which to draw data.

Participants were recruited in two ways: 1) by me, as a literacy coach in an urban middle school; and 2) through gatekeepers—one a librarian, the other a literacy coach—who made preliminary contacts in two other middle schools (Appendix A). Invitations to participate in the project included a cover letter indicating institutional affiliation and insuring confidentiality; each potential participant also received a description of the purpose and scope of the project along with a description of the procedures and expectations of the research sessions themselves (Appendix B). Five teachers from the urban middle school and three each from the other schools elected to participate. Pseudonyms have been used for all teachers and schools involved in the study.

Within the framework of the selection criteria of middle level teachers at the three different locations, participants formed a voluntary sample that reflects the current make-up of the contemporary teaching force in gender and race (Meek, 1998), i.e. they are

primarily white European American women who describe their families of origin as lower middle, upper middle or simply middle class families. The sample—eight white women, one Black-American woman, one African-Asian American woman and one white man—represents the age and experience range of the current teaching force as well; the majority were close to fifty years or older (8) with a small cluster of younger teachers in their twenties or thirties. Seven of the eight older teachers are veteran teachers who have taught for over twenty years. The others include a first year teacher and three with eleven years or fewer teaching.

All but the first year teacher hold master's degrees directly related to teaching. Four of them have a parent who was educated beyond high school; they or a sibling are most often the first in their families to graduate from college. All but one teacher has studied literature formally at the college level and most list taking a children's literature course as part of their higher education experience.

Individual profiles of the teachers substantiate patterns in the demographic description of the group (Appendix C). The profiles also show variations in life experience and circumstance that bring out distinctions within the group. These distinctions in life experience and circumstance—specifically, gender, race and class—form a background for analysis and discussion in the study. While these factors are not used in the analysis of the data, they are used to raise questions about the findings and make recommendations for future research.

The most striking commonality among the teachers is that all of them are life-long readers. Reading for enjoyment began and was nurtured in their childhoods and continues as source of pleasure and satisfaction for them today. Their reading habits

grow from conditions and circumstances in childhood that favored picking up a book to read—availability of books and magazines; family members who read aloud; adults and peers who read; availability of libraries; owning books; and meaningful personal experiences with reading (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988). Even for the one teacher whose top priority was being outside, these conditions nurtured a love and enjoyment of reading that continues into adulthood.

The habits and preferences that inform the teachers' reading lives today place them in an elite group of readers in the United States—highly educated readers who not only read books but also read literature (Zill & Wingle, 1990). Like other book readers (Smith, 1996), they read other formats as well. The information they provide about their reading preferences and habits shows that, for the most part, they share the fifth most prevalent reading pattern for adults in the United States: Like 6% of the adult population, they have high reading activity in five basic formats—books, magazines, newspapers, workplace documents such as memos or training manuals; and personal documents such as recipes, junk mail, letters or circulars (Smith, 1996).

The teachers who comprise the sample for this investigation are experienced teachers who read children's literature with middle-school-age children as part of their present professional responsibilities; they have also read children's literature as children and independently throughout their careers. They are all life-long readers of literature who represent a highly-educated, elite segment of the adult population of the United States, a group that read books, magazines, newspapers and other documents regularly and frequently. Because of this, as a group, they are in the best position to offer

information about the dynamics of engagement with children’s literature needed for this study.

Sources of Data

Data was gathered through interviewing, think alouds and written reader profile surveys in two research sessions held from one week to one month apart (Table 3.1). The transcribed interviews and think alouds, along with the written surveys and discussion of them, became the core of material analyzed in the study.

Taken together, data from the critical incident interviews and think alouds provide information on the dynamics of engagement in two kinds of reading experiences—what Chambers (1985) calls “the book as I was reading it for the first time, and a second book that results from my contemplation of that experience” (p. 32). Critical incident interviews allow participants to talk about a significant experience with children’s literature in retrospect. Think alouds reveal the dynamics of their engagement while reading a short story for children aloud.

Table 3.1
Data Sources

Data Source	Data Provided
Reader Profile Surveys and Follow-up Interview	Demographic data Present reading habits and practices Childhood reading habits memorable to participants
Critical Incident Interviews	Descriptions of dynamics of engagement with children’s literature from reflection on an experience significant to participants
Think Alouds and Follow-up Interviews	Record of dynamics of engagement with children’s literature as it occurs

Reader Profile Surveys. Reader profile surveys and their accompanying discussion provided information on reading experiences the participants prefer and engage in regularly. They also indicated memorable reading experiences from participants' childhoods. In discussion of the surveys, an idea of which parts of their background they consider most important when approaching children's literature was gathered.

Participants received a written survey that they were asked to complete before the first research session (Appendix D). The survey included four sections: 1) teaching and children's literature experience; 2) reading practices past and present; 3) educational background and 4) personal background. Questions related to present reading practices were modeled on questions used in the National Adult Literacy Survey (Smith, 1996) so that participant information could be compared with information on adult readers in the United States.

The first research session began with a focus on the written survey. During this time, participants raised questions about areas on the survey that needed clarification or more explication than space beneath a question allowed. They were also asked to talk about the information on the survey they felt was most important given that the research sessions focused on their experiences with children's literature. The focus on the survey ended with an opportunity for them to talk about anything else in their backgrounds that they thought was important to be known in terms of the study.

Critical Incident Interviews. Critical incident interviews provide information on the dynamics of the teachers' engagement with specific children's books from a reflective point of view. These explorations bring to the surface reading experiences participants

thought to be significant. They also reveal the ways in which they made meaning of these reading experiences.

Critical incidents interviews have been used in a wide range of research in many fields for over two decades and are central to Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) empirical investigation of aesthetic experience. Appropriate when analyzing an experience with "a flexible or undefinable number of 'right' ways to behave" (Zemke & Kramlinger, 1982, p. 134), the technique solicits individual stories of key experiences from those most familiar or best qualified to offer descriptions—in this study significant experiences with children's literature. These individual experiences are then gathered and analyzed collectively, or element by element, in relation to a central question. The collection of these stories and the subsequent analysis then make it possible to formulate the critical elements of an experience or activity (Zemke & Kramlinger, 1982).

Critical incidents of reading children's literature were explored with the teachers through open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. Before the research session they were asked to think about a children's book with which they had a strong connection. After discussing their personal, professional and reading backgrounds, they were each asked directly to describe the book they had selected. Each participant then talked about a children's book significant to them, from childhood or adulthood depending on their experiences. Their initial descriptions were then probed to uncover the circumstances and dynamics of that connection. This exploration ended with asking them to talk about making the decision about which book to focus on as a strong connection.

Think Alouds. Think alouds focused on the actual dynamics of engagement as they occurred between teachers and a work of fiction written for children. Since the two short stories were unfamiliar to all participants, the data gathered here demonstrates how they engaged with a work of children's fiction they had not read before.

Think alouds have been used to great advantage in studies of reading comprehension (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) and are now recommended as strategies for teaching reading comprehension to children (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997; Maria, 1990). The purpose of a think aloud is to reveal thinking concurrent with performance of a task—in this case, reading a selection of fiction for children (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). This study, like reading comprehension studies and classroom practice, used think alouds to make the internal process of reading visible so that it could be studied and analyzed.

Participants reported their thinking as they read two selections of short fiction written for children, one in each of the two research sessions. Both chosen short stories, *Stray* (Rylant, 1985) and *A Good Deal* (Testa, 1995), are works of contemporary realistic fiction (Appendix E). As they read each short story aloud, participants were asked to stop whenever a thought occurred to them and to speak that thought aloud. In order to record as close to a natural reading process as possible, no attempt was made to restrict participants to thinking aloud at predetermined stopping points. A brief interview followed each think aloud. During this time, participants elaborated on specific references that they made during the reading of the short story. They were also asked to talk about any other connections that occurred to them while reading that they had not spoken aloud.

In regard to thinking aloud, Smagorinsky (1989) cautions: “One possible concern about the validity of the data collected from [think-aloud] protocols is that the act of talking while performing a given task might alter the process from the way it would naturally occur” (p. 465). Although this could be true for the think alouds gathered for this study, every effort was made to keep that effect to a minimum. Instructions emphasized that primary interest was in the content of the thoughts that occurred in the process of reading rather than in interpretation of those thoughts (Pressley & Afferblach, 1995). In all but one case, the research session also included a demonstration of the technique and an opportunity for participants to practice, so that speaking aloud thoughts just as they occurred when reading was modeled and practiced as the mode of reporting.

Two participants’ narration of their thoughts were spoken as if the participants were addressing a student audience. In one case, the demonstration of the think aloud technique had been omitted from the first research session because of time constraints; this was discussed in the second research session and the second think aloud reported the participant’s concurrent thoughts more closely. In the second case, review of the transcripts indicates plain miscommunication about expectations from the researcher to the teacher; when the teacher asks a clarifying question, the answer can easily be interpreted to indicate that simulating a classroom think aloud is appropriate. Another participant who understood the process and the expectations of the study had great difficulty with the think aloud process itself because it interrupted her reading of the story and because she relied on non-verbal images to process what she was reading.

Representing Teachers' Perspectives

Like Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's study (1990) of museum professionals who sought understanding of what aesthetic experience meant to people who were having them, this study seeks to understand teachers' aesthetic transactions from their own words and descriptions. Eliciting information on what was important to the participants shaped the written survey, all interview questions and the think alouds.

- Decisions about what was important in their childhood reading habits and practices needed to be made in order to answer the open ended question "Make five statements about your childhood reading habits and practices."
- The follow-up discussion of the reader profile surveys included a direct question about the element of their background they thought most important given the study's focus on children's literature and an opportunity to add any information not covered that they felt was important.
- The probe for the critical incident interview during pilot sessions for the study asked participants to talk about a children's book with which they had a strong text-to-self connection. This proved to restrict responses to a researcher-defined category. For the study itself, the question was reworded. Participants were asked to talk about a children's books with which they had a strong connection. The more broadly and openly-stated question still prompted judgment on the part of the participants—through the use of the word 'strong'—but left room for interpretation of the source and nature of the strength.
- No guidelines were given for whether the strong connection experience should be drawn from childhood or adulthood, or from books published for younger or older children. Not doing so again allowed participants to draw from the widest range of experiences and better represented their view of when significant experiences with children's literature happen.

- Verbal reports during the think alouds by implication represented what was important to the teachers in the moment of reading. Follow-up questions emphasized elaboration on references they made during the think aloud or asked them to reveal something important that was not spoken aloud during reading. The final question elicited information on any other connections they made while reading or that came to them during any part of the process.

Methods of Analysis

This study explores the dynamics of engagement of middle school language arts teachers' lived-through experiences of children's literature. Teachers' descriptions of their experiences with children's literature are the primary source of data for this exploration. The study uses a qualitative methodology (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to organize and synthesize the data.

Representing teachers' perspectives was foremost in analysis of the data. For this reason, grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Ely, et. al., 1991)—which seeks to express findings in the words of participants' themselves—set the tone and thrust of the analysis. The goal is “to discern conceptual similarities, to refine the discriminative power of categories and to discover patterns” (Tesch, 1990 as cited in Ely, et. al., 1991, p. 178) so that the dynamics of teachers' engagement with children's literature could be more fully understood.

Grounded theory most closely informed the initial analysis of the critical incident interviews. Codes of analysis generated inductively emerged from the participants'

words so that the body of data to be analyzed could be further defined and organized in the next level of analysis.

Twelve experiences with children's books were culled from the critical incident interviews. Some experiences were grouped together because they were with the same book and were similar in nature; some teachers described more than one significant experience. They included experiences with children's literature from childhood and adulthood; all were with works of fiction.

Each of these experiences was synthesized as a narrative composition with a goal of highlighting the dynamics of engagement with the literature. The essence of each was extrapolated as, and after, the narrative was composed; this essence was then represented in a phrase from participants' own words which was used as a title for the critical incident.

Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) model for aesthetic experience guided the second level of analysis of critical incident and think aloud data. The critical incident portraits were first examined in light of the dimensions of aesthetic experience—perception, emotion, intelligence and communication. This analysis was enlarged and refined to derive an additional category and more specific points of engagement within the dimensions. The questions raised through the coding and synthesis of this data led to consideration of the think aloud data.

The four dimensions of aesthetic experience were initial codes for analyzing statements made during think alouds. From there, work was done inductively. Codes were developed from the dynamics of engagement as they unfolded in the teachers' think alouds. This representation of dynamics of engagement was conceptualized as three

interwoven components relating to making meaning of the short story; these components were organized and titled using the participants' words to represent the nature of the component.

The conceptualization of the dynamics of engagement for the think alouds was compared and linked with the representation of the dimensions of aesthetic experience and points of engagement for the critical incidents. The new ideas and insights generated through this activity led to a consideration of goals as part of the teachers' dynamics of engagement.

Since goals for reading and thinking aloud the two short stories were defined by the parameters of the research study, the teachers' goals for the readings described in the critical incidents were the subject of analysis. Here, purposes of adult fiction reading—escape, consciousness of the world, powerful images—delineated by Appleyard (1991) supplemented the model of aesthetic experience as an analytic tool. This allowed goals and more specific reasons for reading to be developed.

Two levels of analysis were used to organize and synthesize the data on the dynamics of teachers' engagement with children's literature. First, for both the critical incidents and think alouds, the data was coded, organized and abstracted using grounded theory techniques, i.e. codes, categories, and properties were inductively derived from the data. The critical incident portraits and three component outline of the think aloud dynamics of engagement were then examined in light of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1990) model of aesthetic experience, supplemented by Appleyard's (1991) representation of purposes for adult fiction reading.

From this work, patterns and variations were discovered in the dimensions of aesthetic experience, points of engagement within the dimensions, focusing and meeting challenges within a work and goals for the process. Taken together, these aspects of the dynamics of engagement offer a picture of the dynamics of teachers' engagement with children's literature.

Limitations

The commitment to structuring the collection of data so that participants made decisions about what was important to them from the broadest range of possible responses is a strength of this study. That commitment also brings with it some limitations. These emerge in carrying out the comparison of responses upon which the analysis is dependent. Participants' perceptions of key terms or the range of children's literature mean that comparisons and contrasts may be less clean and clear than if those were defined for them.

For example, participants' conceptions of children's literature as a body of literature itself influenced their answers. After the two research sessions were over, one participant realized and revealed that she had not thought of chapter books as children's literature at all when she talked about her strong connection experiences. Two others saw the line between children's literature and adult literature as arbitrary or artificial and answered accordingly.

Choosing the term 'strong connection' raises issues related to analysis of the data. Using the word 'strong' asks for the experience to be distinguished for the participant by its intensity in some way; whether that strength is experienced positively or

negatively is left to interpretation. The word ‘connection,’ however, may have implied that the experience the participants were to talk about was one of positive value, since connection is most generally defined as “ coherence” or “the logical linking together of words or ideas” (American Heritage, 1992). All of the critical incidents focused on by participants are positive experiences; whether this reflects the nature of critical incidents with children’s books in the teachers’ lives, or the teachers’ interpretation of the word “connection” as positive cannot be determined.

None of the participants in the study had used the think aloud technique formally in any way prior to the study. Most adopted and performed the technique with ease and adaptability. Two modes of engaging in the think alouds may have influenced the naturalness of the process as well as the frequency and kinds of statements that surfaced in the think alouds: One mode arose from unclear research expectations. The other appeared to arise from a participant’s reliance on images, i.e. non-verbal thought, in thinking while reading.

The sample for this study reflects the make-up of the contemporary teaching force. By virtue of being active and life-long readers presently involved with children and children’s literature, the teachers who make up the sample are also people in the best position to offer information about the dynamics of engagement with children’s literature. Like other qualitative studies that seek to represent participant perspectives from their own words, however, this study’s sample is small. It is also a voluntary sample. Self-selected participation and the teachers’ professional responsibility for teaching literature mean that this sample’s experiences with children’s literature are not necessarily representative of even middle school teachers at large. For these reasons, the analysis

presented here is most valuable as careful description and systematic exploration of the topic. It is offered as thorough, thoughtful, viable groundwork for continued examination of teachers' experiences with children's literature.

Chapter 4

Teachers' Experiences Reading Children's Literature

The teachers' experiences reading children's literature presented in this chapter reflect the two levels of analysis used to discover categories, patterns and variations in the dynamics of their aesthetic engagement with children's literature. First, a picture of the teachers' dynamics of engagement is drawn inductively from the participants' own words. Then, this picture is examined in light of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1990) model of aesthetic experience and Appleyard's (1991) delineation of the purposes of adult fiction reading to discern conceptual similarities and derive discriminatory categories. From both these levels of analysis, there emerges a picture of the dimensions, points of engagement, structure, process and goals that constitute the dynamics of engagement of these teachers' aesthetic transactions with children's literature.

The first level of analysis yields twelve critical incident portraits and a three component narrative description of the think aloud process. Each of the portraits and the components highlight the dynamics of engagement as they occur for the teachers in the critical incident interviews and in the think alouds. Each also represents the essence of those dynamics in its title or subtitles—all of which are extrapolated from the teachers' own words to augment and refine the picture of dynamics of engagement from their points of view.

Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) model of aesthetic experience supplemented by Appleyard's (1991) conception of purposes of adult fiction reading guides the second level of analysis. This second level of analysis reorganizes and synthesizes the critical incident portraits and description of the think aloud process

according to the dimensions of aesthetic experience (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990) and purposes of adult fiction reading (Appleyard, 1991). The resulting delineation of categories, patterns and variations in the teachers' experiences, together with the inductively-derived portraits and think aloud description, offers a thought-provoking portrayal of teachers' dynamics of aesthetic engagement with children's literature.

In their Own Words

Critical Incidents

The critical incidents these teachers describe are varied and vital: Elaine plays with beautiful words. Mary and Carol go off to far-away worlds. Sharon and Shirley have a good cry. Articia validates her experience and history. Barbara and Mark contemplate serious societal issues. Kay enjoys potent images that bolster her spirits. Anna revels in rich complexity reflective of her values and daily life. Dee seeks and finds creative ways to open the minds of her students.

Their reflections are much like Keene's (1997) description of her transaction with a passage from *A Leak in the Heart* (Moskowitz, 1985). Keene calls forth conversations from Sunday dinners in childhood, stories of an aunt's life, and an exploration of the same passage with teachers at a professional conference. She finds that the three images converge into a strand of connected recollections that show how "[m]y experience of the piece is different because of my experiences; my experiences are now linked because of these lines." (p. 50).

The strands of connected recollections and experiences evident in these critical incidents show individual and spirited ways of engaging with children's literature. As a group, they also exhibit several elements or aspects in common:

- Each of the experiences is an experience of affinity or making meaning through resonance with or affirmation of emotions, ideas, memories, or experience.
- All are built on multiple connections with prior experience and knowledge, including childhood memories; family history; the circumstances of reading the book; ideas and emotions the book called forth; and the value of introducing the books to children. Admiration for the book's literary elements was consistently among the points of connection in all portraits.
- All center on books that were first read with pleasurable satisfaction, then read again, perhaps several times.
- All include reference to discussing or sharing the books with others—sometimes colleagues, sometimes friends or family, and, almost always formally or informally with children in classrooms or in personal lives.
- Each of the experiences emphasizes a mode of engagement that provides a way into the experience and that galvanizes all points of connection with the children's book.

A close look at one of the teachers' critical incidents illustrates these elements (Table 4.1) and provides a guide for reading the others' descriptions of significant experiences with children's literature.

Table 4.1
Elements of Critical Incidents:
Simply the Way the Words Sound

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Grounding in Affinity</i></p> <p>Elaine values and loves the fairy tales for the pleasure and enjoyment they bring her.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Multiple Connections</i></p> <p>She talks about her experiences with her grandmother, discovery of the relationship between the tales and her grandmother's stories, valuing the gender-free content and morals of the tales, reading the stories to her cousin.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Multiple Readings</i></p> <p>She has read the stories many times. She first hears them told orally, followed by reading the tales themselves as a young person, and re-readings as an adult. Her first reading is one of stories told orally for her enjoyment</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Literary Elements</i></p> <p>She loves the beautiful words of the stories and the way they sound as she reads aloud.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Shared Experiences</i></p> <p>She shares her first experience of the stories with her grandmother and, later as an adult, as a read-aloud experience with a young cousin.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mode of Engagement</i></p> <p>Elaine speaks most passionately about the descriptive beauty and sound of Wilde's words. For her, the enjoyment of the words and description was paramount, a motivating force for sharing them with her cousin.</p>	

Simply the Way the Words Sound

Elaine names Oscar Wilde's fairy tales as children's books with which she has a strong connection. Her reflection on her connection with the tales succinctly contains all of the elements of a strong connection. Analyzing her reflection on her experience of the stories illustrates the elements of a strong connection and shows how they work together to become a strong connection.

Elaine knows Wilde's fairy tales from her childhood: "Not from a story book. From my grandmother. Some of them." Her grandmother would "tell me stories all the time. But she'd mix up all kinds of fairy tales and stories, like bits and pieces. As you

get older, you read, stop and say, “Oh that’s where she got that goofy idea.’ She just told stories a lot” (Elaine 1, S2, P144-164).

She values the tales for their difference from traditional fairy tales—“not . . . a lot of gender role stuff happening in there” and says the “descriptions are real nice and there’s a bit of a moral there,” too. But her primary connection is to “the language of them”—an affinity she has shared reading them aloud to a six year old cousin for the past four years (Elaine 1, S2, P66-106):

I like the language of them, just simply the way the words sound . . . They’re beautiful words. Nice, big, long, fancy words. We [she and her cousin] love saying them out loud (Elaine 1, S2, P74, P102).

From listening to oral storytelling through reading aloud with a young cousin, the underlying dynamic of Elaine’s connection to Oscar Wilde’s fairy tales lies in enjoying the sound of nice, big, long, fancy words. The experience of the words weaves together the other elements, giving her experience of the book’s meaning and importance.

Like Elaine’s experience with Oscar Wilde’s fairy tales, the teachers’ critical incidents grow from grounding in affinity with multiple connections to prior knowledge and experience. The knowledge and experience they bring to the book include literary knowledge as well as multiple and shared readings of the book. The force, power and passion of their children’s literature reading experiences, however, flows from a galvanizing force which paves the way into their experience and focuses their attention as they experience the children’s book.

