Talking about tales: Creating a culture of stories for moral engagement

Lana Rae Smylie

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TALKING ABOUT TALES:
CREATING A CULTURE OF STORIES FOR MORAL ENGAGEMENT

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
In
Interdisciplinary Studies: Integrative Option

by
Lana Rae Smylie

December 1998
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Approved by:
To	
Robert H. London
ABSTRACT

How can moral issues be addressed within the classroom in a way that engages students but avoids indoctrination of any preconceived set of values? This study examines theories of moral development and moral intelligence, particularly how the work of Robert Coles can be applied within a classroom setting. The study shows how one second grade classroom for a month became engaged in discussions of moral issues found in narratives, both read and told. It illustrates how stories are effective in engaging students in moral conversations, looking at their responses and feedback to the stories heard and their reflections on the issues involved.
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To Robert Coles,

who taught us to listen to children.
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Introduction

What is it about a story that has the power to capture us and not let go until its lesson has been infused into our minds and lives? Why do characters like Anne Frank, the Swiss family Robinson, Huck Finn, or Aslan burn themselves into our minds until we actually appropriate their dilemmas, their pain, their struggles as our own? How does this happen to each generation of readers, as these stories are told through the years? If we can discover what is involved in the inherent power of stories, perhaps we can apply its use to the deepest issues we face as a society, how to become good, moral people and how to teach our children to do so as well.

What is moral intelligence? How does one go about the process of developing moral intelligence? Is this a natural process that each individual goes through unaided? If not, what is the role of the teacher/parent? Are there stages in this development that are attached to specific ages? What are the essential features of an effective tool in promoting growth in moral intelligence? Wooster (1990), in his article entitled, "Can Character Be Taught? How We’ve Tried and What We’ve Learned," gives an overview of the historical trail of moral education methods tried in
our country since the mid-1880s, moving from special character education classes, to values clarification, to the just community or moral dilemma school, a new values education system, to the present day character-education-plus-self-esteem movement. Each has shown little or no results in changing actual behavior in children, thus not proving to be effective. In his conclusion, he states,

Creating a moral and effective school is a tricky, complex business. But schools where good books are regularly taught by honorable men and women would do a great deal to help students become decent and just (1990, p. 55).

The pursuit of these questions has led to the hypothesis that the use of narratives (stories—both told and read) is essential to the development of moral intelligence in children. It is through the telling of stories, both our own and of others, that one’s moral perspective has the opportunity to be stated, reflected upon, reevaluated, and consequently, potentially improved. The study described here was an attempt to see how a classroom teacher might be able to tap into this moral intelligence, engaging students in reflecting on and talking about moral issues found in stories.
Review of the Literature

To lay the groundwork for the examination of these questions, the germinal work of child psychiatrist, Robert Coles, has been utilized. A number of terms must be defined for the purpose of understanding this research:

Moral intelligence: "Our gradually developed capacity to reflect upon what is right and wrong with all the emotional and intellectual resources of the human mind" (Coles, 1997, p. 3).

Moral experience: The lived experience of an individual who is faced with a decision as to what is right or wrong in a particular situation. The person faces this experience as a whole entity, incorporating all three aspects of cognition, emotion, and action (Tappan, 1989). Tappan relies on the work of Bruner (1986) in this definition or moral experience. This view of moral intelligence retains the integrity of the whole person as they attempt to live a moral life.

Narrative: The telling of a story, whether from literature or out of one’s own experience, relating a sequence of events in a particular time and place. In this study, the term story or stories will mean narratives in general.
There are four major themes that run throughout all of Coles' works. First, children are moral beings. Reading the interviews that Coles (1986) has conducted with children over the years, one is struck by the profound ideas, questions, wonderings of his young subjects. As he faithfully recorded their thoughts and their stories as they related to a variety of issues, one glimpses the astounding depth of moral imaginations that are given voice by the respectful questions of a listener/learner.

Secondly, Coles believes moral growth is a fluid, nonlinear activity, rather than a set of age-related developmental steps as defined by Kohlberg, and others (1986). Kohlberg's theory of structured moral development (1981), built upon Piaget's work, asserts that a child's justice reasoning moves through a series of hierarchical stages. These stages are achieved in part as the child confronts experiences that produce moral disequalibrium (the inability to satisfactorily resolve the dilemma using their current level of moral reasoning). Moral disequalibrium is overcome as the child reorganizes her reasoning about justice. Kohlberg suggested that this reorganization follows exposure to examples of justice reasoning higher than her own, and, therefore, she becomes
more capable of solving the challenging moral dilemma. Kohlberg purposed that schools be established that promoted this moral growth, organized around just structures and morality discussions (called "Just Community" schools). They were, according to Kohlberg, likely to produce moral development in children.