Another World in the Most Ordinary of Places

Mary's father read her and her siblings *The Chronicles of Narnia* at least twice as she was growing up:

[It was a] really strong connection . . . because my dad used to gather us into the bedroom—and there were four of us—we'd go to the little person's room so that they could stay in bed and [he'd] read to us every night. And I think, by the time I was ten, I'd heard the whole series twice, you know. And he read other books, too. But that one in particular just was, really, this special thing. . . . they're just really special books to everybody in my family I'd say. And actually I'm not wearing it now. . . .but, when I was seven my dad gave my sister and . . . [me] a pendant that's a lion. And on it, it's Aslan; it's the character. I'm not a Leo; that's what people always ask me. But on the back it says "To M . . . A . . . , from Daddy, Christmas, 1972" . . . (Mary 1, S2, P92).

As a child, Mary loved the magic involved in *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis. She loved "finding another world in the most ordinary of places." The stories fueled "a lot of awesome fantasy games . . . for me alone, for me and my siblings, and me and my friends who'd read the book " (Mary 1, S2, P108).

As an adult, after Mary found out that C.S. Lewis was a well-known theologian, she reread *The Last Battle*, the final book in the series. In that book, the lion Aslan, like Christ, "sacrifices himself and is killed and then rises, you know. And I thought, 'Oh, wait, [laughter], who knew? And so it was really interesting to read it from an adult perspective . . . and it was just really neat to see this extra layer. . . I think that the best

children's literature I've read has that extra layer that an adult can appreciate, but that a kid isn't going to get." (Mary 1, S2, P112).

Elaine's strong personal connection to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first book in *The Chronicle of Narnia* series, calls forth experiences and ideas quite similar to Mary's. Like Mary, she was fascinated with the book because it makes the ordinary magical: "because they're these regular kids and then this wonderful thing happens" (Elaine 1, S2, P282).

The book also connects to Elaine's own "fantasy, imagination, games . . ." (Elaine 1, S2, P282)—an experience that she later encourages in the students she teaches:

I always liked it when I was miserable . . . I always pretended that I went away. I went in my closet a lot. I had books and flashlights and like I made a little place in my closet where I would sit under the clothes all the time. I always like to think I was in my own Narnia (Elaine 1, S2, P278).

And then later [in]my teaching, I had three students who were really into it. And . . . we'd been talking about it a lot during lunch and the rest of the class was interested . . . You get the kids talking too about what their Narnia looks like. It's made of chocolate . . . Mine was up, in the sky, as far as I remember. And everything was soft and a lot of clouds and I had a bicycle with wings. And I went around to different places, different clouds, and different things were going on there . . . Yeah, that was nice (Elaine 1, S2, P286-P298).

Oh, My Imagination Just Went

Rooted in a profound connection to the imagination, Carol's relationship with Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* crosses continents and extends from childhood through adulthood:

I just loved that book. . . I just read that book. And I just visualized that moor that she lived on and that huge house, the mansion that had all those rooms, and Colin in the dark room with the curtains closed and she [Mary, the main character] could hear this crying at night. Oh, my imagination just went, I was carried away with that.

And then later in life, when I moved to Kenya, I was horseback riding one day and actually went . . . [a garden that was the way] I pictured the garden with the wall and everything. And I used to pass by there, but I could never see inside. But one day I went horseback riding and I was high enough so that I could see over the wall. And it just reminded me very much of that garden inside, [when] it was originally locked up and everything was overgrown . . .

So, as a child, that is a book I really connected with . . . and after seeing the movie [as an adult] I was a little bit disappointed because my images were much stronger. And then, as an adult, rereading it . . . then I realized the whole socio-economic context—the fact that she had an Ayah and a nanny and everything. And so I wasn't aware of . . . the whole class thing at the time . . . I looked at it much more critically, you know, as an adult (Carol 1, S2, P138-154).

Carol's experiences with *The Secret Garden* echo Mary's and Elaine's with the *Chronicles of Narnia*. All describe the books as powerfully affecting their imaginations during childhood. Each has had other book-related experiences that reawaken and extend the book's meaning. And, Carol and Mary have reread the books as adults and uncovered aspects of it that went unnoticed in their childhood readings.

She Makes the Characters Come Alive and the Issues are Real

Betty and Mark each name *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* as a book they connect with strongly. They admire Taylor's writing, value her exploration of racism, and enjoy teaching the book to their students.

Mark says simply: "I think the strong connection would have to be just . . . a liking for her writing. She's wonderful with words. And, um, she makes the characters come very much alive in my own head. And the issues are real. And . . . you don't know what's going to happen. I mean, I do now, but [not] when I first read it; it wasn't a formula being followed" (Mark 1, S2, P128).

In talking about Mildred Taylor, Betty says "I like her writing actually. . . I think she, first of all, I think she really defines her characters" (Betty 1, S2, P84). Betty describes *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* as "heavy reading" that "requires a lot of historical understanding." She reads *Song of the Trees*, the novella that precedes *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* in the Logan saga, with her fifth and sixth graders before beginning *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*. For Betty, *Song of the Trees* introduces the members of the Logan family in poetic language without too much detail and "sets up the scenario and makes the kids pretty well connected to the family so that when they

actually embark upon reading *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. . .” they have something to build on (Betty 1, S2, P76).

Both Mark and Betty comment on the use of the adult characters in conveying stories that put the events of the novel in historical perspective and explain “why people act the way they do” (Mark 1, S2, P128):

[Taylor] does some flashbacks. . . in which she is teaching these 1930’s children—these Logan children—that the pride that they have in their . . . ownership of this farm . . . dates back to the Civil War. And that’s hard for kids [contemporary readers] . . . because reconstruction and the 1930’s South aren’t significantly different to them. . . So the fashion in which it is done is: the main character Cassie hears from Big Ma, her grandmother, the story of the land which really dates back to reconstruction (Betty 1, S2, P131).

It’s got some inserts, I call them inserts, in which one of the characters . . . Big Ma or Mama goes into their analysis of why things are they way they are. It seems to be an insert in the sense, it looked like the author Mildred Taylor was intending to teach about racism by having a character giving a reasoned economic theory . . . behind these events, [one] that explain[s] why people act the way they do (Mark 1, S2, P128).

Both Betty and Mark appreciate what Betty calls “the opportunities that the book presents. . .” (Betty 1, S2, P87). In Betty’s case, these include opportunities to “discuss issues of black/white relationships” and to highlight the overall sense of pride embodied

in the Logans—“this is a family that, despite problems they encounter in their environment . . . clearly racism, prejudice and oppression . . . it does come across what a proud family they are” (Betty 1, S2, P87). She thinks this kind of literature is important. “I think it’s important for black kids. I think its important for other kids, that they see that kind of pride, um, in the face of adversity.” She “enjoy[s] the understanding the kids develop” (Betty 1, S2, P80).

The opportunities Mark sees are based in the books’ larger focus on racism —“I like teaching from it. I like kids to discuss those issues. I think it’s a great book for looking at racism” (Mark 1, S2, P140)—and in its specific events. He finds those events, “particularly the scene in town when Cassie is forced to apologize for bumping into Lillian Jean, the white girl,” helpful in encouraging introspection and reflection in his students:

Well, the kids identify really strongly with Cassie and sometimes with the boys, the older boy Stacy. That’s good. It helps the kids look at their feelings. Fifth and sixth graders don’t like to look at their feelings and it’s one of my pushes to get them to write about what they’re thinking. This book helps me do it (Mark 1, S2, P140).

Although It’s Fiction, It Hits on Real Facts

Articia first read *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor in seventh grade at the middle school where she now teaches language arts to seventh graders. She says that this first reading was her “first introduction to her [Taylor] as an author. . .

learning her background and how, although it's fiction, it [*Roll of Thunder*] hits on real facts of her dad's life" (Articia 1, S1, P38).

As a teacher, she finally "got the opportunity to teach one of [Taylor's] novels, actually two of the novels." She describes the book as "a very deep book" that could probably be taught at the college level because of the situations and events and conflicts that the characters go through (Articia 1, S1, P34-37). Based on stories her father told her about his life as part of a land-owning African-American family in Mississippi during the early twentieth century, Taylor's book resonates with some of the "real facts" of Articia's own life, including:

her own family's history,

I made a connection there because a lot of my family is West Indian and Southern . . . a lot of my family live in . . . the very deep, deep South. And I know my grandmother . . . stopped school in the sixth grade and worked in the fields and everything. Her parents, or grandparents, had land that they really had to fight for. And I can remember her telling me that a lot of family got killed trying to keep land . . . Although it was their land, they had signed for it and everything, they still had to fight to keep it . . . just the struggle there. It's like even though the land is yours, there are still people that are saying, "We're going to take it. We don't care if it's yours." So I can make a connection there, which I shared with my students (Articia 1, S1, P34-63).

her experience as an outspoken tomboy in childhood,

. . . one of the central or major characters, and the narrator, is Cassie. . .and just her dealing with issues of being the only girl in a family of boys. And having to deal with being a tomboy, or labeled as that . . . also, just what she goes through, and her strength. I think a lot with her character I really liked. I could relate to even the strength of myself in her strength. And how she was outspoken and just how she dealt with different things (Articia 1, S1, P34-63).

and her knowledge of people's struggles for freedom.

. . . it's fiction, but these things really happen. And . . . I even make the connections with students who are from Latin America, Central America and South America and even some of the white students who came here from Ireland, who came here from Scotland, Russia, different places . . . It's not only a Black American thing, or an African American thing. It's all people. We've all had to struggle with persecutions . . . I wanted them [the students] to make connections . . . Hispanics have gone through it, white people have gone through it, and Black people have gone through it . . . it deals with a lot of racial issues, but I wanted my students to see that, although it deals with racial issues, everyone has gone through it in some way (Articia 1, S1, P34-63).

In addition, Articia expresses great respect for the way the Logan family lives as a family, even though the circumstances of their lives were different from those of her own growing-up family: "Family is another strong connection. Just the dedication, the loyalty and the strength. And I think today a lot of families lack a bit of . . . that strength, that unity . . . I grew up where my mother was the breadwinner, but I respect that way of life,

the Logans . . . I really admire that and wish and pray that it was a lot more apparent in families now. You know, where the dad, I'm not saying the mum shouldn't work. I couldn't do it without working. But [where] the father is noticed in society as the breadwinner and the mum is his partner" (Articia 1, S1, P83).

It's Good To Cry

Sharon and Shirley describe powerful emotional responses when they talk about *Where the Red Fern Grows*, a book that has been a favorite for each of them for many years. The "very nice, heart-warming, simple story" (Shirley 1, S2, P136-154) begins with a boy's two-year struggle to raise money to buy hunting dogs in the mountains of Arkansas during the Depression. The story shows "how a person develops a feeling for a pet, in his case, two pets. And they took care of him. He was their master. They would risk their lives for him, and they did" (Sharon 1, S2, 136-154).

. .there was one book. I don't think I can read it again. I read it several times to classes, and every time I got to certain parts I wouldn't be able to read because I cried so much. And that was *Where the Red Fern Grows* (Sharon 1, S1, P72).

. . . I can remember when I first read *Where the Red Fern Grows*. I read it at home and it was the summertime. And I remember sitting on the floor in the living room. . .I can remember, I just remember that I couldn't put the book down and I can remember sobbing (Sharon 1, S4, P327).

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls, an excellent book. Kids seem to really catch on to it; they like it. It gets emotional; it brings tears to the reader's eyes, the teacher's especially. And when I was team teaching, sometimes the other teacher [said], "Mrs. R, you do it" when it would come to the crying part. We would try to trade off because sometimes one would be in less control (Shirley 1, S2, P117).

The emotion of the book—the crying part—centers in the bond between the boy and the animals for both teachers. Shirley describes two events as crying parts:

One time, it's not a definite crying part, but it's an emotional part, in a way, is when [the] boy perseveres day and night. He stays at this tree where he has to cut it down because there is a coon trapped in the tree and the dogs won't go home until he gets the coon. So he just continually hacks away at the tree and his family brings him food. And he's all sore, blisters, muscles, everything.

Another occasion is when one dog gets attacked by a mountain lion. They both are defending the boy. And one of the dogs dies. Then the other dog, the female dog dies, just from heartache. And they both are buried together. (Shirley 1, S2, P125)

Sharon, like Shirley, focuses on the deaths of the two dogs in describing the book.

Visibly moved to tears when talking about the story during the interview, she says "it's the good-bye scene, the death scene [that] is always tough for me" (Sharon 1, S2. P136-154).

Sharon finds this book to be “one of the easiest books to read aloud . . . his writing was so smooth. The words were in my mind [and] brought such images” (Sharon 1, S2, P 136-154). She says this well-written story “can be read by anybody and read for pleasure” (Sharon 1, S4, P307): “. . . any adult could read *Where the Red Fern Grows* and think it was an adult book . . . because it dealt with adult themes. I can see why it’s really for younger people, [though], because it’s a story of how a young boy grew up a little bit; it’s not a story of how an adult got through some hard time in their life” (Sharon 1, S4, P 299).

Both Sharon and Shirley also value *Where the Red Fern Grows* for the message and model it presents; they like sharing it with their students for that reason. Sharon “liked telling the [students] letting them know that here was a boy who worked hard to get what he wanted. Nobody else got those dogs for him. So, you know, it was a nice little story, moral there” (Sharon 1, S2, P 154).

Shirley describes the book’s main character as “just an all-around good character . . . respectful to his family, responsible, hard-working, kind, loving to his family and to others, loving to the animals” (Shirley 1, S3, P292-293). The boy is someone they want their students to come to know:

. . . the boy is a good example of a good boy, a good person, who tries to respect his family. Although they couldn’t afford to buy the dogs, he went on his own and tried to work extra. Because they’re hillbillies . . . he had to work out in the country and do things to earn money and it took him two years. That’s a trait kids should be exposed to, you know, and I appreciated the boy’s struggle. And that that connected (Shirley 1, S2, P135).

Sharon and Shirley connect most strongly to the emotional content of the book. This experience of the book is one they also hope students will share. Shirley underscores the reason for this when she says:

And, um, it's good to cry, sometimes it's good to cry and maybe for the kids to experience a cry, that, you know, isn't really going to hurt them, but it shows them, you know, emotion. And it's okay maybe to be sad (Shirley 1, S2, P135).

A Sense of Awe, Lost Possibilities, Uncertain Futures

Mark says that *Wind in the Willows* is a book from his own childhood that “would definitely qualify” as a book that he continues to have strong connection to now. Grounded in his first experience of reading the book, the connections he describes encompass his present values and emotions, a book of philosophy, and a children's film. The book presents a “particular view of religion and God” that he encountered for the first time in reading the book as a child. This view has come to resonate with his own ideas and beliefs about religion:

And I am a believer that at the core of every religion is a mystical sense of identity of God and everything. And all the rest, basically the outer trappings are basically bullshit. But not that inner message. And *Wind in the Willows* gives a taste of that (Mark 1, S2, 172).

And also, a sense of awe. There's a writer in college that got to me, named Rudoph Otto; he wrote a book called *The Absolute and the Holy*. And he called it

the sense of the numinous, the sense of the numinous, which is the overpowering sense of the divine in which you can't speak about it. You can't, words fail. And that's what happened to Mole and Rat (Mark 1, S2, 172).

Mark talks about *Wind in the Willows* wonderful, beautifully-drawn characters and how the book evokes a sense of melancholy adventure for him. He chooses to elaborate on this sense of melancholy:

I don't know how to describe this feeling that I get sometimes from certain books, or certain things that can evoke in me the feeling that the future is kind of infinite, full of infinite possibilities of which you can get to choose one and all the rest have to go. And it's . . . those moments of choice [that] are very melancholy moments, in a way, because the way you choose might be a wonderful, wonderful way, but all the others, all the others . . . (Mark 1, S2, P164).

I can give you a visual image in my mind. In *Pinocchio*—I usually hate what Disney does to stories, but I don't hate what he did to *Pinocchio* . . . there's a scene in *Pinocchio* in which he's just fallen in with the rogues, and he's going off, they're taking him off. He's in the back of a gypsy-style caravan almost . . . he looks out the back and he can see this town and he's leaving it and who knows if he'll ever come back? He's leaving Geppeto; he's leaving it all. And the sky is . . . this gorgeous blue, um, this deep, deep blue that happens when the sun is setting . . . And, to me, that evokes that melancholy sense of amazing possibilities that lie

ahead, who knows? And yet, there's also something looking back, looking back to the comfort, and that's gone . . . (Mark 1, S2, P164).

What he finds in *Wind in the Willows* is a kind of "sentimental sadness about I don't know. Lost possibilities, or uncertain futures. Maybe loss . . . to have an adventure you have to leave that comfort behind" (Mark 1, S2, P168). And this he connects to the inevitable losses of childhood itself: "And to leave that childhood [with] all its sort of warm coziness, it's gotta go" (Mark 1, S2, P168).

She Had to be Known

Elaine loved the book *Pippi Longstocking* as a child and now feels a strong connection to stories with "girl heroines." Elaine "noticed, as an adult, being really excited that there are all these girls in these stories who are really strong and funny" (Elaine 1, S2, P204-210).

In spite of the fact that her adult fiction reading includes nearly all male protagonists, Kay's experience in reading children's books is similar to Elaine's. Personally, as an adult, she tends to like children's books that "have real strong female protagonists. So I think that's why I liked the whole Tillerman series because Dicey's a great character. Um, I like Mildred Taylor okay; I don't like her style as much as I like Cynthia Voigt but Cassie's a great character" (Kay 1, S2, P94).

Her connection to the young adult novel *House on Mango Street* comes through its main character Esperanza who "noticed everything. You know, that she could just sit back and look at things and you never knew what she was going to see, it was

unpredictable. And I really liked that a lot” (Kay 1, S2, P94). And, finally, she speaks of *Shabanu*: “It’s another one with a strong female protagonist. And the fact that, yes, she knew that she belonged to this culture but there was a part to her—she had to be known, she had to say her thing and do her thing. So I liked that.”

You Don’t Have to Be Brand New to Be Lovable

Kay encountered *The Little Prince* during her youth in French class. She loved the story for “the whole idea. . . [of] being special to somebody in all the world” (Kay 1, S2, P57). She had a similar connection to *The Velveteen Rabbit*, a book she thinks she read in high school: “you know, the little boy loved him so much . . . he loved his fur off” (Kay 1, S2, P57). As a teacher, she tries to keep copies of the books on her classroom library shelves, “but they disappear every year. So, I think, it’s like kids read it and then just keep it because they probably have the same connection that I did” (Kay 1, S2, P57).

The power of love to transform and make someone special is at the heart of Carol’s connection to *The Velveteen Rabbit* as well. She “absolutely loves” the book, in part, as she says, “because I never read it as a child.” Her interpretation of the book’s underlying message extends and refines Kay’s interpretation. When asked why she is enthusiastic about the book, she says:

. . . because that little stuffed rabbit . . . the older he got, the more worn and torn he became, the more he was loved by the little boy . . . and then the whole idea of him being tossed out by the nanny to live with the other rabbits and he becomes real and the boy somehow recognizes him. I just found it very, very touching . . .

the idea that . . . you don't have to be brand new to be lovable. You can fall apart at the seams a little bit . . . and still, look a little scraggly and still be lovable. All the more so, actually. That's why I love that (Carol 1, S2, P 154-1740).

She remembers reading it to students in her classes overseas and, with limited success, with her own children:

And I brought it home, and I made all my three children sit on the bed one afternoon and I read the whole book from cover to cover . . . And they were so . . . bored at the time. It's like: "Do we have to listen to this? Do we have to listen to the whole thing? Are you finished yet?" So my enthusiasm wasn't well-received at the time (Carol 1, S2, P154-174).

Everyone Starts Saying It With You

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day is a children's book that Elaine "liked as a kid [and] . . . pretty much knows by heart." She connects to the character Alexander who is struggling through a day where "everything just goes wrong." She loves the repetition of the text. "I like that everyone starts saying it with you when you're reading it to children, I think that's great" (Elaine 1, S2, P58). She also describes reading the book over and over to students who "just hated, hated hearing me read, hated books" but who loved that book (Elaine 1, S2, P54).

Every Year I Teach It I Go A Different Way

Anna was drawn into *Toning the Sweep* by the colors of the cover. “It’s kind of a nebulous picture of three different women. And they are bright yellow, blue and red in their colors. The color in the paperback is bright and beautiful. And of course that got me [started] . . . “(Anna 1, S3, P26-34).

Once she started reading she found a story that she liked “because it had a beginning, middle and end, and lots and lots of thought” (Anna 1, S3, P34). Her description of the story illustrates the complexity of the plot and indicates why she finds that it full of lots and lots of thought:

The story itself is . . . about a mother and her daughter visiting the grandmother who lives, I want to say Palm Springs, I’m not sure, but she lives far away. And there is some dissension between the mother and her own mother. And the young girl loves the grandmother and the grandmother is very eccentric and rides around in her convertible blasting Supremes’ music really loud. And they are a family of color . . .

But, on the surface, they talk about the mother and her mother, Diane and Ola, that’s the grandmother’s name, [who] moved away from the South when the grandfather was killed, when Diane’s father was killed. And then, later on in the book, it tells that some white people jumped him and killed him because they said he was an uppity Negro, or whatever. That comes out later in the book.

But it just talks about this great relationship between . . . the young girl and her grandmother. And just the different things that they do. And the reason they go

to visit the grandmother is that they go to take her back home because she has cancer.

Anna loves the book because of “the family part, the love between the family” (Anna 1, S3, P48). She is “big on family books” and finds that she’s “big on books about people, because eighth graders are so into themselves superficially. They think they understand the world but when they actually read about someone going through something, maybe if you have twenty kids, maybe not all twenty will get it, but at least five will” (Anna 1, S3, P34).

Tuning the Sweep offers “many different avenues” (Anna 1, S3, P34) for exploring the ideas that Anna values in the book:

So it’s many different levels. It’s the level of sickness; and the level of friendship; and the level of family love; and the level of, ah, ah, racism and civil rights and what happened in those days, which these kids nowadays have no clue of. And it upsets me to no end that they don’t know what maybe their grandparents struggled with. And, then, finally, the level of unraveling why Diane . . . was so angry with her mother and what finally came of it.