Tappan (1998), however, reports that Kohlberg's theories and applications are facing major challenges. First, it is wedded to foundational and universalistic assumptions that are being met with mounting skepticism in the contemporary world. For example, there are fundamental theoretical incompatibilities between the individualistic perspective that characterizes its developmental dimension and the collective perspective that characterizes its educational dimension. In addition, the amount of time, energy and fiscal resources necessary to keep the Just community model in operation are becoming increasingly limited in most school.

Consequently, all but a very few of the Just Community schools that were in operation over the past two decades have now been shut down, both in the United States and in Europe (Tappan, 1998, p. 142).
Day (1991) also criticizes models of cognitive development (such as Kohlberg's) to the extent that they fail to address the affective dimension of moral action or to account for the place of narrative in the moral arena.

In contrast, Coles believes that moral growth happens in "moral moments", spurred by interaction, reflection, and struggle with one's own grasp of an experience; it is a complex combination of influence by experiences, people, and observations. Coles acknowledges the processes involved in moral reasoning and reflection, but rather than working with these processes in the vacuum of hypothetical dilemmas as Kohlberg recommended, he then "integrates it into a student's and a teacher's lived life" (1997, p. 183). In this way, he asserts, what we think and uphold intellectually connects to our daily deeds, "eliminating the disparity between thinking and doing" (1997, p. 184).

Kazemek agrees by viewing Kohlberg's moral dilemmas and values-clarification situations as exercises leading to moral abstraction and principles. In contrast, by examining characters in stories and their relationships, "children learn a morality of flesh and bone and not one of vague principles" (1986, p. 271).
Tappan has written extensively on the role of language in the actual formation and development of moral experience (1991a). Using the work of Vygotsky (1934/1962, 1978, 1981) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986), two Russian semioticians (those studying the signs and symbols of communication), he outlines the interplay between the psyche and language, with language being used as a psychological tool children use to solve problems.

Language—words—enter a child’s psyche from a variety of sources, always in a social context. Now as part of the child’s own psyche, those words carry on a constant dialogue, inner speech, and eventually outer speech as well. This is the process of internalization. This is the beginning of the formation of moral reasoning. As children now have begun to develop their own voice with moral words, their own words take on a discourse with the other voices already present in their psyche, therefore further mediating its growth. Thus the very act of speaking, of telling, of storytelling, is an extension of the work of language already going on in the psyche, and continues to shape the moral function and experience of the person.

Tappan also holds up moral authority as the goal of moral development (1989, 1991b). He reflects on how
telling a narrative is one's way of attaching meaning and one's own moral perspective onto events. As a person tells a story from their own experience, it differs from a simple listing of events in that they do "moralize"; they frame it with a particular significance which is uniquely theirs even as they carry on a constant dialogue with the other voices in their psyche. They, therefore, through telling the story, take ownership of this story and this moral perspective. In taking ownership, they accept responsibility and authority. They have learned the lesson of the story.

If individuals tend to represent and give meaning to their real-life moral experiences through narrative, then it makes sense to assume that a central aspect of the process of moral development is both expressed and enhanced through the moral stories they tell about their lives (1989, p. 189).

As authors of our own lives, we are necessarily responsible and accountable for our own thoughts, feelings, and actions in the world (1991b, p. 11).

Not only do one's own stories help in dealing with the complexity of moral development, but others' stories through literature do as well. Zbikowski agrees by saying,
"Good books" cannot produce "good people." But what reading literature can do is broaden and deepen the sense of all that must be taken into account to form complex moral judgment" (1994, p.17).

Elements of culture can influence the building of moral intelligence within generations. The oral traditions practiced in the Native American culture for hundreds of years have utilized this spiraling effect of stories (Trafzer, 1998). Young Native American children hear stories of their people from their elders repeated over and over throughout their childhood. At some point, the child is asked to tell the story herself. If she does not tell it correctly, she must listen and try again. According to Trafzer, the assumption that new lessons are learned with each new hearing throughout a child's early years are so common within Native American thinking that there is little documentation in their literature. The Native American people have so long accepted the power of a story to provide new lessons on each retelling throughout a child's life, they have relied on this method of passing on their culture to the next generation without finding it necessary to point out what they were doing. Perhaps it should not surprise us that a culture that has so long
relied on its oral traditions would not feel a need to document it.

Thirdly, Coles (1997) insists that moral growth comes from engaging in an exchange with moral adults. It means talking, listening, thinking, reflecting, wondering, worrying, observing. Coles (1997) emphasizes repeatedly the necessity of daily interaction around moral issues, thoughts, questions, and possible answers. This kind of discourse comes through adults sharing their own struggles and victories, pointing the children to their own moral decisions and how they arrived at them. Coles (1986) is quite unique in taking the role of a moral listener, putting himself in the role of a learner, carefully examining what a child can teach him. There is a definite reciprocity in this kind of moral exchange.