Anna finds the multi-layered novel so rich that “every year I teach it I go a different way” (Anna 1, S3, P34).

Something You Can Do

Dee looked to a list of her current and favored reading with students in talking about strong connections with children’s books. She mentioned short story collections—

Tales for the Midnight Hour, *The Scary Story Reader*; recently-published juvenile novels—*Holes*, *Making Up Mega Boy*; and others such as *Meanwhile Back at the Ranch*, *Cezanne Pinto*, *Odysseus*, *Two Tickets to Freedom* and Dickens' *Hard Times* (Dee 1, S2, P51-83). In her discussion of these titles, she highlights the qualities of the book most useful in teaching and learning:

I love *The Scary Story Reader* and use storytelling and anecdotes a lot
(Dee 1, S3, P43).

So I'm very comfortable with short selections, something you can do, you can have closure within a certain amount of class time, and you can open it up
(Dee 1, S3, P43).

Making up Mega Boy, I really liked that a lot, in terms of point of view, could use that (Dee 1, S3, P43).

Some others that we also use, it's a retelling of the legend of Odysseus, um, which is a wonderful books because it mixes genre, it has history interspersed in with photographs and it goes back to the retelling of, of the myth (Dee 1, S3, P43).

Dee places her discussion of these connections to the books in the context of her professional role as a reading specialist: "Everything that I've been reading, it fits into curriculum because, as a support person, I'm always trying to find things to bring to

folks, you know what I mean? . . . Again, I'm not teaching the book, I'm bringing the resources in, trying to use it to support curriculum"(Dee 1, S3, P43 & 48).

As a reading specialist, then, Dee does not work with large groups of children as they read a novel over a period of weeks. But if she did, she said, "If I could, if I were teaching, I would love to do *Hard Times* . . ." (Dee 1, S2, P51-83). And it is *Hard Times*, a novel for adults written in the nineteenth century by Charles Dickens, that, when asked if it would be the one she had the strongest connection to, she answered: "I think so. Sure, why not?" (Dee 1, S2, P51-83).

Dee values *Hard Times* for the ideas it puts forward: "the Industrial Revolution and the mechanical workings of a school, the school as factory" (Dee 1, S3, P59). Its "wonderfully modern description of what still goes on in some schools" makes it "a story that kids could really connect to in terms of modern day. I mean it's just a wonderful way to get to another time period . . . to go back in time. I'm interested in trying to parallel modern and past . . . if you can draw that parallel to kid's immediate lives, I think you could do some wonderful stuff with school" (Dee 1, S3, P59-63).

Dee finds that "the whole notion . . . that facts are the important thing . . . that it's not the bigger picture of what you do with your life as long as you've mastered each of the little bits" is a good metaphor. She thinks it is one that "would give kids a good opportunity to look beyond their own learning and to think about their learning" (Dee 1, S3, P71).

Dee's connection to *Hard Times*, like the connections she mentions to several other titles, are important to her for the opportunities they present for teaching and learning. The connections she mentions to those other works, however, center on

surface or formal elements of the work. The opportunities she finds in *Hard Times* spring from the content of the book, the ideas it puts forward. Like short stories, for Dee, these ideas about the nature of teaching and learning across time stimulate her thinking so that she can imagine creating “something to do” and “a way to open it up” with her students.

Summary: Critical Incidents

These vivid portraits of powerful engagement with children’s books spring from affinity, affirmation and resonance. The teachers move from a force that focuses their attention and shapes their experience of the children’s book. As they do, their links with the book itself, with other books, their lives, their imaginations, the world, children and other people around them converge and transform into individual experiences. These distinct experiences bring each teacher satisfaction, stimulation and a common bond of experience with the others.

Think Alouds

The teachers in this study bring curiosity and an urge to build meaning to their first readings of *Stray* and *A Good Deal*. Implied questions, direct questions and a general spirit of inquiry propel the internal dialogue made visible in the process of thinking aloud as they read the stories aloud. When faced with questions or confusion, the teachers turn back to the story itself, to literary experience, to personal experience and to knowledge of the outside world to build meaning from the stories and give their readings momentum.

These meanings acquire individual distinction as the teachers' make personal associations with what they are reading. These associations sometimes raise questions and sometimes are used to create answers to questions. More often, though, they enrich the meanings the teachers make of the stories, giving them resonance with the experience, knowledge and values the teachers bring to the reading.

Along the way, they also find places that hold and focus their attention. These places of transcendence and dissonance spring from the interplay between the questions and answers that move their dialogues along and from the associations that amplify the personal meaning they were creating. Reflecting on these places catalyzes deeper understanding of the story, the reader and the story's meaning.

Building Meaning: Posing and Answering Questions

Language of speculation, conjecture, exploration and inquiry mark the statements the teachers voice as they read and think aloud the short stories. From their initial reading of the titles of the story through to their follow-up comments at the end, they raise questions and project answers directly and indirectly. This dialogue with themselves inevitably leads them back to the stories, themselves or the world to add more information and find more compelling questions and answers.

I'm wondering . . .

The teachers' think aloud statements made during the opening lines of the two short stories (Table 4.2) illustrate how questioning is embedded in their language.

Sounds like, possibly, I don't know why, I'm wondering, maybe, I'm not sure—phrases like these pepper the think alouds. All express a mode of wondering or questioning which characterizes the interplay of the voiced inner dialogues.

Direct questions are also an integral part of these initial responses to the stories. Articia, Mary, Dee and Kay all ask direct questions of themselves as they try to make sense of what they are reading. Like Dee and Mary, all the teachers ask questions that spur answers from their knowledge of themselves and the world throughout the think alouds. Like Articia and Kay, as their inner dialogues unfold they find questions leading them back to the story—*We'll see, Let's get into the story*—where some of the answers may lie.

Table 4.2
Responses to Opening Lines of the Short Stories

	Implied Questions
Stray	<p>Hm. Looking at the dog, a stray dog, possibly. (Carol S, P7)</p> <p>So, it sounds like this is gonna be about the puppy. I like dogs almost invariably. (Mark S, P9)</p> <p>I don't know why, but I think the South or something . . . (Elaine S, P8)</p> <p><i>Stray</i>, first I thought it was a cat but I guess it's a dog or it's something else looking at the illustration. (Shirley S, P8)</p>
A Good Deal	<p>I wonder what that title is all about. (Carol GD, P7)</p> <p>Oh, court. Right away I get nervous. Court isn't a favorite place . . . I'm wondering, what do I see? The guy on the left could be creepy, could be a criminal. (Shirley GD, P12)</p> <p>I don't know if he's in trouble with this guy or not. (Sharon GD, P9)</p> <p>So a good deal? Hmm? Something is going to be sold or a deal is gonna be struck. Something's exchanged. (Dee GD, P11)</p> <p>I think that, um, . . . these kids are in for something together. They may be Hispanic kids but I'm not sure. (Betty D, P15)</p>
	Direct Questions
Stray	<p>What do you think of when you think of '<i>Stray</i>'? . . I think of someone who is lost—someone who doesn't have a home and it could be an animal or a person. So let's get into the story. (Articia S, P6)</p> <p>Amos, Mamie, Doris. OK. Could be black. Could be white. Does it matter? Probably not. (Dee S, P10)</p> <p>But what was the puppy doing out by itself? It's just a puppy. (Mary S, P15)</p>
A Good Deal	<p>OK. Immediately I wondered. All right, who's Manny? Is he somebody on trial? Is he just there as a spectator? . . you know, what's his role? It sounds to me—if he's sitting next to a career felon type—maybe he's in trouble. But we'll see. (Kay GD, P9)</p> <p>OK. So I'm thinking here, what have these guys done that they're in court? (Anna GD, P14)</p>

I started to really understand . . .

The interplay between questions and proposed answers is at the heart of the inner dialogue revealed in these think alouds. The questions may be simply related to the facts of the story, e.g. Sheila's wondering whether the story was about a dog or a cat. They may be key in establishing what happens next in the plot: Is Manny on trial? Is he a

spectator? What is his role? They may also be weightier and more ambiguous, leaving room for implication and interpretation: Are the characters in *Stray* black or white? What will be exchanged as part of a good deal? Whatever their nature, the questions, in conjunction with speculation on their answers, move the dialogue along.

Turning back to the story after raising questions implicitly or explicitly is a moving force in the teachers' dialogues. The movement through this process is key in building meaning from the reading. Anna's contemplation of Manny's behavior in *A Good Deal* shows how she builds meaning by raising a question, then delving back into the story. Her continued speculation about Manny changes as she reads the next line of the story (Anna GD, P87-92):

Anna thinks aloud:

OK. Again, I wonder about Manny. He won't talk. He won't speak and he's having a hard time understanding. Oh, wait a second . . .

Anna reads:

"I don't know," he says determined to play it safe. "You're the lawyer."

Anna thinks aloud:

Maybe he's trying to be cool.

Anna's dialogue with herself about Manny's motivations shows meaning being built incrementally. The following excerpts from Mary's and Dee's think alouds demonstrate the cumulative effect of the process. After reading *Stray*, Mary talks about her growing understanding of the family's economic situation. After reading *A Good Deal*, Dee draws a picture of how Manny's character emerges for her throughout the story:

Well, I think I began to have an image of the house as I read. Because I started to—particularly near the end when it gets to the powdered milk—I started to really understand that this is a really poor family (Mary 1, S5, P273).

Um . . . well, when you first start off,. . .Manny is pretty superficial. And then you dig down and Manny comes off a little bit deeper, a little bit more complex. And his buddy comes in on that level and then he [Manny] goes back down. I mean he's coming back up and down. And even in the end it's not quite resolved. It's not a closed chapter, I guess (Dee 2, S2, P52).

That is How I Would Feel, or Is It a Language Problem?

Several of the teachers, like Anna in the example of building meaning incrementally, wondered about Manny's silence and treatment in the courtroom. Where Anna went back to the story and used what was written to inform her question, others go to their own personal experiences or to their knowledge of the world at large to try to make sense of the confusion they experience. They draw on these sources to build meaning of the text as they read, or in collecting their thoughts after they have completed reading the story (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3
Responses to Manny's Silence

Text
<p>“You’re going to Courtroom B, right next door,” the judge orders. “Don’t move until I call recess.”</p> <p>Manny stands there, waiting. He’s got no idea what the judge is talking about; he can’t make sense of the words.</p>
<p>Drawing on Personal Experience</p>
<p>I’m imagining that is how I would feel. But I’m not sure if he feels that way because he’s . . . It’s all too much, you know, when you’re in a situation like that and . . . it kind of gets all jumbled and sounds like people aren’t speaking clearly . . . (Elaine GD, P54).</p> <p>I just had a flash that went through there about . . . he’s got no idea what the judge is talking about. And it’s not actually related to this at all, except for that. . . it is, kind of. When my mother was real sick with cancer . . . there were days when everyday tasks just made no sense to me. Like trying to remember my phone number. There was one day somebody asked me my phone number, I had no idea what it was . . . And it makes me think of this. It’s like whatever stress he’s under . . . all of a sudden it comes to head here, because it ‘s pretty simple if the judge is giving him simple directions—“Go over here”—and his brain breaks down on him. So I’ve been there before (Kay GD, P40).</p>
<p>Drawing on Knowledge of Outside World</p>
<p>Hm, maybe he’s bilingual, or . . .? . . . I don’t know if she’s an interpreter. It almost sounds like he might be deaf, the way she’s using hand signals. Or just someone that means meet me outside. (Anna GD, P44, P49)</p> <p>Does he not speak English? I’m, I’m not sure what the sentence means . . . I assume he means that he doesn’t understand it—the language itself, but I’m not sure . . . I didn’t understand—on that second page when it said that he didn’t understand—whether it was a language understanding or a conceptual understanding. It kind of bothered me. Is this story going with the fact that he’s being defended—a Spanish-speaking kid is being defended by an English speaking person. (Betty GD, P28; Betty 2, S2, P76).</p> <p>Now again, I’ve gotta stop because he has no idea what he’s talking about and he can’t make sense. Is that because he’s really excited? Is it a language problem? . . . Now he’s not deaf, is he? Hm. (Dee GD, P55, P60).</p> <p>The fact that he’s Hispanic and I wonder how much of a difference that makes in the court system. You know all of the things that have been coming out lately about . . .how the percentage of black men that are accused of drug-related crimes or are in jail is disproportionate to the percentage of blacks in the community. . .there was a side to my head that was going through . . . if this was a white kid, would things have been different? Would the second public defender been saying, “Come on, take it, it’s a good deal,” if it was Joe Smith, the white boy who lives next door? Probably not. (Kay 2, S3, P45)</p>

That's the Way They Did It . . .

Some of the teachers speculate on or observe the hand of the writer in response to their own queries. For example, Anna has difficulty figuring out just what happens to the *Stray* dog in Rylant's story (1985). She makes sense of her confusion by interpreting the intent of the author:

Halfway through it I was really upset that maybe I missed the point that the father had taken the puppy and put it in the car. And I was a little embarrassed being 49 years old and missing a point there. Oh, you know what I mean? But that's the way they did it. The story was written purposely nebulous like that so the kids would be thinking as I do (Anna 1, S5, P101).

Mark's dialogue includes his interpretation of the author's intent as a counterpoint to his own ideas about Manny's innocence in *A Good Deal*. He also details his frustration with the author for not revealing the motivation of Cecilia, the public defender:

She said, "Well, why were you there?" "To deal with the bookie." Well, that, to me, means he knew what was going on. And he was there to be an enforcer. Or, at least, look like he was. I don't totally agree with the author. The author is trying to say that this guy is innocent or railroaded or something, and I don't quite buy that . . . I am empathetic with his confusion and . . . then at the end, I did like the last paragraph: Trying to figure out the difference (Mark 2, S1, P15).

Well, I cared about Manny. I wanted things to go okay for him I was frustrated by the author not telling us why Cecilia did what she did. But that's

Manny's dilemma. That's Manny's situation. In retrospect, that's a good job.

She lets us see Manny . . . you know, he sort of thinks he knows what's going on but he's basically bewildered (Mark 2, S2, P62).

Since This is a Story . . .

A sense of the literary form of story also helps the teachers build meaning from the stories. After reading a long passage from *A Good Deal*, Dee stops and calls on her knowledge of the literary form: "Now this is the problem with stories. We're bogging down in the middle, aren't we? OK" (Dee GD, P100). In approximately the same place, Mark looks to the form of story to help him figure out how events will unfold: "So, looks like...since this a story, things don't go like they're supposed to go. Looks like this might not go well" (Mark GD, P112). Both of them look to their literary experience to help answer their implied question about what will happen next in the story.

Other teachers refer to the form of the story itself to place the reading in perspective. Articia's comment "So now there's another break in the story" (Articia GD, P120) does just this as she reads *A Good Deal*. Kay's knowledge of story form and her faith in it give her the impetus to move past confusion—"So I guess I'm a little confused here, and I'm sure it will work its way out . . ." (Kay GD, P50) and to imagine possible endings so that she can keep reading:

Now this is where I stop and I go, this is ...this is gonna go either of two ways.

It's either gonna be one of those stories that I'm gonna be happy at the end

because Doris is gonna get to keep this great dog, or they're gonna be too poor to be able to afford to feed this large German Shepardy type dog, and they're gonna

send it away, and it's gonna be a very sad ending and I'm not gonna like it (Kay S, P79).

Amplifying Meaning: Making Associations

While the inner dialogue of the think alouds is moved along through the interplay of self-generated questions and speculation on answers, the dialogues' meanings are amplified or enhanced through the associations the teachers make as they read and think aloud. These associations, mostly personal, are made throughout the think alouds. They range from simple to more extensive references to lived experiences, preferences, other reading, values and emotions.

Teachers make some of these personal references in passing; the teachers acknowledge or enjoy them but there is no evidence that they contribute to their meaning of the stories as a whole. Some references are considered more carefully. These sometimes become emblematic of emerging meaning embedded in the text and sometimes contribute to the cumulative meaning the teachers derive from the stories. Still others are lynch pins where their attention becomes focused; the teachers reflect on these references and find deeper insight that shapes the meaning they make of the story.

Now That Tells Me . . .

The opening sequence of *Stray* includes an image of the main character's father that is drawn in one spare sentence: *Mr. Lacey was at the table, cleaning his fingers with his pocketknife.* The teachers' thoughts after reading this sentence are a good example of the range of personal associations that occur throughout the think alouds. Some make

references in passing; others find questions in the image; and one finds great meaning in the description of the scene:

That's gross. (Anna S, P43)

Yuck. (Carol S, P60)

Hmm, interesting detail. (Dee S, P49)

Very classist comment here, but I was going to say, "Oop." Maybe not high class again because you usually don't sit around cleaning your fingernails with a pocket knife. (Kay S, P42)

Hm. Well that's . . . sounds unusual, too. It strikes me as unusual to clean one's fingernails at the kitchen table. (Mark S, P42)

Gross. (Mary S, P47)

I cannot stand when people clean their nails in front of me. (Sharon S, P28)

Now that tells me that he's kind of an outdoorsy type. Probably more of a blue-collar worker type. Out there working real hard with his hands and kind of a rugged individual, a woodsman. (Shirley S, P66)

Anna, Carol, Mary and Sharon simply express their feelings about the image of Mr. Lacey and move on. For Dee and Mark, the image piques some interest, implying questions about what this detail means. And Shirley has a ready and fairly extensive interpretation of what the image says about Mr. Lacey.

These teachers' thoughts mirror the ways personal references are woven into the think alouds. The thoughts they express here incorporate a range of kinds of association

as well. Anna, Carol, and Mary simply express their feelings. Sharon does that and refers to personal experience, too.

Mark's indicates a reference to an unarticulated idea of acceptable social mores. Shirley's draws on ideas about blue collar workers, the value she places on working really hard with your hands, and some kind of experience. And, after finishing the story, Dee relates her interest in the detail to the structure of the story: "It was setting up character, a little detail there, cleaning your fingernails with a pocketknife. You're thinking already they're setting up a little tension. You know, with Dad; they were setting us up for Dad being kind of hard-nosed" (Dee 1, S6, P234). In doing so, she also reveals the feelings that come from the image for her. These expressions of emotion, references to ideas and images from personal knowledge, and declarations of personal preference vary in effect on the emerging meaning of the story as well as in type of reference. Shirley's, the most fully explicated, combines several points of reference whereas the others express the feeling of the moment only or refer to one idea from personal knowledge.

That Has Happened to Me, It Reminds Me, I Remember . . .

The more direct references to personal lived experience vary in effect on emerging meaning as do the references to Mr. Lacey's cleaning his fingernails. Like the expressions of emotion in that group of responses, some associations with direct lived experience are made fairly casually. The teachers make these references matter-of-factly without relating them to the meanings they make of the stories. The following statements from reading and thinking aloud *Stray* are good examples:

I had a German Shepard for years. He was gorgeous and he ran away. That's why I don't like dogs anymore (Anna S, P77).

Now I remember when I was younger and we were moving into a house and there was a cat. And I asked my mum, "Mum, can we have this cat." And I really didn't think she'd say yes, but she did . . . (Articia S, P34).

I have personal thing about that. That sounds like my father. "Better feed that mutt" (Betty S, S1.9, P89).

It reminds me of a time when I was a child, crying for something that my mother or father refused to give me (Carol S, P194).

That was a word that my father would use a lot. And I like it as a dog word (Mark S, S1.1, P32).

Other references to personal experience are more integral in exploring aspects of the story more closely. Here, Sharon uses her experience with taking care of some stray cats to help her understand Doris's mother and father and to give weight to what Doris is feeling:

What I've been thinking is that Doris really wants this dog. Maybe mother and father are not saying anything, maybe because they don't want to say to each other [that] . . . it might be ok. It reminds me a lot of ...Of when we were...when my husband was trying to convince me to take in one of the stray cats. But I said

absolutely not because of our own cat. And I did not know, you know about shots and things like th....And I did not want to upset my own cat. And we were very very worried about the cats being out in the cold. Even then our neighbor...our neighbor and [my husband] had made some little cat houses, so that the cats would have a place to go. And my mother donated wool blankets and I donated a down jacket. So we did give one cat away, luckily, about a month ago. And I hope that same woman will come back for another cat. So I know what Doris is feeling. And I just sense a feeling of doom. And Doris's sadness is sooo heavy.

(Sharon S, P106)

In reading and thinking aloud *A Good Deal*, Articia refers to the roles and responsibilities of public defenders. Her knowledge stems from recent experiences in court that are not overtly acknowledged as she thinks aloud. It is during follow-up conversation that she describes the experiences. The description of her court experience puts her references to public defenders while thinking aloud in perspective. She then relates those experiences to her reading of the story, using them to affirm what has happened in the fictional court room:

Articia thinks aloud . . .

Now public defender means that it's a court appointed lawyer and not one that you have to pay for. It's actually by the courts, the state sets up lawyers that can defend um, certain people who don't have enough money for a paid lawyer.

(Articia GD, P73)

So you have to understand now, when you're a public defender you might defend a person one week and then the next week there's somebody else defending them. So keep that in mind. I mean it could even go for a paid lawyer (Articia GD, P169).

In follow-up remarks, she says:

Well, I know I have to go to court for someone, who has a public defender . . . And the person is working very hard to make sure that my loved one is fairly treated. Some of them don't, they actually don't and that's just the way of the world. You know, some public defenders are going to do what they need to do to get the shortest plea or a plea bargain and that's it, they're not really out for the best interests, best interests of the person they're defending (Articia 2, S1, P21).

She uses her experience to examine the events of the story:

I was really surprised at how Cecilia was saying if you're innocent then we're going to go back in there. She didn't take the attitude like Paul did and say, "Even though you're innocent you were caught with them so just take your three months and it's all over." Like that's good. He doesn't want that. I mean Manly [sic] finally realizes that's not what he wants.