Coles' point here closely aligns itself with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as it relates to moral development (Tappan, 1998). According to Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development

... is the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in
collaboration with more capable peers (1978, p.86).

Tappan, then suggests that moral education from a Vygotskian perspective involves

... a process of guided participation whereby children are helped by parents, teachers and more competent peers to attain new and higher levels of moral functioning. These attainments occur initially within the ZPD, as new forms of moral thinking, feeling and action are introduced to children, and they are guided and assisted in their efforts to think, feel and act in these new ways. This is the essence of moral education (or "moral learning") from a Vygotskian perspective, and it sets the stage for moral development (1998, p. 148).

Tappan elsewhere refers to the work of Bakhtin (1986) as he points out that moral development necessarily requires the self responding in relation to a moral audience, emphasizing "the force that drives development, therefore, is clearly the experience of dialogue—both between and within persons" (1991b, p.19). It is through this dialogue, whether light and easy or conflicting and struggling, that one sorts out their voice and establishes their freedom from authoritative discourse (other voices demanding to be heard, accepted and not doubted). The person has become internally persuasive, having
internalized others' voice, and now claims authorship of the words for themselves (1991b). Zbikowski (1994) acknowledges the social nature of moral growth as well when he suggests that the approach to literature he examines would resemble a family that talks, argues, listens to each other as they sort out moral issues within complex situations.

Lastly, Coles (1989) has demonstrated that stories are a powerful tool which deeply engage a person, create a forum for the reflecting, questioning, and evaluating of one's perspective. He speaks of how he uses literature in his college courses at Harvard Medical University, and of the profound effect it has on his students as they reflect on implications for their lives not only as physicians, but as human beings. He marvels at

... the wonderful mimetic power a novel or a story can have—its capacity to work its way well into one's thinking life, yes, but also one's reveries or idle thoughts, even one's moods and dreams (1989, p. 204).

He suggests using stories with young people as well (1997). Here he describes what happened as a sixteen year old boy was discussing issues after watching the movie (another form of Story), "A Bronx Tale":

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I could see, that he had been prompted by a film to become a moral witness of sorts, quite stirred to contemplate this life’s rights and wrongs, not always so distinctly, conveniently, categorically differentiated, the one from the other. While watching the movie he had begun to look inward and, thereafter, to play close attention to the world around him. The film and the contemplation it prompted became for him a moral moment in his life. In his own philosophical words, "You get to wondering about how you’re going to live, how you should {live}.”

This boy had let me know that he, a moral witness to his own growing struggle to learn how to live a reasonably good life, had figured out how continually we are challenged morally. We don’t conquer this world’s mischief and wrongdoing and malice once and for all, and then forever after enjoy the moral harvest of that victory. Rather, we struggle along, even stumble along, from day to day, in need of taking stock yet again, with the help of a story, a movie, not to mention the experiences that inevitably and not so rarely, come into our daily lives. The good person is the alert witness not only of theirs, but to his or her own ethical tensions as they flash their various signals, warn of conflicts ahead or of ambiguities not so easy to resolve, or of mixed feelings and temptations and the rationalizations that justify them. This is the stuff of A Bronx Tale, the stuff of your life and mine (1997, p. 19-20).

Zbikowski explains it yet another way:

Using literature, author and readers can run “thought experiments” about the factors that condition human actions and about the
various consequences of those actions (1994, p. 9).

He goes on to explain how literature invites us to identify with the characters in the story and with the author and his or her values. Chesterton remarks, "The babe in the cradle knows of the dragon. He needs the stories to be aware of St. George."

Sometimes this can create a conflict with the reader's own value system, and thus is an opportunity for reflection, struggle, and growth. How one reads will effect how one is effected by what he reads, and Zbikowski suggests that

... the best reader is the Nimble Reader—one who can move around among styles of reading and levels of sympathetic identification, without withdrawing to the safety and relative sterility of an efferent reading (1994, p.13).

Kilpatrick also speaks of the power of story in developing moral intelligence when he suggests that

... morality has a visual base—or, if you want, a visible base. In other words, there is a connection between virtue and vision. One has to see correctly before one can act correctly (1993, p. 133).

He goes on to explain that we think, or "see", in pictures, and that those pictures are the stories by which
we interpret our lives; we naturally think in narratives.

Herein lies the power of storytelling:

The story suits our nature because we think more readily in pictures than in prepositions. And when a preposition or principle has the power to move us to action, it is often because it is backed up by a picture or image (p. 141).

In conclusion he further states:

The story in turn may give us the power or resolve to struggle through a difficult situation or to overcome our own moral sluggishness. Or it may simply give us the power to see things clearly. Above all, the story allows us to make that human connection we are always in danger of forgetting (p 143).

The specific kind of literature that best promotes growth in moral intelligence must be addressed since the wealth of choices available demands discernment. Zbikowski utilizes Auge's (1989) analysis of literature in delineating fables from parables. Fables come with a clearly defined moral, purporting an assumed moral value. Parables, on the other hand, challenge commonly held values, making the reader reconsider assumptions. Again, the reader is engaged in a struggle with voices. Zbikowski summarizes the use of literature in moral development by stating,
If from their reading students take away models, paradigmatic stories, by which to make sense of their own lives and the lives of others, then a sensitivity to the parabolic as well as the fabular dimension of literature would be an important contribution to their moral development (1994, p. 16).

Gooderham (1993) thinks that children may learn something from a tale on a high level, but moral engagement will not take place. However, literature that falls within a child’s zone of proximal development, as described earlier (Tappan, 1998), can be utilized for moral growth with the support and scaffolding of the adults guiding her.

Gillard (1996) speaks of students not only finding their own values, but finding themselves in stories.

It is a mystery, yet it makes sense. Telling stories, students explore their dark sides and confront their fears without having to act on them outside the story’s boundaries. They try on personalities different from the one they show publicly: bold, shy angry, optimistic, naïve, worldly.

At a time when the influence of the peer group and the media is so powerful, storytelling seems to help them honor who they already are as well as sample who they might or must not be (p. 135).

As effective a tool as literature is in the growth of moral intelligence, so, too, are the child’s own stories; those stories out of their own experiences which
encourage growth through the telling in both the speaker and the listener. Coles' (1986) recorded interviews with children clearly demonstrates not only the struggle of these young people as they wrestle with situations and issues, but also our own struggle as we, the reader, react to them. He states,

> Stories from real life as well as stories from the movies, from literature, can stir and provoke the moral imagination. Didactic or theoretical arguments don't work well; narratives, images, observed behavior all do (1997, p. 5)

As mentioned above, Tappan (1991b) raises the issue of authoring, or authority, as the goal of moral development and how it functions through children's own stories. Webb-Mitchell (1990) shares how his work with mentally disabled children was based on Coles' (1989) use of stories, and what he learned from their narratives. Some professional storytellers, as well, have branched off into the area of personal stories, recognizing the healing effect of telling in both the teller and the audience as can be seen in their presentations.

Moral education is required by the state of California to be part of the public school curriculum. Given recognition of Story's effectiveness at engaging children
in thinking about moral issues as we have discussed, can it 
be utilized in the classroom as a way of meeting this 
mandate? If so, questions arise in trying to understand 
exactly what this practice would look like within a 
classroom. After the story, what then? What would 
facilitate students' initial engagement into reflection 
immediately following a telling? And what would facilitate 
an ever-deepening look at the issues involved as students 
examine the meaning of a story and its relevance to their 
own lives? This study was done in an attempt to discover 
some answers to these questions and others as I tried to 
engage students in moral conversations through 
storytelling.
Method: Classroom Conversations

To understand the specific aspects of the kinds of engagement that took place in this study, it will be helpful to understand the context within which they occurred.

Description of the School

Ridgeview Elementary School is a four-track year-round school consisting of grades K through 5, with an enrollment of approximately 850 students. Being only 10 years old, it retains a majority of the teachers who were hand selected to open the school, with its motto, "To make a difference in the life of every child." That same attitude of personal accountability exists among the staff and faculty today, as they are called on to make no excuses for failure, to achieve success for every student. The school has a reputation for being a leader in implementing the best of teaching practices, often leading the way for other schools in the district in areas of improving instruction.

The school draws from a largely middle income population of a fast growing, rural town in Southern California. While that is generally true, the school also has lower income families in attendance because of the district's open enrollment policy; 23-24% of the students
enrolled are getting free or reduced lunches. A number of students are children of college professors and educators employed in a variety of settings. These students are seated alongside children of itinerant workers with the expectation that no distinction be made in terms of how they are treated by staff or how they are expected to treat each other.

Being a multi-track year-round school means that at any one time, three tracks will be in attendance and one track will be off. Statistically this means that at any given time throughout the year, between 21% and 29% of the school population is not in attendance. Special efforts, such as a monthly school-wide Spirit Day, school T-shirts, and weekly bulletins sent to all faculty (on or off track), are taken to create a unity within school despite the obstacles presented by missing members of the school community.

Description of the Cultural Climate of the School

Another way to meet the challenges of such a scattered configuration was to develop a positive school focus, thereby eliminating negative rules. Three years ago the principal introduced a focus that included four character traits or virtues: respect, responsibility, honesty, and
kindness. These four qualities are those that everyone at Ridgeview (staff, faculty, parents, and students) is familiar with and expected to demonstrate. Frequent reminders and examples of these traits are found on walls of the central office and multipurpose room, in the weekly staff bulletin, in the principal's monthly letter to parents, as well as within the walls and the daily workings of the individual classroom. This focus provided a familiar backdrop for this kind of study involving moral issues.