You know, I'm sure he wished that Cecilia was there. And it's also to show that there wasn't communication between Paul and Cecilia because, if there were, then Paul would have had clear . . . and a lot of time it happens: you go into court and

the lawyer doesn't even know at what place to be at times. . . . you rely on the lawyer to have everything all set, to have his files on point and then you get in and he has to openly tell [you] . . . "I am not prepared." And that happens, more often than not, "I am not prepared" or "I have to get my things together and I'll be with you." And . . . the judge acts just like the judge here: "I don't have a lot of time so if you're not ready we're going to set another time." And that time can be months away. Yeah, so it does happen, mm-hmm (Articia 2, S1, P25).

Delving More Deeply Into Meaning: Focusing Attention

Posing and answering questions and making associations bring teachers back to the text, to new questions and to clearer understanding of what they are reading. Most of the time, these build meaning dialogically. Occasionally, teachers find a place in the transaction between themselves and the text that bothers them, moves them or engages them more deeply. These places arrest their attention, provoking intense, more focused dialogue. This dialogue, in conjunction with an opportunity to reflect on their thinking, moves them to fresher, fuller or keener understanding of the story's meaning. Kay, Carol and Elaine experience such moments.

It Was About All of Life

Kay's first thought as she begins reading *Stray* foreshadows her subsequent experience with it: "Before I even start, I'm looking at this picture of this stray dog, thinking this better not be one of those stories that's gonna make me cry." As her reading unfolds, *Stray* turns out to be exactly "one of those stories" for her.

Near the middle of the story, as Doris hears her father's car travel down the road taking the dog away, Kay is overcome with emotion and breaks off the think aloud to cry. She pulls her attention back to the short story by telling a story about reading aloud to one of her classes:

This is terrible. See this is what happens to me . . . I have to read things ahead of time because I really do cry when I get to stuff like this . . . This happened to me, actually I was reading a James Herriot story to a class one time and I got to a point and said, "Somebody has to finish this for me because I can't read

anymore.” And they were, “It’s OK, Ms. R. It’s OK. We’ll read it for you.” And a kid did finish it (Kay S, P126).

She continues to read, think aloud and tear up. In spite of her emotion and the difficulty of reading, she does read and think aloud through to the story’s conclusion. At one point, she proclaims the story a terrible story and, after finishing the reading, says it’s a good story (Kay S, P133-136):

Kay reads:

It was nearly night when she finally woke up. Lying there, like stone, still exhausted, she wondered if she would ever in her life have anything. She stared at the wall for awhile.

Kay thinks aloud:

So now it’s even sadder because now she doesn’t have the dog and she’s worried about her whole life. This is a terrible story.

At the end, she’s again overcome with emotion but says:

Oh, it was a good story. But I still would never be able to read it to a class.

Because even though I know what the ending is, I get to that part [overcome with emotion] . . . I’m sorry (Kay S, P179).

In the interview that followed, Kay explores her experience of reading the story more thoroughly. She first responds to questions about what makes her say this was a good and a terrible story:

Well, the terrible part is the whole, that's interesting, because what I was going to say was: "It made me cry and made me feel so terrible. That's why it's terrible."

That's my five year old response to it. "It made me cry and I didn't like it."

And then, why it was good, because all of the horrible things that made me cry went away at the end. And I wanted her to have the dog from the first time the dog walked down the street. And she ended up with the dog at the end. So I got what I wanted. And books like that are very satisfying. Or stories like that are very satisfying (Kay 1, S5, P170).

The depth of sadness the story evokes makes Kay call it terrible. The fact that all the painful emotion went away at the end made it good story, i.e. a story that is satisfying because she, as the reader, gets what she wants.

When asked if there were any other things that came up for her while reading that did not surface in the think aloud, she reveals that she thought about her own dog Murphy the whole time and the big fat cat that lives downstairs with her step daughter. She also talks about one line in the story "that really made her want to stop and sob" (Kay S, P 182-194):

You know, there were probably a 100 things that went through my head. That one line about. I have to go back here [paging through story]. That really made me want to stop and sob. I couldn't stop because I didn't really want to think about it that much, but the one about where she closed the door and . . .

Susan reads from story: It was nearly night when she finally woke up, lying there like stone. Still exhausted, she wondered if she would ever in her life have anything.

Kay: Oh, that line . . . it's like everybody has a time in their life where they wonder if they're going in the right direction. And things just seem really horrible. And, how can they ever get any worse than they are right now? And that's, any time I've ever felt that way, hit me at that point in time, and I didn't want to think about any of them. So I wasn't going to stop for that, no matter what you said to do. Cause I didn't want to have to process that, I wanted to go on and say "This better get better." . . . I do remember feeling, I know how you feel, I've been there. There are times when you just feel like it's never going to be good . . . And I thought it was the most powerful line in the whole story, actually (Kay 1, S5, P190).

Kay further distills her experience of this one line and of the story in the next research session when she is asked what made her say that "Still exhausted, she wondered if she would ever in her life have anything" was the most powerful line in *Stray*. She answers:

Because, it seemed, how do I explain it? I guess it was a feeling when I read it. It hit me in the gut, more than anything else there, everything else there. And I connected to a lot of parts of the story, because it did connect with parts: with the kittens in my childhood, and the cat that sits at the top of the stairs, and the dog

that I have now and all that stuff. But that one line was more universal. That to me wasn't really just about this dog, it was about all of life. And wondering if you're going to have a good life or you're not going to have a good life. And it can be as little as "Will mom let me keep the dog?" or as big as, you know, "Where am I going to live? Who am I going to end up with?" and all that stuff. And it just felt like you could pull that line out of there and put it in other stories and it would still be the most important line in the story (Kay 2, S1, P14).

Kay's hit in the gut signifies an important part of the story as she reads it. While reading, her emotional response, particularly to the one line of the story, is so overpowering she chooses not to let it surface in the think aloud. Upon prodding and her own reflection, she explores the significance the line and the story have for her. The story is not just about this dog; it contains greater meaning for Kay, meaning that is captured in "the most powerful line of the story" and is universal. The great emotion she experiences while reading focuses Kay's attention; through this overpowering non-verbal affinity she determines what is important in the story. This creates a meaning that overrides and resonates with all her other points of connection to the story.

Why Manny Riveira?

When Carol begins reading and thinking aloud *A Good Deal*, she raises many questions—I wonder what the title is all about, I wonder what time period this is, I wonder what age group this book is for. She comments on the "stream of consciousness

kind of writing” (Carol GD, P7) and calls the language “kind of cool, maybe slang language” (Carol GD, P27).

Most of Carol’s think aloud statements relate to figuring out the events of the story. Two comments stand out: 1) When the judge in the story calls out the main character Manny’s full name—*Manuel Riveira!*—she says: “That’s very telling, about the ethnic background there” (Carol GD, P38); and 2) Midway through the story, she declares “I’m not making the connection. No, I’m not making one” (Carol GD, P135). Reassured that the focus of the think aloud is on her experience whatever that may be, she reads through to the end, moving her reading along with questions directly related to the plot and themes of the story. At the end, she says, “That was great.”

Immediately after reading, Carol talks about her experience of reading the short story which presents challenges for her. The disjuncture she experiences motivates dialogue with herself about the story. She finds the characters flat and puzzles over why the main character is given a Latino name.

I couldn’t feel the personalities of these characters. . . they were [just] names . . .
 Manny Riveira, let’s say he’s Latino or he’s Chicano, it wasn’t like the way he
 might be speaking comes out . . . Let’s see now, would he be over 18 or a minor?
 I’m not sure. I’m trying to figure out what his age would be. I mean, I know he’s
 young. But just maybe, um, some cultural stuff [is not] coming out here . . .
 I mean, in what he’s saying . . . I don’t connect with it (Carol 2, S3, P170, P198-
 199).

. . . here's the other thing, I don't know Jason's last name. I don't know Albert's last name. So why do they give us Manny's? Why does he say Manny Riveira? He could have just said Manny. Why Manny Riveira? What's the . . . [point] of saying Manny Riveira? Because I don't see what difference it makes when he says Manny Riveira. He might as well have just said Manny (Carol 2, S3, P230).

She reflects on the language of the story and its implications for the time period it takes place.

. . .that's what it sounds like to me, something that might have been written, let's see, yeah, the sixties . . .that's what's coming across but when I try to think of, oh, things like "tough break." Some of the language and expressions, it seems like it dates the writing . . . I guess it's the whole idea of the jeans pockets. You know, this story reminds me very much of Thank You, Ma'am, that kind of style of writing . . . the fact when I read about the jeans . . . there was some reference to that (Carol 2, S3, P154, P246).

In spite of the fact that "this [story] was kind of flat to me" and problems with its style, she says:

I do like the stream of consciousness. I do like that style. I do think it's very effective when you write in the present tense . . . I liked, you know, the title *A Good Deal* and did he get a good deal? And, who was guilty and who was innocent? . . . I think the author got the message across here (Carol 2, S3, P186 P246).

Carol's direct questions about *A Good Deal* focus her attention as she reflects on the story in following conversation. She does not find Manny's "very telling" ethnic background reflected in the events or themes of the story and, because of this dissonance, questions the author's intentions. The time period for the story also mystifies her, drawing her to ponder the author's choice of language. These disjunctures catalyze further dialogue about the story. While the dialogue does not lead her to embrace the story wholeheartedly, it makes her sense of appreciation for it more incisive: She values the story for its style, for the intriguing questions that express its theme and for the fact that "the author got the message across here."

Not Like a Mom

In reading and thinking aloud *Stray*, Doris' feelings resonate strongly with Elaine. Over and over, Elaine's think aloud statements exhibit deep empathy and sympathy for Doris: "That's really rough. . . When you're a kid, if you could just secretly beg or change the situation . . . She doesn't have much and the dog seemed to bring her a comfort and happiness" (Elaine S, P137).

Throughout the think aloud, Elaine also bounces the portrayal of the Lacey family off an unarticulated conception of a typical family. As she does so, her idea of what is typical, particularly for a mother, emerges explicitly and her understanding of the Laceys alters and grows. The juxtaposition of the story's portrayal and what is in Elaine's mind creates a series of dissonant moments that build and finally are resolved in her reflection on the story in the interview that follows.

The story first bumps up against Elaine's conception of how a child introduces a stray dog to her parents and lobbies for its keep. Doris' behavior raises questions about her age and about the way she handles the dog and herself:

You know she's pretty confid[ent]...I mean who'd . . . picture someone bringing in a stray dog and plopping it down in the kitchen with the mother there. And that isn't usually the way most kids would go about it (Elaine S, P36).

She might be pretty smart, pretty perceptive. Well, I don't know how old she is, just that she would know how to...estimate how old the dog was . . . Maybe she was looking at his paws to see if he was gonna be big (Elaine S, P65).

Now that takes remarkable self control and I really want to know how old she is. Because I would think within a few minutes you already have a name. You already picture your life with the dog. And you know, you're really working hard on convincing...on changing the situation, not really accepting it (Elaine S, P86).

She didn't say she loved him (Elaine S, P107).

Elaine goes back and forth about whether the parents are typical or not. When Doris brings the puppy into the kitchen, Mr. Lacey says, "I don't know where it came from . . . but I know for sure where it's going." Elaine calls this response a "typical parent response" and reveals that her sounding board for what is typical is, in part, based

on personal experience: “So . . . It just seems like a typical parent response, in the beginning, when you see a puppy. And that’s how we got all our animals. None of them were staying, not one” (Elaine S, P43).

After Doris tries several approaches to convincing her parents to keep the dog, Mr. and Mrs. Lacey say nothing, barely acknowledging her. Here, Elaine places their behavior in context with her perceptions of Doris as atypical: “So, they don’t seem like the typical parents, either. Or. . . they’re just not doing anything. They’re ignoring her . . . not a very passionate family” (Elaine S, P118).

Elaine’s thoughts about the father and the mother change after Mr. Lacey tells Doris he could not leave the dog at the pound. With the image of Mr. and Mrs. Lacey smiling over coffee at the kitchen table, she says:

So, now I went from thinking they [were] just really cold and horrible and ignoring her just sitting there not doing anything. Now he’s soft [laugh]. He cared what the place looked like, you know? (Elaine S, P191).

So, now she seems more like a mom. She didn't really seem like a mom in the story. You know she didn't...She wasn't like hugging her saying, "It's OK. This is just how things are. They'll get better." No comfort or anything. She didn't call her for dinner. And um...but now she said...she was smiling, and she's happy (Elaine S, P203).

After the think-aloud concludes, Elaine responds to a question about what “not acting like a mom” means to her. Her elaboration on this continues the implicit dialogue between the story’s portrayal of Mrs. Lacey and Elaine’s conception of what a mom is and does:

The typical stereotype of a mom is always that when the kids are crying or upset, [they offer comfort] . . . she didn’t feel comfortable crying or getting upset so she wasn’t free to do that. So I wondered . . . she seemed cold like sitting there. And she didn’t put her arms around her and say “You can’t keep the dog, that’s just how things are.” It was just deal with it and be grown up and that’s that . . . And [she] didn’t yell to get it [the dog] out of the kitchen either. She [Doris] brought in a dirty dog from the street. It could have had anything and she put it in the kitchen. She didn’t ever react passionately about the daughter, or the dog. In the end, she seems sort of quietly proud of the husband. But, you know just not like a mom, your typical mom. And she didn’t call her for dinner. And she said she had to get herself out of bed for dinner. And when she got downstairs she had already eaten, doesn’t seem very mom-like, to me (Elaine 1, S5, P420).

When asked what other connections she was making that may not have surfaced in the think aloud, Elaine talks about her own experience wanting a dog and not being allowed to have one because of her allergies. Then, in response to the general query “Anything else that came up?”, she talks again about the mom in the story. Her thinking here reveals a continued inner dialogue that is trying to resolve the dissonance between the story and her conceptions:

It just made me think of like a, in a way, I know I said the mom wasn't like a mom. But in a way, it was kind of a traditional family. . . poor, quiet. Just the way the father is sitting there without work; he's cleaning his fingernails; they eat together; they don't [talk] (Elaine 1, S5, P440).

This leads to thinking more about the time and place of the story

I couldn't picture what time period it really was. I was thinking it was an old New England family. I mean with the names it doesn't sound particularly modern. It doesn't sound, I mean there's cars so . . . I really couldn't pinpoint. There were times when it seemed really old-fashioned but then all these other things came in. So I wonder if they're really like in Maine, somewhere, a little separated (Elaine 1, S5, P440).

When asked what part of all the things she thought while reading and reflecting on *Stray* she thought might be the most important, Elaine achieves an integration of the feelings which spoke to her strongly and the moments of dissonance that kept her thinking:

I think it was the girl when they said no and she had to be grown-up. And it made me [think]. That's a really hard thing to say to a kid. And knowing that your family is poor. And that you have to take it on the chin, pull yourself up by your bootstraps and all that stuff. But I think when she was in her room, that was like a soft spot. Because I remember that feeling when she had to heavily lift herself out

of her room, that feels like when you lost. There's nothing you can do and you have to go down and do it anyway (Elaine 1, S5, P472).

Summary: Think Alouds

Building meaning during reading and thinking aloud springs from posing and answering questions. Posing and answering implied and direct questions moves the dialogue of the teachers' think alouds. These questions lead them to personal experience, knowledge of the world, literary experience, and, inevitably, back to the story to build meaning of what they are reading. Meaning is built cumulatively as the teachers ask and answer their own questions.

Making associations amplifies and personalizes the meaning the teachers make of the stories. They draw on associations to the world, themselves and literature to add value to some aspect of the story; to frame their overall understanding of the story; or to provide a sounding board for their conceptions of what is happening.

Some of the questions and associations made by the teachers were casual references made in passing and let go. Some contributed to a larger idea of the significance of the story. Some invited deeper consideration of the story and the teacher's response to it.

Delving more deeply to broader, more refined interpretations of the stories hinges on the teachers coming to a place in the stories where they are overwhelmed, pushed, or bothered so much that they had to stop and pay attention. Not all teachers experienced such a moment as they read and thought aloud these short stories, but those who did then

brought attention to the matter through some kind of action: One cries. Another declares a disconnection. Another returns again and again to her thoughts about what is typical.

Follow-up questions prod these teachers to bring even more attention to their responses: Why such strong feelings? Why was a character given a specific ethnicity? Why did the mother act the way she did? Thinking these things through generates more dialogue with themselves that, in turn, leads to a refined and broader idea of the meaning of the story.

Dynamics of Engagement

The portraits of the critical incidents and description of the think aloud process draw directly from teachers' words to describe their experiences reading stories written for children. These experiences with children's literature are enjoyable, full of personal significance, rich in association, dialogic and relational in process. While commonalities among the experiences can be discerned, the spirit and vitality of the experiences highlight the infinitely varied nature of aesthetic experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990).

Placing the portraits and think aloud descriptions within Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) conception of aesthetic experience and Appleyard's (1991) purposes of adult reading abstracts and consolidates emerging patterns. With these patterns in mind, variations also emerge more distinctly.

These patterns and variations center on key elements of the dynamics of engagement in aesthetic experiences. Analysis of key elements—specifically, the dimensions of aesthetic experience, points of engagement within the dimensions, focusing and meeting challenges within a work, and goals of the process—offers a way to look at these teachers' experiences that raises questions and provokes insights useful in thinking about teachers' experiences with children's literature at the college level.

Dimensions and Points of Engagement

The paths the teachers follow to their strong connections with children's books resemble dimensions of aesthetic experience discerned by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990). Each teacher mentions appreciation for the literary form or language as part of the experience with the book—perception. All refer to some idea brought forth by the text—intelligence. All respond emotionally to some aspect of the story—emotion. The multiple dimensions they incorporate in their experiences support the idea that the strength and depth of aesthetic experiences relates to the number of dimensions a reader incorporates into the experience (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990).

In each case, however, one path or dimension dominates the others (Parsons, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990). These dominant dimensions serve as the teachers' primary ways into aesthetic transactions with the books. Within the dimensions, there are more precise points of engagement. These entry points focus attention on the children's book and shape the aesthetic experience of it.

Looking closely at the teachers' descriptions of their critical incidents and think alouds to discern the dominant dimension reveals clusters of experience that fall within the dimensions. In the critical incidents, some of the teachers are predominantly struck by the formal elements of the book; others experience its emotional impact most powerfully. Still others savor its intellectual aspects. Some enjoy a dimension slightly different from those derived by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990)—imaginal possibilities. No one emphasizes communication as a dimension in the description of critical incidents, but communication is the dominant dimension of the think alouds.

Grouping the critical incident experiences within dimensions of aesthetic experience allows closer examination of the variations within each. Here, the particulars of the teachers' experiences hold sway. Examining the content of the teachers' experiences offers a more precise idea of the points of engagement that focus attention on children's books. A roster of dimensions and points of engagement (Table 4.4) shows groupings of the critical incidents by dominant dimension of aesthetic experience.

Table 4.4
Points of Engagement: Critical Incidents

Dimension	Points of Engagement
Perception	Sheer Pleasure <i>Simply the Way the Words Sound</i> <i>Everyone Starts Saying It With You</i> Exemplary Elements— <i>Something You Can Do (List of Books)</i> Unraveling Complexity— <i>Every Year I Teach It I Go a Different Way</i>
Emotion	Validating Values and Experience <i>Although It's Fiction, It Hits on Real Facts</i> <i>Every Year I Teach It I Go A Different Way</i> Experiencing Emotion— <i>It's Good To Cry</i> Emotional Resonance <i>A Sense of Awe, Lost Possibilities, Uncertain Futures</i> <i>She Had to Be Known</i> <i>You Don't Have to be Brand New to be Lovable</i>
Intelligence	Relating the Past to the Present <i>She Makes the Characters Come Alive and the Issues are Real</i> <i>Something You Can Do (Hard Times)</i>
Imagination	Creating Worlds in the Mind <i>Another World in the Most Ordinary of Places</i> <i>Oh, My Imagination Just Went</i>

Perception. All of the teachers appreciated the books they chose as strong connections on a perceptual level; Dee, Elaine and Anna do so most strongly. While all of the others enjoyed one or the other of their books' literary elements, these three emphasized their perception of them in their descriptions of critical incidents: Elaine for saying and hearing words said aloud; Dee for particular literary elements in each of a series of children's books; and Anna for the layers of plot and theme which fill *Toning the Sweep*.

Sheer Pleasure. Elaine's enjoyment of the sound of the words of Wilde's fairy tales and *Alexander and the No Good, Very Bad Day* is sheer pleasure. She, and the children she reads them with, delight in sound, rhythm and repetition—perceptual enjoyment perhaps in its purest form.

Exemplary Elements. Dee appraises each of the books in her list of current favorites in terms of its formal elements first and foremost. She relies on her perception of them to find exemplary elements that she can share with her students and derives great satisfaction in doing so.

Unraveling Complexity. Anna concentrates on the many levels of plot and theme offered by *Toning the Sweep* when she talks about her strong connection to it. She describes the levels in detail and talks admiringly of how the unraveling of them brings rich complexity and meaning to the pleasures of reading and teaching it.

The strength of these critical incidents comes through what the teachers hear and say when they read, their appraisal and appreciation of formal literary elements, or the process of seeing, then reassembling, literary elements. Elaine's and Dee's connections

are almost wholly on a perceptual level. While Anna's connection comes from her perceptions of literary complexity, it stems almost equally from her affinity for one of the book's central themes—the importance of family. This association with the value she places on family gives her entry into the work an emotional aspect as well.

Emotion. The largest number of critical incidents fall in the realm of personal association and of connection with the emotional content of the work. They do so in three ways:

Validating Values and Experience. Articia and Anna have affinities for *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *Toning the Sweep*, respectively. Each book resonates with their personal experience and beliefs; then the stories unfold to enliven and refine conceptions of what is important. Kay's and Elaine's affinities for stories with strong, funny female protagonists build on the high value they place on images of active girls in their lives. As they encounter each protagonist individually and see the array now present in children's literature, their sense of themselves and of the possibilities for girls in the world deepens and widens.

Experiencing Emotion. Sharon and Shirley respond powerfully to the emotional content of *Where the Red Fern Grows*. The emotion they experience when reading the work brings them into the work. They value this emotional experience, not so much because it shines new light on their own personal lived experience, but because the experience of emotion is important for its own sake.