Description of the Students

This study was conducted in a second grade class composed of 31 students. Many of these children had been together since beginning their formal education in kindergarten. As first graders, they had been divided into two classes with a 20:1 student/teacher ratio. As second graders, they were being combined back into one class, but now with two teachers, as will be explained in more detail later. Having known each other for several years, the students were very comfortable with each other and shared a common background of knowledge and experiences from which they could collectively draw.
The academic range of the class was broad, with Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) scores reaching from 1 to 9. Two students were in the bilingual program, but only one took advantage of pull-out services of the bilingual aide for 40 minutes a day. Two students who had been identified with learning disabilities received daily instruction from the Resource specialist, spending the first hour and a half of the day with her before joining the class for the remainder of the day.

Description of the Teachers

Because of Ridgeview's full enrollment, the state's mandate of class size reduction had given this school a difficult challenge: how to maintain a 20:1 student/teacher ratio in grades one and two on an already-crowded site. The answer, for only the year in which this study took place, was to put two teachers together with not more than 32 students.

Chris Kelleghan and I brought a total of 22 years of teaching experience together as we co-taught this group of children. While teaching styles and philosophies differed, they were quite complimentary to each other. Curriculum areas or specific times of the day were not divided up as one or the other's responsibility; rather both teachers
participated fully in the class' activities. While one would be giving the main instruction, the other would be monitoring the class, occasionally adding a point to the instruction as she felt necessary and assisting individuals or small groups as needed.

My constructivist approach in teaching provided a natural framework within which to design a project that involved moral engagement without reverting to didactic means. It is my belief that children learn most effectively when presented with material with which they can evaluate from past experience and knowledge, discover new truths, and dialogue with others to create their own meaning. Therefore, developing a system through which they could make their own "moral discoveries" within a social context was consistent with the philosophy that drives my teaching practices.

Description of the Time and Length of Study

The study took place during the final month of the 1997-1998 school year. Each day, usually after the lunch recess, students were told a story and then discussed and/or wrote about the story in response to questions I presented. Occasionally a change in schedule or activities
precluded this time, so in those four weeks, a total of 15 story sessions were conducted.

Each session would begin with a short introduction of the book or story, or its author. I then either read or told the story. After the story, I asked questions about it. Most of the time these questions were asked within a discussion format. I would allow as many students to respond as time allowed, and a new question would often present itself from a student’s response. The length of each session varied due to the flexible nature of discussions, but they normally took between 20 and 30 minutes. Twice I asked the children to respond in writing to two or three questions, wanting to get a response from every child (something not feasible in a discussion). These sessions also lasted between 20 and 30 minutes.

Description of the Stories

As part of setting up this project, a great deal of time went into collecting books and stories that involved issues of character, virtues, civility, or morals. For this study’s purpose, I’ve referred to them as moral issues. I created a story bank of these (see Appendix A), including the approximate age group for which the story is
appropriate, and a brief description of the plot. From this story bank, as well as stories listed in Kilpatrick’s Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right From Wrong (1992) and Lamme’s Literature-Based Moral Education (1992), I compiled the stories that revolved around the four traits that our school focuses on: respect, responsibility, honesty, and kindness. It was from this group that I pulled out the 15 stories for the study.

Here, then, are the stories, with a brief description of each:

Big Bad Bruce
Bill Peet
A small, spunky witch puts a bear bully in his place.

“A Blind Man Catches a Bird”
from Peace Tales
Margaret Read McDonald, (Ed.)
A young man learns about forgiveness.

“Feeding His Clothes”
from Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest, (Ed.)
A rich man illustrates that “clothes do not make the man.”

The Gorilla Did It
Barbara Shook Hazen
A boy finds a unique way to not accept responsibility.

Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse
Kevin Henkes
A little girl lashes back at her teacher after he disciplines her, only to regret it later.
Pages of Music
Tony Johnston
A young man repays an entire village for their earlier kindness to his mother and him.

"The Parts of the House Argue"
from Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest. (Ed.)
A tale from the Philippines about a family and their house where everyone argues about being the most important.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin
Barbara Bartos-Hoppner
The Pied Piper rids Hamelin of a rat infestation, but isn’t rewarded as promised. The town suffers the consequences.

Pierre
Maurice Sendak
A little boy learns there are consequences to not caring.

"The Prince and the Rhino"
from Ordinary Splendors
Toni Knapp
A young prince learns the value of kind words and respect.

The Rough-Face Girl
Rafe Martin
A scarred young woman is rewarded for her kind heart.

Stellaluna
Janell Cannon
A young bat learns that her differences are OK.

"Slops"
from Peace Tales
Margaret Read McDonald, (Ed.)
A farmer and his wife come to discover a new world once they are willing to see things from another’s perspective.
Thy Friend, Obediah
Brinton Turkle
A colonial boy in the early days of Nantucket, and his experiences with a friendly, but annoying seagull.

"The Wooden Bowl"
from Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest, (Ed.)
A young boy teaches his parents the importance of treating elders with respect.

A combination of reading books aloud and telling stories was used since the two methods differ in the amount of interaction between the teller and the audience, and I wanted to see if this difference measurably changed the level of engagement found in the students’ responses.

Description of the Questions

One of the major challenges of moral education has been to satisfactorily address the question of whose values, whose morals are to be taught since it was the end product that was the focus. However, my focus would shift to the process, the dialogue, the engagement itself, not a predetermined product of the discussion. In deciding what would happen after the story was told, it was easier to decide what I did not want. I did not want questions that led to one right answer. I did not want students to feel that they were searching for the one and only lesson to be found, devoid of their own meaning. Didactic moralizing has
been part of past programs, and has been proven ineffective (Coles 1997, Kilpatrick 1992, Lamme 1992). Kazemek (1986) cautions that it is even more than ineffective:

Using children’s literature in a crudely didactic fashion is dangerous. Such moral didacticism can be harmful to children’s developing love of books and developing sense of moral interdependence. Likewise, such didacticism is harmful to the teacher because it puts her into the position of moral arbiter and inculcator—indeed, often into the role of moral propagandist (p. 269).

As a constructivist, foremost in my mind was to provide a format for some kind of dialogue as a means by which individual students would be assisted in their personal search for moral meaning (Coles 1997, Tappan 1991, Zbikowski 1992). The purpose would be to stir their thinking, their moral imagination and lead to personal application and evaluation. I wanted to set up an arena in which students could safely share their thoughts and ideas about issues within the story, listen to each other’s answers, and have the opportunity to affirm or challenge their own beliefs. My goal was to provide the freedom within which thought could fly, bounce into each other, and then be examined once they had landed. It would be within this setting that the behavior of characters within a story
would be reviewed, analyzed, and evaluated from the students' perspectives.

I began by looking at the area of literature responses to get a sense of what questions others have asked and how responses were categorized. Wollman-Bonella & Wechadio (1995) asked their first graders to respond in journals to the following questions regarding pieces of literature:

1) Feeling I had. Why?
2) What I liked or did not like. Why?
3) What I wish had happened. Why?
4) What the book reminds me of. Why?
5) Questions I have.

They then sorted responses into two main categories and several subcategories:

Text-Centered Responses
- Retelling: Recounts text events
- Understanding characters: Expresses understanding of character's thoughts or feelings, either stated or implied in the text
- Prediction: Predicts plot or character's actions

Reader-Centered Responses
- Personal reaction: Expresses student's thoughts or feelings about the text
- Relates to experience: Relates text to students' own experience
- Self in story: Expresses students' sense of being in the story or the desire to be participating in the story events

Lamme, Krough, and Yackmetz (1992) suggest that a literature-based approach to moral education requires a
transition from comprehension-based curriculum and its use of testing questions (what teachers already know) to authentic questions (what teachers really want to learn from their students). They defined authentic questions as those that dealt with the affective reactions of the students and relate the story to their own lives. They suggested these questions, and give the justification for each:

1) What happened in the story? This question focuses the children’s attention on what actually happened and assures that they understand what they read.

2) Why did this happen? A key to understanding the moral value in a story is understanding the character’s motives for behaving the way they do. This question helps children attribute meaning to the story.

3) How did this make the story character feel? In order to move up the scale of moral development, children need to understand how other people feel and how one person’s actions influence another’s feelings.

4) How did this make you feel? In order to respond at a personal level, the children have to have both affective and cognitive responses to a story. Unless a story impacts their feelings, the moral lesson in it is likely to be lost.

5) What does this remind you of in your own life? For children to internalize any of the ethical themes, they must link them to their own life experiences.
6) Did you learn something from reading this story? What was it? This question can elicit more thoughtful reflection about the moral theme of a book.

I combined these suggestions and developed the following list of questions which began with a testing question, then quickly moved into authentic questions:

1) What happened in this story?
2) Why did this happen?
3) What did you notice in the story?
4) How did this make the character feel?
5) How did this make you feel?
6) What does this remind you of in your own life?
7) What do you think this story was about?
8) Did you learn anything from this story?
9) What do you think the lesson of this story was?

At the outset of the project, I'd conjectured that asking each of these questions for each of the stories would provide the cleanest data for comparison purposes. As the story sessions proceeded, however, I found myself feeling too constricted by being bound to this structured list. Sometimes a particular story lent itself to opening the discussion with a question unique to that story alone, or to branching off from a point specific to that story. To follow a scripted list proved too confining for the kind of open dialogue I desired. Therefore, I ended up using
this list of questions as a guide during the discussion, adding or omitting, as I judged necessary at the time.