Emotional Resonance. Kay's and Carol's strong connection to *The Velveteen*

Rabbit and Mark's to *Wind in the Willows* blend amplification of personal experience with connection to the emotional content of the work. While the images that speak to these teachers do not reflect their personal experience directly, they do call forth emotion that resonates with their own emotional experience. Working through their perceptions of the image, they articulate the emotion that is evoked. This emotion then becomes part of the image, which, in turn, amplifies their personal emotional experience and fuses it with the emotional content of the book.

Imagination: Creating Worlds in the Mind. Mary and Elaine speak with excitement and fondness when they reflect on their strong connection to C. S. Lewis' books. Carol does the same for her experience with *The Secret Garden*. All three enjoy the thrill of escape that marks their critical incidents. All three enter into their experiences through actively imagining worlds only accessible to them through imagination. All three enter these worlds in childhood.

The pleasure of surrender in reading the *Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Secret Garden* bridges both emotional and intellectual dimensions. While these experiences are strongly transcendent—a characteristic Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990) identify with the emotional dimension—the access to that kind of experience comes through exercise of their intellects. Their experiences emphasize creating worlds in their minds, worlds that they must place themselves within. Teachers, whose path into the children's book was emotional, find entry into the work by relating the story to some aspect of

themselves or their experience; they place the world of the story within the world of their own minds to find its meaning.

Intelligence: Relating the Past to the Present. The historical, biographical and social context of the book *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is the point of entry for both Betty's and Mark's strong connections. They value the book because its events and characters illuminate an historical period and show the roots of racism in present society. Dee's way into *Hard Times* is similar; the model of education it presents intrigues her because of its historical setting and because of its relevance to contemporary education.

Communication: Talking with Oneself. The teachers' descriptions of critical incidents show potent affinities that anchor and encourage exploration of complexity, refinement of awareness, flights of fancy, and literary appreciation. None of their descriptions of the critical incidents, however, reveal raising questions or posing challenges to thinking, values or experience as part of reading children's literature. Dialogue with themselves, the author or the times of the books are absent from their descriptions of critical incidents.

Communication encompasses and dominates all other dimensions in the think alouds, however. Asking oneself questions, conjecturing outcomes, speculating on motives of character and authors, wondering what something means—these hallmarks of inner dialogue are all integral in the process that the teachers reveal as they speak their thoughts aloud.

The dominant dimension of all the think alouds is communication. The dialogues that unfold as the teachers read and think aloud incorporate associations and questions based in perceptual, emotional and intellectual dimensions of aesthetic experience.

Feelings, knowledge of the world and literature, personal lived experience—all are points of connection drawn into the process of constructing meaning from the short stories.

Points of engagement for the critical incident derive their natures from the content of the teachers' experiences themselves (Table 4.5). Points of engagement through the dimension of communication as experienced in the think alouds derive their natures from the process itself. Throughout the think alouds, questions and the conscious, explorational associations offer the teachers opportunities to move to deeper levels of understanding of the stories. While not every question or association serves as an entry point for profound consideration of a story's meaning, three teachers do find entry points that open the way for profound consideration of the think aloud stories.

Each of the three teachers who delve most deeply into the meaning of a think aloud find a place in the story that jars, either from dissonance or powerful affinity. They notice this and mark the disruption with some kind of action. One cries, another announces she is making no connection with the story and the third repeatedly remarks that one of the characters is not like she should be.

Table 4.5
Points of Engagement: Think Alouds

Communication: Points of Engagement
Affinity— <i>It Was About All of Life</i>
Disconnection— <i>Why Manny Riveira?</i>
Dissonance— <i>Not Like a Mom</i>

In order to understand these experiences of affinity, disconnection or dissonance, other dimensions of aesthetic experience are called into play. In making sense of *The Stray*, the teachers look more deeply at their personal associations and consider the characterization the story offers. To bridge the gap of disconnection in reading *A Good*

Deal, the teacher examines her understanding of ethnicity as an aspect of behavior as well as the descriptors and word usage that inform the story.

Focusing Attention and Meeting Challenges in the Work

The dimensions of aesthetic experience found in the critical incidents and think alouds are common areas where the teachers' more specific, individual points of engagement with the children's books arise. These points of engagement are entry points and shapers of the experience of reading. They are the points and areas where attention focuses and the problems and challenges of the work are faced.

Reading and thinking the stories aloud draws its momentum from the communicative aspect of aesthetic experience. The questions and associations give direction to the ongoing process of making meaning of the story; they help the teachers build meaning cumulatively. While each has the potential to do so, not all questions or associations raise challenges or pose problems that trigger more profound consideration of the story or the teachers' inner worlds.

If a moment of arrested attention does occur, the prompted reflection that follows the think alouds encourages the teachers to maintain focus and continue dialogue with themselves. It is after they finish reading—when they have a modicum of reflective distance and when their attention is nudged toward the challenge by follow-up questions—that they focus their attention. The resulting spoken inner dialogues probe the literary elements of the story as well as the teachers' emotional, perceptual and intellectual responses to it.

The teachers who experience disconnection and dissonance in the think alouds move back and forth from those jarring moments to the story itself, their prior knowledge, personal experience, values and emotions. Their challenge is to move more deeply into the stories and into their responses; there they find aspects of both that help to build understanding of the source and significance of the moment of disorientation. What is important in the stories and in their responses to it become clearer as they engage in this explicit dialogic action.

The teacher who is overwhelmed with emotion in reading and thinking aloud *The Stray* exemplifies the kind of affinity that dominates the teachers' descriptions of critical incidents. In her think aloud and in the critical incidents, the teachers talk about parts of the work of literature that ring true, touch them deeply or affirm beliefs. These aspects of the book strike emotional, intellectual, imaginal or perceptual chords with them: Images resonate with unarticulated emotions. Characters and plot validate values and personal history. Persistence in the face of great odds calls forth tears. Imaginary worlds link the possibility of magic to ordinary life. Beautiful words offer joy and fun. History enlivens and explains contemporary life.

The challenges these affinities engender require paying attention to the resonance, going back to the text and contemplating the associations that arise within the ever-widening circles of exploration. The challenge is to build outward, finding aspects of the work that strengthen and enlarge the original experience of universal truth, shared feeling or affirmation. The action here is a form of dialogue, but a form more subtle and less explicit than that used to meet challenges raised through disconnection or dissonance.

No matter what the nature or source of the challenge, the teachers all experience a moment or place in the stories that holds their attention. These points of engagement are naturally-occurring focal points that signify challenges present in the works of literature. The teachers meet these challenges by engaging in an internal process that is more or less explicitly dialogic. The inner dialogue, which centers on the literary elements of the work and their own emotional, intellectual, perceptual or imaginal responses to it, is the means through which they build particular meaning for particular stories at this particular moment in time.

Purpose and Goals

What motivates these teachers' experiences reading children's books? The teachers' experiences with children's literature exhibit a sense of overall purpose related to reading from the body of children's literature. Each of the experiences is also informed by a goal more closely related to reading a particular book at a particular moment in time.

Purpose. The overall purpose for reading children's books in childhood and adulthood differs. In the childhood experiences, enjoyment of reading literature itself leads the teachers to the books; in the adulthood experiences, their professional responsibilities for sharing literature with students lead them to books for children in general; those motivations mix with their life-long enjoyment of reading literature for its own sake as they read individual books.

The mix of professional and personal purposes causes confusion for some of the teachers as they participate in the research sessions. They seek direction as they talk

about their experiences: How should they be answering the questions? “For myself, or in my classroom?” (Carol 2 S5, P376).

As already noted, two of the teachers adopt a highly instructional stance in the think alouds (Betty S, Articia S, Articia GD) so much so that they verbally report what they are thinking as if they are saying it to students in their classrooms. Several also request clarification in this area of purpose as they talk about strong connections to children’s books. In directly asking which realm they should be exploring or by declaring their responses ‘personal’ without being asked to do so (Betty 1, S6, P276; Elaine 1, S2, P278; Mary 1, S2, P90-92), they indicate an assumption of differences between the two kinds of connections.

Two others widen the interpretation of purpose. In doing so, they show the territory that lies within the apparent “for myself, or for my classroom?” dichotomy. The first shows an understanding of definite differences in purposes for reading children’s literature. The second shows that ‘personal’ itself carries more than one meaning. The third shows several ways that a mixture of personal and professional purposes might manifest itself:

. . . I did take a children’s literature course . . . in the education department. So it was very different than taking a children’s literature course where I might have been pulling apart *Alice in Wonderland*. I was looking at a colossal variety of books and talking about using them with children, or using them with middle school students. Therefore, we looked at a lot more books than I might have in literature. It kept the audience in mind . . . I literally looked at hundreds of books and thought about audience so much (Mary 1, S1, P63).

. . . in terms of personal connection, I've just been reading a lot of Civil War stuff and, for me, it was an interesting, it was a story I hadn't heard before. Um, and it was a true story, actually, rather unbelievable, so that's a personal connection, but not really personal. I'm having a hard time with personal (Dee 1, S2, P93).

Well, it's funny, because when I sat down, I wondered about that question.

Because I was thinking, do you want to hear about a book that I teach and have a strong connection to, or just one that I like and I recommend to kids a lot, or one that I like and . . . recommend to family members (Kay 1, S2, P57).

Some teachers' responses within the research sessions indicate an assumption of a dichotomy between professional and personal purposes. One sees definite differences in what one does in approaching children's literature as literature—"pulling apart *Alice in Wonderland*"—and in approaching it as a teacher—"keeping the audience in mind." Others show some of the ways of interpreting and mixing the purposes that lead to a range of more specific goals.

Goals. The teachers' goals in reading and thinking aloud the two short stories were defined by the parameters of the research study: They were asked to read and think aloud the short stories so that normally unspoken thoughts could be recorded and available for research. With a fixed purpose, the readings of the assigned stories gives the best picture of the dynamics of actual reading experiences. Goals for the readings featured in the critical incidents are self-determined. They are wider ranging and

implicit in the portraits. An examination of these gives a clearer idea of goals as part of the dynamics of engagement that characterize teachers' experiences with children's books.

Pleasure and Enjoyment. Pleasure and enjoyment motivate the individual readings the teachers describe in the critical incidents. The portraits of these experiences resound with appreciative, affirmative, positive connections to literary elements, shared experiences of the books, treasured imaginary experiences, dearly-held values and important personal experiences. Using one of the teachers' words, the readings of the critical incident books could be described as "authentic experience[s] of reading," i.e. experiences that are "just a little better. . . less academic, less looking for foreshadowing, you know, and more vicarious experience . . ." (Mary I, S4, P251-255).

Whether they first read the children's book as a child or as an adult, the teachers' first readings of the children's books held pleasure and enjoyment as the goal of reading. As in other autotelic experiences (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, 1990), the teachers "enjoy what they are doing to the extent that experiencing the activity becomes its own reward" (p. 7). For them, ". . . intrinsic rewards appeared to overshadow extrinsic ones as the main incentives for pursuing the activity" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p. 35).

Children's books read in childhood most clearly do so. The strong connections to these books lie in self-motivated and self-affirming experiences of reading enjoyed in the private world of the mind or within a circle of family and friends. Even the goal for Articia's reading of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* moves beyond the imperative of assigned school reading to reading for pleasure as she connects the book to herself and family history.

The teachers' descriptions of children's books read in adulthood emphasize pleasure as a goal for reading as well. As adults, the teachers choose to read from the body of children's literature because they are teachers. Like Articia reading of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, however, most of the teachers' readings of the books they name as significant move beyond the imperatives of required reading or professional obligation. While children are never far from their minds, the teachers enjoy the experience of reading these children's books for their own sakes, with some form of pleasure as the primary motivator.

Thinking of the teachers as mature adult readers offers a fresh perspective on understanding pleasure as a goal for their readings of children's books. Appleyard's (1991) conception of the purposes of adult fiction reading expands the notion of pleasure from simply "pleasing" to include several ideas of what brings adults enjoyment in reading. His delineation of the main motives for adult fiction reading offer a lens through which to view the teachers' ways of connecting with children's books; this lens aids in eliciting more specific ideas about how the teachers derive pleasure from reading children's books. He says:

First of all, there are different motives for reading or different uses that adults make of fiction—to escape from the intractable problems of everyday life, to enlarge their consciousness of the world, to discover images that have power and meaning for their lives. Furthermore, most adults seem to combine these different uses of reading in different proportions, and most adults probably exemplify one of them more than the others at any given moment in their reading history or with particular books (p. 163).

The motivation for these teachers to read children's books mirrors Appleyard's (1991) scenario quite closely. Although their connections are not with the lighter, genre fiction he says adults read to escape, they did indeed read children's books to go beyond the confines of their everyday lives. They read to enlarge, or in some cases sharpen, their consciousness of the world. Several found powerful images that have great meaning in their lives.

In addition, all the teachers found pleasure for a fourth reason, one that falls outside of Appleyard's conception of purposes and is unique to this set of experience. They found pleasure in what one of the teachers characterizes as "the opportunities the book presents" for teaching and for sharing with children (Betty 1, S2, P87).

The pleasure teachers derive from these kinds of connections springs from sharing, or the expectation of sharing, the work of literature—an expectation uncommon in most adult experiences with literature. Among other experiences, the teachers love it when "everyone starts saying it with you" (Elaine 1, S2, P58); savor "the understanding the kids develop (Betty 1, S2, P80)," value introducing "responsible, hard-working, kind, loving" characters (Sharon 1, S2, P154); and look forward to "draw[ing] that parallel to kid's immediate lives (Dee 1, S3, P63)." Associations to past and projected ways of sharing a work of children's literature amplify its meaning and the pleasure it brings the teachers.

Influence of Genre. Escape, consciousness of the world, powerful images and opportunities for teaching and sharing mark the teachers' reflections on children's books in varying combinations. Their reasons for reading, like the adults Appleyard describes,

also appear to be influenced by the particular books they have read and by the given moment in their reading histories.

Mark is one of the teachers who spoke of two strong connections with children's books, one with a book read in childhood and the other with a book read as an adult. His connection with each reading experience exemplifies a different primary reason for reading. For the book first read in childhood—*Wind in the Willows*—the connection is made through powerful images. For the book first read in adulthood—*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*—the connection is made through consciousness of the world.

The most readily-apparent source of difference in purpose of reading is the difference in genre of the two books. *Wind in the Willows*, as a fantasy, would likely call forth vivid images from the imagination. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, a work of historical fiction, would illuminate events that have taken place in the real world, bringing with it a clearer understanding of the world.

Mark's experience, and the other teachers' reflections, affirm the idea that purposes of reading are influenced by the particular book being read. All seven strong connections grounded in consciousness of the world were with contemporary realistic or historical fiction. Of the seven books read primarily for escape or powerful images, five are fantasies.

Unlike the other readers of realistic and historical fiction, Shirley connects with *Where the Red Fern Grows* and Carol connects with *The Secret Garden* primarily through escape. Their connections suggest that the genre of the book itself is not the sole or definitive influence on the reason for reading a children's book. Mark talks about all of his childhood reading being escapist. His exploration of what he means by "escapist"

reinforces the idea that, while the genre of the book may be influential on the predominant mode of reading, it is not definitive:

I wanted to say one, what I meant by escapist . . . at the time my childhood wasn't very happy; there was a lot of tension in the home. And I think I read to go to other places in my mind. So, everything, even the Holocaust literature, was escapist literature . . . I realized later on, looking back that in no way did I think that this was current history or recent history. It seemed to me extremely remote in the past, this was in the fifties. This would have been only fifteen years after. I was born in 44 so it was happening when I was born. I probably was, in some way, aware of that if you asked me. But it seemed to me to be incredibly far and distant and not like anything I knew and it made my own life, which I mentioned was unpleasant . . . it made all those things pale by comparison to what they were going through (Mark 1, S1, P 103).

Mark's comments on what he calls escapist reading show that the genre or nature of the reading do not determine the reason for reading. His exploration does support the idea that the reason for reading preferred or used by a reader is influenced by the given moment in personal reading history.

Reasons for Reading. Each teacher has several reasons for enjoying the reading described in her or his critical incident portrait. Like the dimensions of aesthetic experience, one reason seems to dominate the others for each experience. Looking at the dominant reason for reading for each of the teachers' experiences gives an idea of the range of ways the teachers derive pleasurable satisfaction from their reading of children's books (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6
Reasons for Reading: Critical Incidents

Critical Incident	Teaching & Sharing	Consciousness of World	Escape	Powerful Images
<i>Something You Can Do</i>	XX	X		
<i>Every Year I Teach It I Go a Different Way</i>	XX	X		
<i>Although It's Fiction, It Hits on Real Facts</i>	X	XX		
<i>She Makes the Characters Come Alive . . .</i>	X	XX		
<i>It's Good to Cry (Sharon)</i>	X	XX		X
<i>It's Good to Cry (Shirley)</i>	X	X	XX	X
<i>Everyone Starts Saying It . . . Simply the Way the Words Sound</i>	X		XX	
<i>Oh, My Imagination Just Went</i>		X	XX	
<i>Another World in the Most Ordinary of Places</i>	X*	X	XX	
<i>You Don't Have to Be Brand New to Be Lovable</i>	X			XX
<i>A Sense of Awe, Lost Possibilities, Uncertain Futures</i>	X	X		XX
<i>She Had to Be Known</i>				XX

XX indicates the primary reason for reading; X indicates a secondary reason. *Elaine only.

Escape. Whether as children or adults, Mary, Elaine, Carol, Shirley and Sharon all used their experiences with the children's book as an escape from the confines of the real world. While the act of escaping was the motivator, what each escaped to varied.

Mary and Elaine each delight in the *Chronicles of Narnia* because the book provides a way out of ordinary life that can be found in the midst of it. The presence of the magical alongside the real world provides an easy way to get away from their lives—alone, like Elaine when she is miserable, or with others in elaborate games of make-believe, like Mary with her siblings and friends who have shared the books.

Carol's experience with the house, garden, moors and fens of *The Secret Garden* takes her right out of her own world to a far-away world that is different and remote from her own New England city life. Vivid descriptions of landscape and human relationships push Carol's imagination beyond the boundaries of her own world to a created world the realities of which she does not fully comprehend until she rereads the book as an adult.

Elaine loves the rhyme, rhythm and repetition of *Alexander and the No Good, Horrible, Very Bad Day* and the fancy words of Oscar Wilde's fairy tales. Reading the words out loud with children brings her and them to a place of enjoyment within the routines of school and home life.

Where the Red Fern Grows brackets off a safe space for Shirley to feel deep emotions and for her to encourage students to do so as well. The world of the story is a protected place, slightly removed from the real world, where the reality of emotions can be explored and enjoyed.

Shirley's sense of escape is qualitatively different from that of Carol, Elaine and Mary. Mary, Elaine and Carol escape through the reading itself; the story and its events and language encompass them, transporting them to other worlds. Shirley escapes *to* the reading, relying on the structure of story itself to remove the experience enough from reality so that the emotions and events of the story can be experienced without harm. Like the others, she also wants the situations, characters and events to differ from reality. Whether the story world reflects reality or magic, Shirley says:

It's nice to have something different than ordinary life, maybe. Maybe drift into a different area, a different world . . . ghosts and mysteries like that are not the same as a gangland shooting or a drug bust or a drug deal, you know, or marital abuse.

It's still sort of like mystical, away, on a different sphere. Most people probably don't think they are really going to meet a ghost . . . out on [Main] Street, you know, where the other stuff you could meet. Maybe that has something to do with it. A little beyond somewhere, it's not really going to hurt them but it's kind of intriguing to read about it. (Shirley 1, S 4, P299-311)

Consciousness of the World. Articia, Barbara, Mark, and Sharon fine tune and expand their sense of the world through historical and contemporary fiction written for children. All value following fiction back to reality, to think through and feel more deeply the events, interactions, and ideas that shape life in the real world.

Sharon likes “reading things that have a lot of feeling to them” (Sharon 1, S1, P80) and *Where the Red Fern Grows* is one of those books. She uses her experience of the book, not to set her apart from the real world, but to rarify the emotional experience of it. She looks to the book to sharpen her emotional consciousness.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry's base in the author Mildred Taylor's family history enhances the meaning of the story for Articia. Her reading of it sharpens her consciousness of her own similar family history and resonates with some of her childhood experiences. She uses the experience of reading to place discrimination and prejudice based on race and ethnicity in a broad context, hoping to enlarge her students' idea of how these forces shape all people's lives.

Both Barbara and Mark value Taylor's exploration of racism in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, an issue each of them sees as important in the contemporary world. They admire her writing that they see as sharpening students' ideas of family pride and

enlarging their understanding of the chronology and economic base of the history of African-Americans.

Sharon's connection to *Where the Red Fern Grows* centers on emotion; she looks to the book to sharpen the emotions that are a part of the human experience. She wants her reading to help make sense of the emotional contours of life. Articia's purpose of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* is much more personal. She finds herself, her family and her students in the book and uses the reading to connect those personal, familial struggles with the struggle for human dignity on a global level. Betty and Mark key in on the struggle for dignity, against racism, but from a more distanced perspective; they want the reading to place actions and events historically, as well as to help them and their students understand why people do the things they do.

Powerful Images. Strong, funny girls . . . a tattered stuffed rabbit whose fur has been loved off . . . Pinocchio, fallen in with the rogues, looking back on the town as he is jostled off in the caravan wagon . . . Elaine, Kay, Carol and Mark all use their reading to find images that touch them deeply.

Elaine and Kay welcome the female protagonists in children's books. They are excited that there are all these girls in stories and enjoy reading about them now, as adults. Mark, Kay, and Carol use their reading to find images that help embody and articulate deep emotion. Carol and Kay examine the image of the toy rabbit to find a way to understand express what they think about love and its many facets. Mark begins with a feeling engendered by *Wind in the Willows*, moves to an image from the film *Pinocchio*, and back again to illuminate the sense of melancholy and loss evoked by the book and, sometimes, his life.

Elaine and Kay not only enjoy the individual images of girls in children's books, they derive power and meaning from the fact that "there are *all* these girls in stories" [emphasis mine]—an array of images to choose from and savor. Mark, Kay and Carol use the images to galvanize emotion, to give it a form so that it first can be understood by themselves, and then articulated to others.