Description of Response Codes

Lamme (1992) included a response chart developed by Peterson and Eeds (1990) which developed response categories from high to low, giving examples of types of responses that would be included in each category. I also looked at Bloom’s Taxonomy to see how I could adapt his categories of higher level thinking onto the kinds of responses students might give in our discussions.

A three-tiered coding system was developed by which responses could be clearly coded. It is as follows:

Level 1—Linear Response: Retells a story or message. “I like the book.” “It was good.” Memorizes all or part of the story word for word. Has literal recall of the story. Answers factual questions about the story with one right answer.

Level 2—Interpretive Response: Provides a theme or moral. Includes plot recognition, theme, main ideas. Analyzes pictures of the story. Book links—references to other stories. Includes genre comparisons. Involves cause and effect of actions or intentions. Involves predictions
Level 3-Evaluative Response: Measures a story against a standard. Involves judgement. Refers to tone and mood of the story. Relates to emotions. Questions actions or motivations of character. Is individual, imaginative, not copied. Explores reasons why authors have written the way they have. Speculates on how alternative actions or motives would affect events. Within this study, I will define moral engagement as responses that demonstrate a process of personal evaluation against a personal standard or making a judgement, most closely aligned with the evaluative response in my coding system. While all three types of responses are important to fully process a story, the evaluative responses indicate a higher level of critical examination of right and wrong, including both the cognitive and affective domains, and a personal weighing of choices.

Description of Data Collection

Mrs. Kelleghan videotaped each story session, including both the story and the discussion afterwards, at an angle from which both the teller and the audience were viewed. On two occasions the students were asked to write
down their responses. This was done to ensure getting a response from every student and also to see whether written responses would elicit more or less complex, thoughtful answers.

The videotape of each story was then transcribed by hand, and each student response was given a number corresponding to the previously described coding method. From this transcription, the responses were then analyzed and compared to see what they could tell us about the students’ engagement with the stories and the issues involved.
Findings and Discussion:

What Does Engagement Look Like?

Within the findings of this study, we can look at the engagement of the students from three perspectives: in discussion, in feedback, and in application.

Engagement in Discussion

As the student responses were coded, it was found that all three response levels were represented throughout the stories. Each level of responses were examined for similarities and differences as I looked at the reflection and engagement revealed by individual responses.

Table 1. Stories and Total Responses at Each Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pages of Music</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden Bowls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Bad Bruce</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding His Clothes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pied Piper of Hamelin</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily's Purple Plastic Purse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prince and the Rhino</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stellaluna</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gorrilla Did It</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rough-Face Girl</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thy Friend Obediah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Blind Man Catches a Bird</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

35
Pierre 7 14 10
The Parts of the House
Argue 1 17 14
Slops 5 9 0

Level 1—Linear Responses.

I chose to include some testing questions (Lamme) at the beginning of each discussion to not only spot check comprehension of the plot, but also as a means of reviewing the main events.

Students easily answered the question, "What was this story about?" or "What happened in the story?" Most often the answer was a retelling of the story, sometimes in great detail. It seemed more difficult when I asked them to tell what happened in just a few words. Summarizing seemed beyond the students' ability at this point in their development.

Level 2—Interpretive Responses.

Interpretive responses were earlier defined as those which provided a theme or moral, recognized plots, themes, and main ideas, analyzed pictures, linked to other stories or genres, involved understanding of cause and effect, involved predictions, translated story to own experiences, and attached a personal lesson to a story.
Interpretive responses in this study came primarily within two main groupings. The first group was relating the story to their concrete personal experience. In the discussion after a story, the students easily found comparison to events in their own lives; the question, "What does this remind you of in your own life?" was by far the one answered by the most children. No matter what type of story it was, the students easily related to it on a personal basis, such as:

"It reminded me of when someone lied to me."

"One time I went to the park, and these kids made fun of my color."

"When my sister said my parents cared more about her than me."

"I made a mess in my room and blamed it on my sister."

"The time when my next door neighbor said, 'I don't want to be your friend because you look black.'"

"I thought a dog was mean, but it wasn't."

"I tried to say 'sorry' to someone, and they walked away."

"When I broke my ankle, and had my cast for three weeks. It felt new to me to stand by myself, just
like it'd feel new to (Stellaluna) to hang differently."

It is important to note that their personal experiences usually featured themselves as the injured party, victims of some form of injustice. This is understandable, since at age 7 or 8, these children are still very egocentric in their social awareness. It is difficult for them to see the injury they themselves inflict on others. This coincides with Kohlberg's (1981) stage of moral development for this age group, being unable to view their own actions through another's perspective. With some prompting, however, some children were able to recall incidents where they were guilty of similar unfair or hurtful behavior toward others. One might speculate that through the practice of stepping back together and examining a character's actions and motivations from a comfortable distance through stories, children may learn how to better reflect on their own behavior.