Opportunities for Teaching and Sharing. As observed earlier, teaching and sharing the books with children is never far from the teachers' minds. All but three of them either describe an experience already shared with children in or out of a classroom, project potential ways of using the book in instruction, or refer to aspects of the book they feel are important for children to experience. Making these kinds of connections is one source of pleasure in their readings—if not the dominant source, still an influential one.

Opportunities for teaching and sharing is the dominant reason for reading for both Anna and Dee. Anna's description of a multi-layered novel and Dee's descriptions of single dimensions of a series of individual titles incorporate analysis of the qualities of the books that present opportunities for teaching the students they work with. The two approaches in thinking emphasize different aspects of literature and different ways of using it.

For Anna, the beauty of *Toning the Sweep* lies in its complex plot, focus on family, exposition of racism and the fact that all of these, and more, are offered in one slim volume. She uses her reading of the book to find many different avenues to explore with her students and looks at these avenues as welcome opportunities to vary her teaching from group to group and year to year.

Dee's purpose in reading children's books is to get a grip on each, finding a way into the book that she can use to explore the book with individual and small groups of students. Opening the book up in a metaphorical sense is important, whether it be to discuss far ranging issues of education, or to illustrate a writing technique or reading strategy.

Anna and Dee approach their search for opportunities for teaching and sharing in two distinct ways that form a continuum of emphasis for teaching and sharing in these critical incidents. Anna immerses herself in the story, finds what she likes—in this case, its focus on family and its levels of plot and meaning—and takes direction in her teaching from its content and complexity; her experience of the book depends more on the lived-through experience of aesthetic reading than Dee's. Dee reads more efferently—for what she can take away from the book; she searches the stories and literature for the points on which to hang teaching and sharing, looking for the hook that will make it possible to use the story successfully with students in any number of ways.

Summary: Dynamics of Engagement

Teachers' descriptions of their critical incidents exhibit the dimensions of aesthetic experience put forward by Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson (1990). Individually, each of the teachers incorporates emotional, intellectual and perceptual dimensions into the description of the critical incident; none of the incidents exhibits communication as a dimension.

Three of the teachers' critical incident descriptions introduce a category which appears particular to this set of experience. Sharing aspects of both the emotional and

intellectual dimensions, the imaginal dimension emphasizes using the intellect to create worlds in the mind that offer readers transcendent experiences based in emotion.

Each of the critical incidents incorporates all of the dimensions in some configuration, but one dimension dominates each of the portraits. A closer look at the data in light of dominant dimensions reveals more precise entry points for the teachers' experiences with the books. Emotional and perceptual dimensions each manifest variation in points of engagement. Imaginal and intellectual dimensions each manifest only one entry point.

While communication is absent from the critical incident descriptions, it encompasses all other dimensions in the think alouds. A spirit of inquiry, implied and direct questions, conjecture, exploration, speculation and wondering characterize and motivate the spoken inner dialogues which constitute the think alouds. These dialogues draw on the intelligence, perceptions and emotions of the teachers in making the associations that give their experiences content and value.

Points of engagement within the communication dimension arise from the process of dialogue that is the chief characteristic of the dimension. The points of engagement evident here arise when teachers' attention is arrested by strong affinity, complete disconnection or niggling dissonance.

Communication, then, is the path through which the teachers engage as they read and think aloud a children's short story that they have not read before. In their more reflective, retrospective descriptions of significant experiences with children's books, the range of other dimensions—i.e. perception, emotion, intelligence and imagination—pave the way for their entry into the experience.

For both the think alouds and critical incidents, delving more deeply into the meaning of a work comes through focusing the attention within a dimension of aesthetic experience. Points of engagement serve as leverage points for this process. The implicitly dialogic process of profound consideration brought to light in the critical incidents builds exclusively from experiences of affinity, affirmation and resonance. In the think alouds, the process is explicitly dialogic and builds from affinity, disconnection and dissonance.

Pleasure and enjoyment are goals for reading the children's books described in the critical incidents. Teachers derive pleasurable satisfaction from children's books for several reasons that reflect motives adults bring to reading fiction: Teachers read children's books to escape the confines of the world and its limits. They read children's books to sharpen and enlarge their consciousness of the world. They read children's books to contemplate powerful images that resonate and enrich understanding of their experience, thoughts and emotions. The teachers also find pleasurable satisfaction when reading for another reason, unique to this set of experience: finding opportunities for teaching and sharing with children.

Reasons for reading are products of particular books and given moments in a reader's history. While one reason for reading for pleasure usually dominates an experience, several may be present at once. For the teachers, children are never far from their minds when reading children's books. Finding opportunities for teaching and sharing children's books with children is a more or less pointed influence in nearly all of the teachers' dynamics of engagement with children's books. Based in enjoyment and expectation of sharing the literature, teachers read along a spectrum ranging from finding

places in the books that serve as hooks for instruction to taking direction for shared reading experiences from the content and complexity of the work of literature and their response to it.

Chapter 5

Insights, Questions and Implications

This study seeks to bring the missing voices of teachers into the conversation about teaching and learning children's literature. Grounded in an empirical base that affirms a need for this perspective, the study places teachers' experiences with children's literature in the foreground. Data collection focuses on two distinct sets of these experiences: 1) critical incidents, or contemplated readings of children's literature; and 2) think-alouds, or initial readings of children's literature. The ensuing exploration follows the teachers' own sense of significance through the data to elicit a picture of the dynamics of their engagement with children's books as aesthetic experiences of adult reading.

What does the data of this study, rendered from this fresh perspective, reveal about teachers' aesthetic experiences with children's books? What implications might the insights it offers have for teaching and learning children's literature at the college level? What questions do its patterns and inconsistencies raise for further empirical consideration?

The Missing Voices of Teachers

The teachers in this study are proficient, pragmatic readers who look back on childhoods noted for conditions that favor picking up a book to read. All have education concentrating on elements of literary form and perceptual skills. All have enjoyed a range of self-rewarding, meaningful individual reading experiences over the years. Each has shared children's literature with children formally and informally. All are presently active readers. Years of practice, exposure, concentration, and enjoyment make them highly-skilled readers whose experiences offer a reliable indicator of a range of possibility for the breadth, depth and structure of teachers' aesthetic experiences with children's books.

The data gathered from these expert readers grounds the delineation of the dynamics of aesthetic engagement laid out in the previous chapter. Best seen as a map of possibilities, rather than as a model of ideal experience, the delineation reveals previously uncharted aspects of teachers' aesthetic experiences with children's literature.

Examined collectively, across the categories and distinctions of dynamics of engagement, the data also offers more general insights into teachers' experiences with children's literature. These insights draw on and represent the missing voices of teachers. Detailed and discussed below, the insights are rich in implication for pedagogy and future research:

- The teachers' experiences with children's books are complex, fluid, vital and varied.
- Distinguishing between personal and professional reasons to read has significance for the teachers.
- The expectation or experience of sharing children's literature with others is an integral part of the aesthetic transactions the teachers describe.
- References to teaching and sharing children's literature contribute to the richness of aesthetic experiences when they are one among many perspectives integrated into the experience.
- Even with all their skills, the teachers still benefit from, and at points need, attention and encouragement to delve more deeply into the process of aesthetic reading.
- Affinity is the preferred mode for meeting challenges faced by the teachers in their contemplated and initial readings of children's literature.

Vital and Varied Experiences

The teachers' experiences with children's books are complex, fluid, vital and varied. In both contemplated and initial reading experiences, they reflexively link what they are experiencing with other books, their lives, their imaginations, the world, children and other people around them. Like the autotelic and aesthetic experiences described by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990), these self-rewarding experiences are individually distinct in content, but share common characteristics in dynamics of engagement.

The teachers enter their experiences with children's books from a range of points of engagement centered in five dimensions of aesthetic experience: perception, emotion, intelligence, imagination and communication. While they are contemplating a previously read book, intellectual, perceptual, emotional or imaginal dimensions are the dominant paths into the work. While teachers are reading and thinking aloud short stories, they work from the dimension of communication, integrating the other dimensions into the inner dialogue that characterizes it.

The absence of communication as a primary dimension of the critical incidents and its importance as the primary dimension of the think alouds distinguishes the dynamics of engagement presented here from those presented by Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990). This difference reflects the nature of aesthetic engagement with literary art in general and its differences from engagement with visual art in particular.

Unlike visual art, children's literature is a discursive form; it depends on perception of its parts in sequence rather than perception of its whole simultaneously. Like other works of literature, works of children's literature need to be assembled in the minds of readers before they can be contemplated and experienced to the fullest. Time must be given to the process of assembly before attention can be centered on the effect of the whole in relation to its parts.

Chambers' (1985) conception of reading children's literature as a series of experiences builds on this conception of literary reading. He sees the initial reading of the book and its contemplation after reading as distinct experiences. While qualitatively different, each experience is essential to full aesthetic experience of the book. Realizing what he calls a book's "potentialities"—i.e. the possibilities it presents for sharing

experience and understanding—requires an experience of both “the book as I was reading it for the first time, and a second book that results from my contemplation of that experience” (Chambers, 1985, p. 32).

The data collected in this study clearly support Chambers’ (1985) contention. Reading the short stories for the first time and contemplating past readings of children’s books require different dynamics of engagement because the task of each is qualitatively different. The inner dialogue of communication is emphasized in the think alouds because those are initial readings, the time when parts are encountered, questioned, associated and assembled into a whole. When the whole is contemplated, as it is in the critical incidents, particular parts and responses stand out and provide challenges to deeper understanding; these parts or responses reach the teachers through the pathways of perception, emotion, imagination and intelligence.

Personal or Professional? A Dichotomy of Purposes

Pleasure is the overriding goal for the teachers’ experience of reading children’s literature. The reasons for reading that underlie the pursuit of this pleasure reflect similar motives for adult reading (Appleyard, 1991): expanding consciousness of the world, escape, contemplating powerful images. They also encompass a reason for reading particular to this group of expert readers: seeking opportunities for teaching and sharing with children.

The four reasons for reading delineated in the data appear in various combinations in the teachers’ contemplated experiences of children’s literature. While one or the other of the reasons to read may dominate, each of the contemplated experiences includes

seeking opportunities for teaching and sharing as a reason to read on some level. The teachers mix all these reasons to read productively and easily. Even so, the data indicates that they see a significant distinction between those reasons derived from Appleyard's conception of adult reading and the one derived from their own experience.

Teachers present this distinction between reasons to read as a dichotomy of purposes. For them, the dichotomy is characterized as personal versus professional—"For myself, or in my classroom?" as one of them says (Carol 2, S5, P376). The personal that they see is akin to the profound aesthetic transaction encouraged by children's literature instructors; these transactions with books offer autotelic or self-rewarding experiences based in readers' own thoughts, emotions and imaginations. The professional allies with instructional aims and classroom activities; these transactions offer hooks on which to hang instruction or a wealth of material to draw into teaching.

Their conception presents "personal or professional" as distinct and oppositional reasons for reading. As such, it reinforces the dichotomy implicitly drawn by instructors of children's literature when they define teachers' pragmatic purposes as a source of challenge in their teaching.

An Expectation of Sharing

In the experiences with children's literature studied here, the prospect of sharing the literature is never far from the teachers' minds. In nearly all of the critical incident portraits and in the think alouds, children, friends, family, and colleagues were present subtly and overtly, in imagination or in remembered experience. The teachers read with the expectation of sharing the literature formally or informally—and most often they fulfill that expectation.

The expectation of sharing the literature distinguishes the teachers' aesthetic experiences with children's literature. Adult fiction reading and many children's readings of children's literature are commonly done privately and independently with no thought of sharing the experience. Children's literature for these teachers, on the other hand, is read aloud to groups of students, shared one-on-one, traded with colleagues, and discussed with large and small groups of children in passing and as part of curriculum. In the teachers' lives, shared reading experiences of children's literature are springboards for collective play, fuel for shared exploration of values and literary elements, an impetus for dialogue about the world at large and a cornerstone for communal family experiences.

The expectation of sharing the literature is a tacit expectation for the teachers. It is a presumed part of the process so central that it is not observed or reflected upon. What are the effects of an expectation of sharing as a condition of aesthetic experiences with children's literature? The data in this study, supported by previous research (Salvio, 1995; Day, 1991, 1997), indicate that recognizing it as a distinguishing characteristic of this particular class of aesthetic experiences may be important. If the differences and similarities between what the teachers would call their personal and professional literary experiences can be delineated and discussed, it becomes possible to use them both to the best advantage in structuring literary experiences for children.

One Among Many Perspectives

In all but one of the critical incident portraits, the teachers refer to and describe sharing books with children or using them for instruction. In doing so, only one teacher's experience lands squarely on the professional side of the perceived continuum. The others mix personal goals and aesthetic pleasure with ideas for teaching: One finds purpose and direction for teaching from her experience of the book and its complex structure and content. Others find opportunities to discuss racism and personal values with children through a novel's characters and plot. And another seizes the chance to explore students' own imaginary worlds based on the literary conception of a fantasy world.

Key in their experiences, though, is that finding opportunities for teaching and sharing is not the *only* connection or reference they make as they talk about the books. In these forceful, multi-faceted autotelic literary experiences, the link to teacherly concerns is one link among many and, most often, it is not the strongest link.

Links to teaching and sharing mix with urges to understand the world more fully, the thrill of escaping humdrum daily life, and contemplation of meaningful images and literary elements. The combinations create aesthetic experiences that draw on perceptions, emotions, knowledge and imagination.

If a teacherly perspective is one among many perspectives brought to a work—as it is in almost all of the critical incident portraits—it adds value to the experience: A literary experience “gains aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed” (Greene, 1995, p.116). If connection to instructional concerns is the sole dimension brought to a children's book, the

experience of reading it, like all aesthetic experiences grounded only in one dimension, will be correspondingly narrow (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990).

Attention and Encouragement Needed

Aesthetic capacity grows in direct relation to aesthetic exposure. It requires the skills to perceive the whole and the parts of the work of literature itself. When the skills of the reader meet the challenges presented in the work, the activity of engaging with the work of literature becomes its own reward.

The experiences examined here affirm that the skills and experience the teachers possess bring richness and depth to reading children's literature aesthetically. The critical incident portraits and think alouds also show that, even with all their skills, they still benefit from, and at points need, attention and encouragement to delve more deeply into the process of aesthetic reading.

Delving more deeply into meaning during the think alouds is a case in point. As teachers make associations, they refer obliquely to other experience, knowledge or ideas. Follow-up questions urge them to explore apparently casual references; the nudge of attentive questioning trips continued dialogue with themselves. This dialogue takes them more deeply into the meaning of the story, turning what would have been overlooked casual references into exploratory references that lead to new understanding.

While thinking aloud, some teachers find points of engagement that arrest their attention forcefully. They notice these and recognize them in some way, e.g. crying or declaring a disconnection with the story. They do not, however, pursue them in the voiced inner dialogue that accompanies the rest of their reading. Only in the follow-up

session when the researcher focuses attention on their naturally-occurring points of engagement do they go more deeply.

The researcher's comments or questions prod them to reflect on their own moments of arrested attention. The following dialogue with themselves is searching, profound and focused. The teachers then make striking leaps into deeper meaning made more significant because, without notice from someone outside their own process, they may not have taken the leaps at all.

Emphasis on Affinity

In all the experiences of children's literature investigated here, affinity was the preferred mode for meeting the challenges that the works present. All points of engagement in the critical incidents are based in resonance and affirmation. In the think alouds, one of three points of engagement triggers a move into deeper meaning through potent affinity and emotion. Teachers also rely on associational exploratory references to amplify emerging meaning throughout the think aloud process. Dissonance and disconnection serve as points of engagement and motivators in only two of the experiences with children's literature, both of which are part of the think aloud process.

Differences in the ways teachers meet challenges proffered by children's books relate to the qualitatively different tasks of initial and contemplated readings. In the critical incidents, or contemplated readings, the dialogue is implicit. The teachers move outward from affinity with a part of the text that strikes a resonant chord. As a compelling force, the associational process focuses attention through the intensity of particular affinities, emphasizing commonalities and smoothing disjuncture along the

way. Knowing the whole of the work and having encountered it before supports the process of association: With full knowledge of the book and a reservoir of response to it, there is more material to feed making connections and finding patterns.

In the think alouds, or initial readings, affinity informs the process of delving more deeply into meaning, too, but it does not do so exclusively. In these initial readings, where the task is to assemble the story and make meaning of its parts in sequence, an explicitly dialogic, questioning mode dominates. As each part is encountered, questions are asked to figure out how it fits in and what it contributes to the whole.

Disconnection and dissonance surface more readily in initial readings because of the explicitly questioning mode. Some of them coincide with personal feeling, emotion or ideas; some bump up against values, ideas, and experience. When bumps occur, questions forcefully arrest attention, requiring notice and encouragement to be explored more deeply.

Outstanding Questions

The expert readers whose experience is the source of data in this qualitative study offer substantive insights into the process of teachers' dynamics of engagement with children's books. The study's analysis and synthesis leads to a set of findings that reflect commonalities and variations in teachers' individual experiences with children's literature and in their experiences as a specific class of aesthetic experience. Drawn from the data, these findings help discern conceptual similarities, refine the discriminative power of categories and present patterns in teachers' dynamics of engagement with children's literature.

The core of understanding about the teachers' dynamics of aesthetic engagement evokes a picture of patterns and variations rich in implications for pedagogy for teaching children's literature at the college level. It also raises questions. Some of these questions follow naturally from working with a small sample of expert readers. Some arise from variations or concentrations in the data that may indicate emerging patterns in dynamics of engagement. Others speculate on the meaning of data-based insights in understanding teachers' experiences with children's literature. All of these questions are promising avenues for further research.

Broadening the Sample

This study is grounded in the experience of expert readers who have responsibility for teaching literature in middle schools—teachers who are not necessarily representative of teachers as a whole, and, who may not be typical of those who enroll in college level children's literature courses. For this reason, the delineation of the dynamics of teachers'

aesthetic engagement is offered as a map that can be used to show teachers of all levels of expertise possibilities for dynamic engagement with children's books.

How might the map of possibilities offered in this study become a viable basis for a fully-developed theoretical model of teachers' experiences with children's literature? In order to explore this, the study would need to be replicated with larger, stratified samples of preservice and inservice teachers with varying levels of expertise as readers: How do less-skilled readers who are teachers fit within the map of possibilities presented here? What, if anything, differs in the experiences of preservice and inservice teachers? How do differences in class, race and gender of teachers affect the picture of dynamics of aesthetic engagement? How do teachers without responsibility for teaching literature fit within the framework?

Placing the findings of this study, based in the experience of expert readers, in juxtaposition with examination of critical incidents and think alouds of other specific groups of teachers would sharpen and extend the picture of patterns and variations. A model of teachers' dynamics of aesthetic engagement with children's literature could then be pursued and developed into a theory generalizable to teachers as a whole.

Emerging Patterns?

Inevitably, a study of this scope raises questions whose investigation would refine and expand the work done here. Throughout the analysis of the study's data, indicators of other possible patterns of experience presented themselves:

- The dimensions of dynamics of engagement described here include a category—imagination—that falls outside Csikszentmihalyi's and Robinson's (1990) conception of the dimensions of aesthetic experience. The three critical incident

experiences that fall into this category are all strong connections made with books read by the teachers during childhood. What is the influence of the given moment in a reader's history on the dimension used as a path into a children's book? Is the dimension of imagination more properly a dimension specific to childhood literary experiences rather than those of adulthood?

- Most of the teachers, including the one male, enter their critical incident experiences through the dimension of emotion, albeit through focus on a variety of points of engagement. What meaning might this concentration of experience in the emotional dimension have? References to personal life experience are by definition subsumed within the emotional dimension: Does the concentration indicate a propensity for reliance on personal experience in making meaning of children's books? Or, given that most participants are female, does it reflect a pattern based in gender-related modes of making meaning and knowledge?
- Three of the teachers choose to describe *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in their critical incident interviews. The two white veteran teachers who do so approach the book similarly. They find their way into the story of an African-American land-owning family in Mississippi through the intellectual dimension; they value the book for the way it relates history to the present and admire the author's artistry in writing. The black first-year teacher who describes her experience with this book, approaches it through the emotional dimension; she appreciates the book most strongly because it validates her experience and values. What lies behind the differences in approach? Race seems the most obvious difference—would a similar difference be found if more teachers, both black and white, were interviewed about their experiences with *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*? Is this indicative of a larger pattern in preferences for dimensions? Other questions come to mind as well: How important is literary quality in fostering aesthetic experiences with books drawn from outside a reader's own race or culture? What are preferred and viable points of engagement for entering literature with unfamiliar content, values or form?

Affinity and Dissonance

The data of this study affirm that strong, vital, varied, rich experiences of children's literature can be wrought based in affinity supported by strong perceptual skills and a solid repertoire of literary experiences. Looking for patterns and elements in common is clearly important to teachers in contemplating their chosen books and in reading works for the first time. The predominance of affinity as the mode for making meaning of the literature does raise questions.

The surfacing of dissonance in initial readings of children's stories and reliance on affinity for the contemplated readings can be seen as a reflection of the difference in the qualitative nature of each kind of experience. The overall reliance on affinity in both the critical incidents and think alouds remains open for explanation, however.

In seeking common ground, do underlying differences and challenges simply not come forward? Is dissonance synonymous with unpleasant and just not a part of the strongest connections? Do the teachers delve more deeply into meaning through dissonance in other remembered experiences with children's literature, e.g. those of books that make them uncomfortable?

Since the sample for this study is predominantly female, the emphasis on affinity may be related to how women develop and learn. Research on adult learning stresses the importance of relationships and a sense of connectedness in women's overall development (Caffarella & Olson, 1993). Women's learning has been shown to emphasize relationships among elements and searches for commonalities as foundations for inquiry and exploration (Belenky, et. al., 1986). This description of learning certainly coincides with the way in which nearly all of the challenges in the works of children's

literature were met by the teachers in this study. Does the preference for affinity as a mode for meeting challenges relate to the gender of the teachers? What would this mean if it did?

Working from questions and dissonance is critical in reading any literature that portrays experience that might challenge values, affront personal sensibilities or raise disquieting thought. In the larger world of literature, this most logically includes literature whose form or content falls outside one's own accepted cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups. In the world of children's literature, it is likely to include literature in all those categories representing "not-like-me" as well as literature that confronts conceptions of what is appropriate for children on any level.

When works of children's literature defy dearly-held values, challenge strong conceptions of what childhood ought to be, or simply present experience far outside the realm of personal experience, will working primarily from association be enough to take on the questions and the upset the works evince? Without experience and guidance in working through dissonance, will teachers be ready to take on challenging books in order to lead children through grappling with tough questions?

The questions raised here related to affinity and dissonance and those that reflect possible emerging patterns in the data are important, viable points worthy of investigation. Pursuing them, along with replicating the study with teachers from a variety of life circumstances, should lead to fruitful continued examination of teachers' experiences with children's literature. Based in the groundwork laid here, fully-developed theoretical model of the dynamics of teachers' aesthetic engagement with children's literature could then be constructed.

Implications for Teaching Children's Literature

The voices of the teachers in this study clearly communicate significant insights into their perspectives on experiences with children's literature. They perceive a dichotomy between personal and professional purposes in reading, see children's literature as a shared literature, and prefer to make meaning of literature through affinity. Their aesthetic experiences are richer when their instructional perspectives are integrated with perceptual, intellectual, emotional and imaginal dimensions. They are expert readers who benefit from external attention in order to delve more deeply into children's literature. What do these insights contribute to the conversation on teaching and learning children's literature at the college level?

Pedagogy for teaching children's literature to teachers needs to validate teachers' prior and present experiences with children's books. Lines between professional and personal purposes in reading must be blurred so that teachers' instructional aims are seen as an important, but not sufficient, condition for engagement with children's books. The potential range of dynamics of engagement with children's books must also be clarified and expanded so that teachers better understand the breadth and depth possible in aesthetic literary experience. Finally, pedagogy must build on their preference for affinity and encourage in them the ability to make meaning of literature through dissonance.

More specifically, the data in this study and the insights extrapolated from it suggest three areas of endeavor as pivotal in accomplishing these aims:

- Reframing the dichotomy of purposes.
- Expanding conceptions of the aesthetic stance.
- Enlarging teachers' capacities to work through dissonance.

The discussion of implications of this study for the pedagogy of teaching children's literature to teachers centers on these three endeavors. The strategic approaches woven into the discussion suggest concrete steps that could be taken by instructors of children's literature to shift and enlarge pedagogy to reflect the missing voices of teachers. In so doing it offers a philosophy and raises questions that call for still further refinement, exploration and discussion of teaching and learning children's literature.

Reframe the Dichotomy of Purposes

Teachers enjoy full and satisfying experiences with children's literature when perspectives on instruction are integrated into profound, personal aesthetic engagement with children's books. Seeing the two aspects as opposing forces strengthens tension. Reframing the challenge of cross-purposes that is the source of this tension is an essential step toward creating an encouraging context for teachers' deepest and fullest engagement with children's literature.

Teachers come to children's literature courses in a professional mode: They are studying teaching within professional education programs; their dominant shared characteristic is that they are or will become teachers; and their interests center on their practice of teaching. Their perception of significant distinctions between personal and professional reasons for reading underscores this mindset and the circumstances that support it. All these factors combine so that they arrive in the children's literature classroom ready to learn about children's books in order to become better teachers.

When instructors ask teachers to learn about children's literature through profound, personal aesthetic engagement, they unwittingly invalidate experience prized by teachers and central to their learning goals. Misunderstanding the process because

they see and feel such a sharp division between personal and professional spheres, teachers, of course, resist.

Teaching adult learners any subject from a premise that invalidates their experience is difficult at best (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Marienau, 1995); in teaching children's literature, it is frequently frustrating and all-too-often counterproductive. Validating teachers' experience and their preferred perspectives are central in reframing the pedagogy of teaching children's literature through profound aesthetic engagement. In order to do this, the perceived line between personal and professional reading must be blurred. Teachers' instructional perspectives must be encompassed as an integral part of the aesthetic experience.

As this study shows, teachers see and experience children's literature as a shared literature. In fact, this aspect of their aesthetic experiences distinguishes them from most of their own adult readings of literature and from many children's readings of children's literature. Talking with adult students about this distinguishing characteristic of their experience in children's literature courses could offer entrée into discussion of ways that this sharing has happened for them, and can happen for them, in and outside of the classroom. Their instructional and curricular concerns can then be placed in the larger category of shared experience, thus helping to diffuse the dominance of the professional perspective.

The idea of children's literature as a shared literature can also feed discussions about differences and similarities in readings of adult literature and those of children's literature. Examining differences and similarities in the two kinds of aesthetic experiences heightens consciousness of dynamics of engagement. It also validates

teachers' reflection on their own experiences as a source of direction in reading children's literature.

Understanding the dynamics of each kind of experience clarifies the importance of the unique aspects of each; both the perceived professional and personal perspectives are validated. A clearer idea of a range of capacities employed in both kinds of aesthetic experiences also emerges; professional and personal perspectives become part of a larger pool of differing perspectives, all of which can be drawn on to augment the aesthetic validity of the literary experience which grows "precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed" (Greene, 1994, p.116).

Expand Conceptions of the Aesthetic Stance

If a teacherly perspective is one among many perspectives brought to an aesthetic experience of a children's book, it adds value to the experience. In order for professional perspectives to be seen as one of many perspectives for engaging with children's literature, teachers must see and understand a range of possible perspectives. This range of possible perspectives is often defined for teachers by Rosenblatt's (1983) conception of efferent and aesthetic stances.

Although Rosenblatt (1983) presents these stances as a continuum of experience, in practice the nuances of experience between endpoints of the continuum are rarely explored. The dichotomous thinking of instructors and teachers convolutes understanding. The efferent stance, which emphasizes taking information from a text, conflates with the instructional perspective teachers bring. The aesthetic stance, which emphasizes the lived-through experience of a text, represents the push for profound engagement that instructors advocate. What could be a tool for opening up understanding of a range of ways of encountering children's literature loses force by association with the binary thinking that underlies the perceptions of purposes instructors and teachers bring to children's literature.

In addition, the scope of the aesthetic stance is not fully explored. When first introduced to the conception of stances, teachers welcome it. They use it to bolster the value of simply reading and enjoying literature in the classroom—a worthy and needed use of the idea. From there, understanding expands to the importance of acknowledging emotions and personal experience while reading. Understanding that personal experience and emotions can be a part of making meaning from literature is a significant extension

of knowledge about the range of possibility in aesthetic experience. However, if the interpretation of the aesthetic stance stops with these elements, as it frequently does, transactions with children's books fall far short of their potential.

This investigation draws a more precise, nuanced picture of what is encompassed within the aesthetic stance. With a more fully realized picture in hand, teachers can begin to work with connections to their personal experience and emotion to grasp more of the subtlety and depth of their experiences. They can then push beyond these connections to recognize and bring more perspectives to the literature. For example:

- As associations with personal experience arise, they can ask: What kind of personal experience am I drawing on in reading this book? Experiences with ideas? With imagination as a child? With words and language? If personal experience is my primary path into this book, what other dimensions do I notice as I read?
- If their experiences with children's books fall primarily within the emotional dimension, they can go further by asking: What is my reason for reading? To escape? Sharpen consciousness of the world? Am I looking for images to guide me? What is my particular point of engagement?

The picture of the dynamics of aesthetic engagement delineated here offers teachers a broader and more-refined framework within which to examine their literary experiences. They also gain language with which to articulate self-discoveries. This approach, shown to be particularly effective with adult learners (Levine, 1989; Marienau, 1995), encourages the self-awareness essential in profound aesthetic transactions with any work of art.

Given the framework and the language, it becomes possible for teachers to see for themselves in their own experiences what has been seen here in their aesthetic

experiences with children's literature: Intellectual connections that draw on perceptions of literary elements and lead to greater understanding of the world and human nature.

Deep emotional resonance grounded in admiration for a book's plot, themes and values, satisfying a need to escape for one and a need to feel reality more deeply for another.

Journeys to far away worlds taken through imagination, reinforced and made more meaningful by shared personal experiences in reality. And, inner dialogues marked by a mode of inquiry, incorporating intellectual, perceptual, emotional and imaginative associations to arrive at meanings as distinct and individual as each of the teachers themselves.

Enlarge Capacities for Working through Dissonance

Teachers create satisfying, self-rewarding, complex and impressive experiences with children's literature working primarily through an associational mode. These experiences incorporate many dimensions and points of engagement and are informed by a range of reasons for reading. Validating their experiences and expanding notions of the aesthetic can refine and expand their *modus operandi* so that not only will their aesthetic experiences become richer but their own knowledge of that richness will grow as well.

Working with teachers' propensity to make meaning of children's literature through affinity is another way of validating their experience. In doing so, instructors of children's literature build confidence, strength and flexibility in the aesthetic capacities teachers bring to children's literature. Working from what teachers bring with them nurtures strong foundations for continued growth and refinement of aesthetic capacity.

However, focusing all energy and resources on building this kind of foundation may limit the potential of teachers in working with children's books for which they have little or no affinity—books that might be important in building the aesthetic capacity of the students who study with them. Working from affinity only may also leave the teachers without the skills and knowledge needed to make meaning of literature based in forms and experiences drawn from unfamiliar cultures, races, classes or values—books that might offer the most important opportunities to break with the familiar and set aside the taken for granted.

Two teachers in this study engaged in deep exploration of children's literature through dissonance and disconnection. Their experience shows just how productive this kind of exploration can be. It suggests two approaches viable in working with moments of dissonance to deepen understanding of a work: Engaging the teachers in think alouds within the structure of the children's literature course is one avenue to pursue. Another is to read together children's books unfamiliar to both teachers and instructors. Validation of experience is key in the effectiveness of both suggested approaches.

During think alouds, validation takes the form of attentive listening. Someone outside the teachers' own reading process witnesses it, noticing points of dissonance as they happen. After reading and thinking aloud is completed, attention focuses on the points of dissonance. Teachers are urged to clarify and further explore the story and their response to it through these points of dissonance. The process affirms validity of experience on two levels: 1) Working from readers' own priorities and sense of significance affirms personal experience as an important source of learning. 2) Focusing on dissonance affirms it as a viable mode for engaging in depth with a work of literature.

As this study shows, important questions, often unacknowledged by teachers, occur during initial readings of children's literature. In children's literature courses, students do initial readings on their own outside of class in preparation for class. In-class discussions of children's books between instructors and teachers are already part of the contemplated experience of the book. Working directly with teachers on making meaning through questions and points of dissonance becomes possible if initial readings of some works of children's literature become the basis for in-class discussion.

Reading children's books unfamiliar to both instructors and teachers together can bring initial readings of children's books into the classroom. Questioning as a compelling force in making meaning becomes visible as a dynamic. Opportunities for instructors to demonstrate their own points of engagement and to focus on those based in dissonance in particular arise naturally, enhanced by the spontaneity and freshness of the process for the instructor. As the unfamiliar works unfold, emphasis can be placed on teachers' own dissonant points of engagement. As in the think aloud process, teachers priorities and sense of significance are privileged and dissonance as a mode of inquiry is legitimated.

Conclusion

The missing voices of teachers captured in this study make it clear that the skills and knowledge they bring with them to children's books can engender complex, multi-faceted aesthetic experiences. In the midst of these experiences, the teachers keep children close in mind while reveling in beautiful words, escaping to far away worlds, connecting history to contemporary life, having a good cry or finding meaning in metaphorical images. Their rich and profound aesthetic experiences move outward from resonance and affirmation in ever-widening circles that bring more and more different perspectives to the work.

Strong perceptual skills and solid repertoires of literary experience shape these teachers' aesthetic experiences with children's books. They are highly skilled readers who find pleasure in all kinds of literature. Even so, they still benefit from encouragement and attention in delving more deeply into children's books, particularly when faced with challenges arising from disconnection and dissonance.

These teachers do bring pragmatic purposes related to instructional and curricular needs to their readings of children's books. They see these purposes as distinct from and oppositional to personal purposes in reading children's books. Nevertheless, as long as sharing literature with children is one among many perspectives they bring to children's literature, it contributes to the richness and validity of their aesthetic experience.

The challenge of teaching children's literature to teachers lies in opening up narrow interpretations of the aesthetic stance. Moving teachers' conceptions of the aesthetic stance to recognition of a fuller range of dynamics of engagement is essential. Blurring the lines between professional and personal purposes so that instructional

perspectives are encompassed as valid parts of teachers' aesthetic experiences is key. Validating teachers' experience with aesthetic experiences based in affinity while building their capacity to work through moments of dissonance is critical.

Using the insights and implications drawn from this study, instructors of children's literature can implement strategies that affirm the perspectives, skills and abilities teachers bring with them to the study of children's literature. They can work to enlarge and refine understanding of the dynamics of aesthetic engagement. With heightened awareness of their own dynamics of engagement and validation of their experiences, teachers can be encouraged to make significant leaps in imagination as they read children's books. With the confidence, flexibility and strength fostered by validation of their experience, they can become more receptive to breaking with the familiar, setting aside the taken for granted and leading children to children's literature that explores critical issues of childhood. Based in their own profound engagement with children's literature, they can then shape children's literary experiences to realize the power and pleasure of looking at the world as though it might be otherwise.

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perspective. Finally, Kate Byrne, Kate King, Anne Moore and Elizabeth Stahl—the women’s literature book group—grounded my perspective by providing four real-life, impressive models of how literary experience can be a vital part of larger, well-lived lives. Reading and sharing literature with all of these active, proficient, pragmatic readers has kept the pleasures and power of reading aesthetically front and center in my life.

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Appendix A

Description of Schools

North Regional Middle School (NRMS) is the only middle school in a medium-sized town, located in the shadow of a branch of a state university and several surrounding colleges. The school, which serves 750 children, includes sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The predominantly middle class student body is 70% white and 30% students of color. The English teachers from the NRMS work as part of teams of teachers who each have responsibility for one of the major subject areas—mathematics, English, social studies and science. The Reading Specialist works with small groups of students as needed to support the school's curriculum and instruction.

The East Middle School is a large middle school which is part of an urban public school system. The 750 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students who attend the East are predominantly poor, working class, Hispanic and African-American. The Language Arts teachers who participated in this study teach in grade level teams that rotate students throughout the day, each teacher focusing on a particular subject area. At the time of the study, looping was in effect for 7th and 8th grades so that the teachers taught each grade level every other year. The Special Education teacher teaches Language Arts as one aspect of the curriculum in a self-contained, multi-graded classroom that is also part of the school.

South School is a K-8 school located in a medium-sized city which is immediately adjacent to a densely-populated urban center. Sixth, seventh and eighth grade students are housed in the same building as the students in the lower grades. Serving 520 students from the spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, the sixth grade teachers from the South School teach language arts as part of a larger curriculum in self-contained classrooms. The eighth grade language arts teacher combines language arts and social studies in a humanities model program.

Appendix B Pre-Study Participant Materials

Susan C. Griffith

Lesley College, 29 Everett, Cambridge, MA 02138

Who am I?

I am an adjunct faculty member at Lesley College, Wheelock College and Boston College where I teach children's literature, multicultural children's literature and research methods. I also work as a literacy coach at the Mary E. Curley Middle School in Jamaica Plain and am a student in Lesley College's doctoral program in Educational Studies. As a doctoral candidate, I am studying factors that influence teachers' interpretations of children's literature.

What is the research project?

With a focus on the experiential dynamics of reading, this qualitative research study will explore teacher's experiences reading children's literature. Verbal report data will be gathered from interviews and think alouds with twelve middle school teachers who teach language arts. Data will be organized and analyzed to understand the frameworks that inform teachers' selections and interpretations of children's books.

This research study will form the basis for my dissertation. All research, analysis and reporting will be carried out in conjunction with my senior advisor, Dr. May Carson Reinhardt, Associate Professor, Lesley College.

What would a session be like?

Research will be conducted with individual teachers in two one and a half hour sessions. Each teacher will be asked to fill out a survey about personal and professional background to bring to the first session. In each of the sessions, teachers will be interviewed about aspects of their experiences with children's literature. They will also be asked to think aloud—i.e. to verbally report their thinking—while reading short stories or excerpts from works of realistic fiction written for children.

Sessions will be scheduled outside the parameters of a school day at the convenience of teachers and myself. Sessions may be conducted on school premises or in another place mutually agreeable to both parties. Both sessions will be audio taped and transcribed. Teachers will receive an honorarium of \$100 for their participation

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All sessions are confidential. Participants will remain anonymous; they will be referred to by initials only or given pseudonyms in all discussions and written material. Participants should be aware, however, that *the discussions, written material, verbal report data from the sessions and quotations from the sessions will be part of a dissertation and eventually may be part of other published work*. Participants will be given the opportunity to review transcripts. Participants will be asked to sign a formal release allowing the information to be used in research and possible publication.

Would you like to participate?

If you would like to participate or would like to discuss the possibility of participating with me individually, please fill out this form and return it to me by mail as soon as possible. Please feel free to be in touch by phone or e-mail as well if you would like more information.

Factors That Influence Teachers' Thinking about Children's Literature

Session I

Preparation

Fill out questionnaire related to teaching experience, children's literature experience, reading habits and personal background. This should take about 20 minutes. We will go over it during the first session to make sure that we have a common understanding of the information.

Think about a children's book you have a strong connection with, a children's book you are most comfortable sharing with children and a children's book you are uncomfortable sharing with children.

N.B. You do not need to limit your thinking to children's books for middle school age children. Even though all study participants will be middle school teachers, children's literature should be interpreted broadly as books published for children from infancy to age fourteen. This will make it possible for conversation to draw from the widest range of experiences with children's books.

Agenda

Go over questionnaire.

Talk about the children's books with which you have a strong connection, are most comfortable sharing with children and are uncomfortable sharing with children.

Read/think aloud and talk about a short story provided at the time.

Session II

Preparation

Reflection on previous session.

Agenda

Talk over thoughts and questions that have arisen since the previous session.

Read/think aloud and talk about a short story provided at the time.

Read and talk about excerpts from works of fiction provided at the time.

Permission Form

I agree to be interviewed for the research project "Factors That Influence Teachers' Thinking about Children's Literature" being conducted by Susan C. Griffith as part of requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Studies at Lesley College with the guidance of Dr. May Carson Reinhardt, Associate Professor, Lesley College.

I understand the following:

I will participate in two research sessions of approximately one and one half hours each and will be paid \$100.00 for participating. My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

The information given in each of the research sessions is confidential; I, and my school, will remain anonymous in all written material and discussion of the results of the research.

Quotations and other data gathered from the research sessions will be part of a dissertation and eventually may be part of other published work.

Susan C. Griffith has my permission to use all material from the research sessions in which I participate in her doctoral dissertation as well as in possible future publications with the understanding that information is confidential. Neither my name or my school's name will be used in any written material of discussion of the results of this research

Participant

Date

Susan C. Griffith, Researcher

Date

Appendix C Participant Profiles

Anna, Eighth Grade Language Arts Teacher

Anna has taught at intermediate and middle school levels almost exclusively for the same school district for 28 years. She teaches 8th grade Language Arts at South School and has a master's degree in reading. She connected completing some of the questions on the survey with a recent professional development experience that caused her to reflect on her personal reading and writing habits: "We talked in small groups about what impressed us when we were little about reading . . . So when I wrote that I thought, 'Oh, I think I've answered these questions before'" (Anna 1, S1, P18)

Anna is the first in her family to attain a college degree: "Well, I was just thinking that I never realized before that I am the first person in my family to graduate from college. I never realized that. I was the oldest of six, my mother wanted desperately to go to college to be a writer and my grandfather said 'You go to teachers' college ,or you don't go.' And she didn't go. She went to work as a secretary"(Anna 1, S?, P?). Anna calls her family of origin middle or upper middle class because her father owned a small business: " Well, my father was a blue collar worker, however, it was his own business. He didn't go to work in a suit and tie and my mom stayed home. So it was between, I guess, middle class and upper middle class, but I wasn't sure so I just checked middle class. I mean they weren't college educated but, yet, we never really wanted for anything." (Anna 2, S1, P22)

Articia, Seventh Grade Language Arts Teacher

Articia is a first year teacher who teaches at the East Middle School where she was once a student. She teaches 7th grade language arts. With a bachelor's degree in English, she is pursuing a master's degree in special education.

Articia's family's roots are in the South of the United States and in the Caribbean. Her response to being asked whether she is the first in her family to graduate from college distinguishes her from other participants: Her answer is "no" and, where others listed only parents or siblings that had gone before them, she includes her cousins' accomplishments along with those of her mother, who has a degree in early childhood development, and brother. She says she "grew up where my mother was the breadwinner" (Anna 1, S1, P83). She lists her background as working class and the group she belongs to as Black American.

Betty, Sixth Grade Teacher

Betty is a European-American veteran teacher of 30 years. Betty alternately teaches fifth and sixth grade in a self-contained classroom at South School. Language Arts is one of a range of subjects she is responsible for teaching.

Betty has a master's degree in Urban Education and says: "I had a good college education. I had a strong academic background. But . . . as far as for [the past] 25 years, I've been involved in additional education which I think is probably more meaningful in terms . . . [of] whether people stay in education or don't stay in education. It depends on the quality of their professional development, either self-initiated or system-initiated . . . I would say that participating in professional development of my own choosing has

probably been about the most significant thing in terms of keeping me interested in things”(Betty 1, S1, P35). Most of her recent professional development has been in mathematics and science, but she mentioned her participation in a course in African Literature taken at a local university as relevant to the research sessions she engaged in for this study.

Two of four of Betty’s siblings have college degrees—one in business, one in health management/nursing. Her mother was a nurse and her father an insurance salesman. She chooses “lower middle-class” as the term that best describes her family of origin’s socio-economic status.

Carol, Seventh and Eighth Grade Language Arts Teacher

Although she is equivalent in age to the veteran teachers in this study, Carol has taught English Language Arts to 7th and 8th graders at the East Middle School for only eleven years. Prior to this, she taught elementary grades in American schools in Kenya. She speaks Swahili, has a master’s degree in education and, in addition to her regular teaching load, teaches in a reading program designed to support skill development in struggling readers.

Carol’s father worked as a dental technician, her mother as a medical secretary. She talks about her middle class family of origin:

We were a very active family, traveling, a variety of interests. We were a large, relatively large family, we were five children. My mother loved opera. So . . . we had to listen to the opera every Saturday, the Metropolitan Opera . . . Now my father was not into that. He liked jazz and my mother also played the

piano . . . so there was a lot of music in the house. My sisters played the violin. My brother played the drums and the timpani. I played piano. And so there was a lot of noise and music and a lot of books. And yet, neither one, my mother went to the conservatory but never finished. My father never went to college. But it was a very stimulating, we were close, we argued and quarreled, we had our little fights and all, but [we were a] pretty tight-knit family.

Carol, who is both African-American and Asian-American, says she is not the first in her family to attain a college degree; while she does not indicate their relationship to her, she lists others in her family as having degrees in law, medicine and theater arts

Dee, Middle School Reading Teacher

Dee's role at NRMS is to provide reading and study skill support to 6th, 7th and 8th grade students; her responsibility is to support the curriculum and the work of the teachers in the school. With a masters degree in reading and writing, she has worked with students and reading for twenty-two years at both middle and high school grade levels.

Dee is a European-American who grew up in a middle class family. Her mother did "summer work" but was "really a housewife." She lists her father's occupation as "Executive Director, Boys' Clubs of America (really a social worker)." She is the first in her family to graduate from college.

Elaine, Middle School Special Education Teacher

With a master's degree in special education, Elaine is in the first years of her career. Her five years of experience include teaching in special education at both the elementary and high school level. She is presently responsible for a self-contained, multi-grade middle school classroom for special education students at the East Middle School.

Elaine hails from a European-American family that she cites as both middle and upper-middle class. She lived in Manhattan until she was twelve when her family moved to suburban New York. She describes her time growing up as having "a lot of activities and sports and books and there was always family around and friends. There was always something" (Elaine 1, S6, P520). Her father works as a corporate banker, her mother as a teachers' aide. She is the first in her family to graduate from college.

Kay, Eighth Grade English Teacher

Kay is a veteran teacher who has worked her entire twenty-two year career working for the same school district. She has taught developmental reading, English to seventh through ninth graders and coordinated a writing center. She has a masters in education and currently teaches 8th grade English at NRMS.

Kay grew up in a middle class, European American family in New Hampshire and Connecticut. Her mother was a homemaker. Her father held an associate's degree in aircraft engineering and worked as a field service representative for an aircraft company.

Mark, Sixth Grade Teacher

Mark, who has worked as a storyteller, puppeteer and musician, currently teaches sixth grade in a self-contained classroom at South School. He has taught in some capacity for the past twenty-eight years, mostly music on a part-time basis. He says: “I think it’s important to know that I have been in this line of teaching [i.e. classroom teaching] only for a few years” (Mark 1, S1, P7).

Mark holds two master’s degrees, one in the history of religion, the other in elementary education. His sister, mother and father have college degrees in social work, elementary education and law, respectively. He indicates that his family of origin was lower middle class because “Dad was very conscious of being poor. He had been fairly poor as a steel worker’s son in a large Catholic family and he had gone through the depression. And he was worried. He was always worried about money. He didn’t make a lot. He was a lawyer, but he was a corporation lawyer who made a little bit of money” (Mark 1, S6, P323).

Mary, Eighth Grade English Teacher

Mary has been teaching for nine years, first for a rural school district in Maine and now for NRMS. She has taught English to both seventh and eighth grade students. She focused on English teaching in her undergraduate years and received an M.A. T. in English Education in 1989.

Mary’s family lived in upstate New York where her “father . . . [was] a pediatrician which means before he retired last year he worked 75, 80 hours a week typically” (Mary 1, S1, P51). Mary says she “grew up with the stay-at-home mom, the

dad who went to work, the siblings, [a] very traditional family” (Mary 2, S1, P14).

Mary’s two brothers and her sister all hold college degrees. She is European-American and chooses upper middle class as the best description of her family of origin’s socio-economic class.

Sharon, Seventh and Eighth Grade Language Arts Teachers

Sharon’s thirty-one year career teaching for an urban school district includes teaching in elementary schools and her work at the East Middle School first as a reading teacher and, now, as a language arts teacher. She holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and a masters’ degree in reading.

Sharon chooses working class as the best descriptor of her family of origin’s socio-economic group because both of her parents’ worked—her father as a tool maker and her mother as a gift-wrapper for a local department store. She says that even though her father “did not graduate from high school. He got a GED” (Sharon 1, S6, P495) he had a good vocabulary and “did the daily crossword in the papers”(Sharon 1, S6, P495). Sharon’s sister, a medical secretary, was the first in their family to earn a college degree. Sharon is a European-American who has lived and worked in the same city her whole life.

Shirley, Seventh and Eighth Grade Language Arts Teachers

Shirley has earned degrees in elementary education and reading. She has taught at the elementary and middle school levels for the same urban school system for over

thirty-one years. She presently teaches language arts to seventh and eighth graders at the East Middle School.

Both of Shirley's parents were immigrants from Europe to the United States. Her mother's occupation was "mother, wife, homemaker," her father's security guard. Shirley says that her parents "had very little education, but they seemed to know what to do, and they seemed to know what to value especially education and respectability and honesty and faith. . . of course my mother worked in the home and she was always very ill, but, um, I don't know they [her parents] just seemed very smart. You know, and I think, myself included, and some of the rest of the world today may have degrees, but sometimes I wonder if we're as smart" (Shirley 2, S1, P40). Sharon grew up in the city she teaches in and is the first in her working class family of origin to attain a college degree.

Appendix D Reader Profile Survey

Please fill out the questionnaire as fully as possible. Feel free to continue on the other side of the page if you need more room. This questionnaire will be discussed as part of the first research session.

Teaching and Children's Literature Experience

1. How many years have you been teaching? _____
2. What is your present teaching position? _____
3. Please make a brief list of the places, grade levels and/or subjects you have taught:

4. Have you ever taken a children's literature course? ____yes ____no If yes, please give a brief description of the course, telling when and where you took it.

5. Have you, or do you read, discuss or share children's books with young people on a regular basis outside of your teaching responsibilities? If so, please explain.

6. Are you required to teach specific children's books to the students you now work with? If so, what are those books?

7. What children's books have you used in your teaching during the 1999-2000 school year?

Reading Practices

8. Make five statements about your childhood reading habits and practices.

9. How often do you read a newspaper?

- a) every day _____
 b) a few times a week _____
 c) once a week _____
 d) less than once a week _____

10. How many magazines do you read on a regular basis? _____ Please list their titles:

11. Which categories of books have you read in the past six months? Please check all that apply:

- a) fiction/novels/short stories _____
 b) about recreation/entertainment _____
 c) current affairs/history _____
 d) science/social science _____
 e) inspiration/religion _____
 f) other _____

Please list the last two books you have read in the previous six months:

12. How often do you read the following types of documents for your work?

Document Type	a) every day	b) a few times a week	c) once a week	d) less than once a week	e) never
Letters and memos					
Journal reports/ magazine articles					
Manuals or reference books					
Directions/ instructions					

13. How often do you read the following types of documents at home?

Document Type	a) every day	b) a few times a week	c) once a week	d) less than once a week	e) never
Letters and memos					
Journal reports/ magazine articles					
Manuals or reference books					
Directions/ instructions					

Educational Background

14. Please list your college degrees, fields and majors.

Degree

Field

Major

15. Are you the first in your family to graduate from college? ☐ yes ☐ no

If not, who else has a college degree? In what field?

Person

Degree

Field

16. Did you study literature formally in college? If so, please briefly describe.

Personal Background

17. Where were you born? _____

18. Where did you grow up? _____

19. Please indicate the group you belong to:

___ African American ___ Asian American ___ Hispanic American

___ Native American ___ European American

Other _____

20. What is your first language? _____

21. What other languages do you speak? _____

22. Age: ___ 20 - 29 ___ 30 - 39 ___ 40 - 49 ___ 50 - 59 ___ 60+

23. Please indicate the group that best describes your family of origin's socio-economic class:

___ Poor ___ Working Class ___ Lower Middle Class

___ Middle Class ___ Upper Middle Class ___ Upper Class

Other _____

24. Please list your mother's and father's occupations while you were growing up:

Mother's Occupation(s) _____

Father's Occupation(s) _____

Appendix E

Short Stories Used for Think Alouds

cause of the snow, was out shoveling the cinderblock front steps when she spotted the pup on the road. She set down the shovel.

"Hey! Come on!" she called.

The puppy stopped in the road, wagging its tail timidly, trembling with shyness and cold.

Doris trudged through the yard, went up the shoveled drive and met the dog.

"Come on, Pooch."

"Where did that come from?" Mrs. Lacey asked as soon as Doris put the dog down in the kitchen.

Mr. Lacey was at the table, cleaning his fingernails with his pocketknife. The snow was keeping him home from his job at the warehouse.

"I don't know where it came from," he said mildly, "but I know for sure where it's going."

Doris hugged the puppy hard against her. She said nothing.

Because the roads would be too bad for travel for many days, Mr. Lacey couldn't get out to take the puppy to the pound in the city right away. He agreed to let it sleep in the basement while Mrs. Lacey grudgingly let Doris feed it table scraps. The woman was sensitive about throwing out food.



Stray

In January, a puppy wandered onto the property of Mr. Amos Lacey and his wife, Mamie, and their daughter, Doris. Icicles hung three feet or more from the eaves of houses, snowdrifts swallowed up automobiles and the birds were so fluffed up they looked comic.

The puppy had been abandoned, and it made its way down the road toward the Laceys' small house, its ears tucked, its tail between its legs, shivering.

Doris, whose school had been called off be-

By the looks of it, Doris figured the puppy was about six months old, and on its way to being a big dog. She thought it might have some shepherd in it.

Four days passed and the puppy did not complain. It never cried in the night or howled at the wind. It didn't tear up everything in the basement. It wouldn't even follow Doris up the basement steps unless it was invited.

It was a good dog.

Several times Doris had opened the door in the kitchen that led to the basement and the puppy had been there, all stretched out, on the top step. Doris knew it had wanted some company and that it had lain against the door, listening to the talk in the kitchen, smelling the food, being a part of things. It always wagged its tail, eyes all sleepy, when she found it there.

Even after a week had gone by, Doris didn't name the dog. She knew her parents wouldn't let her keep it, that her father made so little money any pets were out of the question, and that the pup would definitely go to the pound when the weather cleared.

Still, she tried talking to them about the dog at dinner one night.

"She's a good dog, isn't she?" Doris said, hoping one of them would agree with her.

Her parents glanced at each other and went on eating.

"She's not much trouble," Doris added. "I like her." She smiled at them, but they continued to ignore her.

"I figure she's real smart," Doris said to her mother. "I could teach her things."

Mrs. Lacey just shook her head and stuffed a forkful of sweet potato in her mouth. Doris fell silent, praying the weather would never clear.

But on Saturday, nine days after the dog had arrived, the sun was shining and the roads were plowed. Mr. Lacey opened up the trunk of his car and came into the house.

Doris was sitting alone in the living room, hugging a pillow and rocking back and forth on the edge of a chair. She was trying not to cry but she was not strong enough. Her face was wet and red, her eyes full of distress.

Mrs. Lacey looked into the room from the doorway.

"Mama," Doris said in a small voice. "Please."

Mrs. Lacey shook her head.

"You know we can't afford a dog, Doris. You try to act more grown-up about this."

Doris pressed her face into the pillow. Outside, she heard the trunk of the car slam shut, one of the doors open and close, the old engine cough and choke and finally start up. "Daddy," she whispered. "Please."

She heard the car travel down the road, and, though it was early afternoon, she could do nothing but go to her bed. She cried herself to sleep, and her dreams were full of searching and searching for things lost.

It was nearly night when she finally woke up. Lying there, like stone, still exhausted, she wondered if she would ever in her life have anything. She stared at the wall for a while.

But she started feeling hungry, and she knew she'd have to make herself get out of bed and eat some dinner. She wanted not to go into the kitchen, past the basement door. She wanted not to face her parents.

But she rose up heavily.

Her parents were sitting at the table, dinner over, drinking coffee. They looked at her when she came in, but she kept her head down. No one spoke.

Doris made herself a glass of powdered milk

and drank it all down. Then she picked up a cold biscuit and started out of the room.

"You'd better feed that mutt before it dies of starvation," Mr. Lacey said.

Doris turned around.

"What?"

"I said, you'd better feed your dog. I figure it's looking for you."

Doris put her hand to her mouth.

"You didn't take her?" she asked.

"Oh, I took her all right," her father answered. "Worst looking place I've ever seen. Ten dogs to a cage. Smell was enough to knock you down. And they give an animal six days to live. Then they kill it with some kind of a shot."

Doris stared at her father.

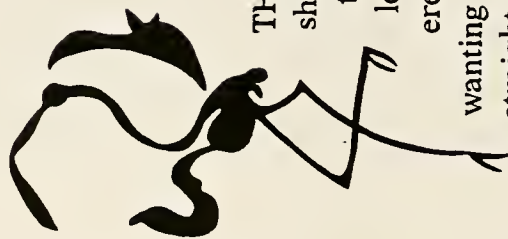
"I wouldn't leave an ant in that place," he said. "So I brought the dog back."

Mrs. Lacey was smiling at him and shaking her head as if she would never, ever, understand him.

Mr. Lacey sipped his coffee.

"Well," he said, "are you going to feed it or not?"

A GOOD DEAL



THE COURTROOM IS PACKED. MANNY shifts in his seat, trying to create some distance between himself and the guy on his left, a scary-skinny, career-felon type, covered with tattoos. He turns to his right, wanting to talk, but Albert and Jason are staring straight ahead, barely breathing, like they're in awe of the judge. They're the best friends a guy could have, Manny thinks, better than brothers, but man, are they uptight. Never been to court before, neither of them. Manny's got one prior, a couple of years ago when he was still Family Court age. It's not much, but it's better than nothing.

"Hey," he whispers, elbowing Albert, who jumps in his seat, his trance broken. "How long do you think they're going to make us wait? I got things to do today." Manny grins, like getting arrested is nothing more than an inconvenience, a slight stress on his time. But Albert just shakes his head, and Manny can't tell if that means Albert doesn't know or he's too scared to talk.

"Manuel Riveira!" The judge's voice booms, and Manny can feel it down to the soles of his shoes. He leaps out of his seat like an uncoiled spring.

"Here!" he answers, proud of the strength of his voice, ignoring the peculiar sensation of his legs turning to rubber.

"You're going to Courtroom B, right next door," the judge orders. "Don't move until I call recess."

Manny stands there, waiting. He's got no idea what the judge is talking about; he can't make sense of the words. A dark-haired woman standing in front of the courtroom catches his eye. She points at Manny, then at herself, and then at the door. She holds up an outstretched palm, signaling five minutes. The judge calls Jason next, and Manny sits down quickly. He doesn't even flinch when Tattoo Man's green hand brushes up against his thigh. He pretends not to notice.



An hour passes before the judge finishes calling everyone's names and he finally dismisses them from the courtroom. Manny can't believe it. So much for five minutes. Justice is in no hurry at all.

The same woman who pointed at Manny also wants to talk to Albert and Jason. She's carrying a stack of files when she approaches them in the crowded corridor outside Courtroom B. Manny stares at her, studying her face. Up close, she looks really young—not bad, either. He smiles like he'd smile at her if they met at a party. Bad move. She doesn't smile back. She stares at him until he's ready to give up smiling for the rest of his life. She's a lot tougher than eighteen.

"Good morning," she says, looking none too happy but mercifully breaking the silence. "I'm your public defender. We need to talk. You can call me Cecilia, my last name is too hard to say." Manny's never heard anyone talk so fast in his life. He glances at Albert and Jason. One of them better speak up, because he sure as hell isn't going to open his mouth.

Jason clears his throat. "Excuse me," he cuts in. "You mean you're our lawyer?"

"Right," Cecilia continues. "All three of you got hooked in under the new gambling statute, is that correct?"

She opens a file and flips through it. "Let's see. You were arrested paying off your bookie in the parking lot behind the airport." She smiles suddenly, like she's amused. She looks at Manny. "Sounds like a setup to me. What do you think?"

Manny shrugs like he's got a million more pressing things on his mind.

"I don't know," he says, determined to play it safe. "You're the lawyer."

"That's right. I am." Cecilia keeps on smiling. "Now listen, all three of you. I've already talked to the D.A., and considering you guys seem to be pretty clean kids, she's willing to offer you three months unsupervised probation with your records completely cleared at the end of three months. How does that sound? Good deal?"

Manny doesn't say anything, but for some reason, he trusts her. She talks so fast, she must be a good lawyer. Jason does his throat-clearing thing again.

"So we can go home today and that's it?" he asks.

"Right. Keep your noses clean for three months, and it's like none of this ever happened." Cecilia shifts her files and glances over her shoulder. "I don't want to rush you into anything, but I can't afford to spend too much time on this. I've got some people facing some pretty serious charges who need my attention."

Albert jams his hands into his jeans pockets. "Let's do it," he says. "I mean, let's get out of here." Albert is not having a good time. Manny punches him in the shoulder. The guy needs support.

Jason turns to Manny. "If it's okay with you, it's okay with me, you know what I'm saying?"

Manny nods. No problem.

"Great," Cecilia says. She can't stop smiling now—it's like her day is made. "Go on into Courtroom B and have a seat. You might have to wait a while, but when the bailiff calls your names, come up to the bench. I'll be there. The judge will ask you how you want to plead, and all you have to do is tell him you're pleading guilty. He'll give you your three months probation—unsupervised, so it's nothing, really—and that'll be it." She pauses suddenly. Manny shakes his head. She's amazing. He was wondering when she would need to come up for air. "Okay? All set?" she asks, diving right back in again. "I'll see you in there. Be patient." She turns to go, ready to focus on all those people facing serious charges.

"Tough break," Jason says as he playfully throws an arm around Manny's shoulders. "How's it feel to plead guilty to something you didn't even do?"

Cecilia stops dead in her tracks, like she just hit a wall. She turns and stands face to face with Jason.

"What did you just say?" She is definitely not smiling. Manny tries to remember the last time he was scared of a girl.

Jason glances at him, confused.

"I just mean," Jason explains, "that Manny's never been involved in our gambling ring. It's just Albert and me and some other guys. Manny came along for the ride in case we needed his help with the bookie."

Cecilia looks at Manny. "You mean you're a fighter, not a gambler?"

Manny shrugs. "Something like that."

"So you were about to go into that courtroom and plead guilty to something you didn't even do?" Her voice drops and she looks almost sad. "I'm sorry," she says. "This is partly my fault. Maybe I should have explained better. But you have to speak up! It's just plain wrong to plead guilty when you're not. What are you afraid of?"

You! Manny wants to scream with all his might, but he knows it's impossible. He shrugs again.

"I thought it would be easier if I just went along with your plan," he says.

"No. There's nothing easy about it. It's wrong." Cecilia sighs, subdued. "Listen, I'm going to enter a not guilty plea for you, and you're going to have to come back next week. Then we'll move for dismissal

of your case altogether." She points at Jason and Albert. "You two are both guilty, aren't you?" They nod, almost in unison. "I'll see you all in Courtroom B in a little while, then." She puts her hand on Manny's shoulder and stares straight into his eyes. "And as for you, I'll see you next week as well. I'm counting on it."

"And I'm looking forward to it," Manny says, because he knows she's trying really hard not to smile.

Next week, Cecilia's not smiling. At least, Manny doesn't think she is. He doesn't know for sure because he can't even find her.

She's not in Courtroom B or any of the other courtrooms, and she's not in the corridor. Manny doesn't know where else to look. He slips into Courtroom B and sits down in the last row of seats. Maybe he blew it. Maybe today's the wrong day or he's in the wrong place or it's too early or too late. Maybe no one knows he's there.

"Manuel Riveira!" Okay, so they know he's there. The bailiff gestures to the front of the courtroom. "Come forward, please."

He starts up the aisle, and a man with bushy red hair meets him halfway. The man grabs Manny's arm and whispers into his ear: "Hi. I'm Paul. I'm your public defender."

Manny wants to laugh, but he's afraid he won't be able to stop.

"No you're not," he whispers back, instead. "Where's Cecilia?"

"She's across town doing a felony trial. I'm handling her smaller cases today." Paul looks up at the judge's bench. "Your Honor," he says, "may I have a minute with my client?"

"One minute and only one minute," the judge responds. He does not look happy. "I've got a full docket here."

Manny wants to offer to come back at a more convenient time for everybody, but Paul is pushing him into a chair at a table in front of the bench. Every inch of the tabletop is covered with files. Paul finds the one he's looking for and whips it open. He elbows Manny in the ribs.

"It says in here they offered you three months unsupervised probation. That's a gift! You have to take it."

"But I'm not guilty!" Manny whispers as loudly as he can.

"Come on," Paul says, his voice rising. "In three months you'll be right back to normal. It's a good deal!"

Manny leans back in his chair, trying to slow things down, trying to stay in control, trying to

remember how to think. His mind is racing, but it's going nowhere. The judge is staring at him.

"Is there a problem here, Mr. Riveira?" the judge does not exactly ask. Paul grabs Manny's arm again, harder this time.

"It's a good deal," he repeats, as if chanting a mantra. The judge continues to stare.

"Okay. Let's do it," a voice says, and Manny doesn't even remember thinking the words.

It's all over in a minute.

Manny walks out of Courtroom B alone. You're a free man now, he tells himself. You're never coming back here again. Celebrate. Be happy.

But his mind wanders—*three months . . . unpervised . . . a gift*—and he is not smiling.

There's a crowd standing in front of the elevators. Manny slips his hands into his jeans pockets, ready to wait patiently. He's got no place special to be. All around him, people are in a hurry. It's easy to identify the judges and lawyers, carrying their files and briefcases, but who are all the other people? Are they criminals, or are they just people accused of crimes? Who is guilty and who is innocent?

Manny waits with them, one of the crowd, trying to figure out the difference.



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