The second group of interpretive responses was what they thought the lesson of the story was. All students seemed to realize that there was a lesson or moral of some kind within each story, and the lessons seemed to fall into three categories. These same three categories were evident
whether the entire class responded to a writing prompt or only a few children were called on in a discussion. These categories are as follows and are illustrated with the exact lessons the students offered in response to hearing Lily's Purple Plastic Purse:

1.) A direct lesson specific to the story. These lessons are tied to specific situations within the story, and are a result of what happened within the story. They refer to an action in the story and speak to what could have been avoided.

"Not to do something when the teacher is talking."

"She should have thought before she did that."

2.) General lesson. These lessons are truths that relate to life on a general basis and not tied to a particular incident within the story. While they are related to a point from within the story, they turn to a more broad application, not simply to remedy the one problem in the story.

"We should obey our teacher."

"Don't judge people by what they do to you."

3.) Universal concept. These lesson are abstract
principles, removed completely from any specific context. These refer to truths about life in general. Very little, if any, of the actual story is involved.

"The story was about forgiveness and consequences."

It is notable that the interpretive responses of the students in this study reflect the concrete thinking typical of this age group. Abstract ideas are interpreted in very concrete, literal ways. For example, in the story Slops, the wee man wished that the husband could "see" with wee man’s eyes. When the husband eventually did, he could then see the tiny village that had been there all the while. When the students were asked if they had ever had an incident where they finally "saw" through someone else’s eyes, they told of occasions when someone had seen something that they couldn’t (e.g., while riding in a car). In A Blind Man Catches a Bird, it was said that the blind man looked at the young man “as if he could see right into his soul.” When asked how the blind man knew the young man had switched birds, one student said, “Because he looked into his soul and he could see.” This concrete way of thinking should be anticipated when dealing with abstractions in stories in order to help students gain an understanding of what is being discussed or asked.
Level 3—Evaluative Responses.

As defined earlier, evaluative responses are those that measure a story against a standard. In other words, they make a judgement of some kind. They also refer to a mood or tone in the story, relate to emotions, and question the actions or motivations of a character. These responses are more imaginative and individual rather than copied, explore reasons why authors have written the way they have, and speculate on how alternative actions or motives would affect events.

As this study progressed, it became apparent that responses were falling into three main categories answering the following questions: "Why?", "How did (character) feel?" and the open-ended questions of "What did you notice?" and "What surprised you?"

The first group of evaluative responses came in answer to why something happened in a story or why a character did something. Students were very capable of seeing cause and effect within situations, clearly stating the relationship between actions and the results of those actions. They were adept at making connections between characters, their motivations, their behavior, and the results of their behavior. When asked why the Rough-Face Girl could see the
Invisible Being but her sisters couldn’t, students answered, “She could see him because the Rough-Face Girl had an honest heart and they didn’t,” and “The older sisters were cruel and mean, and the other was kind, nice, and generous.”

Sometimes they even went further in speculating on a more appropriate course of action. For instance, in the book, *Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse*, when Lily hastily drew the hateful picture of Mr. Slinger and came to regret it, one girl said, “She should have thought about it before she did that.” She was able to see what had happened as a result of her hasty vindictiveness, and provided a solution. These questions require students to go through a process of evaluation, forcing them to examine their reasoning, and then make a judgment.

The second group of evaluative responses contained responses that related to the feelings of the characters. When asked how a character felt about a certain situation, students in this project were quick to identify the emotions, perhaps illustrating once again their keen sense of any personal hurt or injustice. In projecting how the character might have felt, some examples of their observations are:
“He thought he couldn’t trust that person.”

“His mom probably wanted to give him to somebody.”

“The didn’t like it. They felt they were going to get hurt.”

“The mom would feel sad and like he doesn’t love her anymore.”

“He was mad and embarrassed because why would he want a seagull following him everywhere? He didn’t want him copying him.”

Some students even projected themselves into the story with desires to avenge a character’s hurt, with comments like, “I felt like I was one of the animals, and I wanted to hurt Bruce.” The students’ sensitivity at this particular age seems to enable them to be keenly aware of another’s feelings, and often take on a protective stance for whoever they view as the injured party. Perhaps this quality could be encouraged in other situations to help them see another person’s point of view, thus moving them further along in their moral development.

Thirdly, the questions of “What did you notice?” and “What surprised you?” provided an open-ended arena into which students could throw in anything that was on their minds. These ideas were not led by a focused question, and therefore, spanned a broad range of perspectives and gives
the observer a truer sense of what was being picked up on by the students individually. A sample of these responses follows:

"Bruce was mean because he almost killed the animals with the big boulder, and he might have killed Roxy, and he changed his life and made his life good."

"He didn’t learn the lesson because he threw rocks at the insects."

"I’m thinking that the man was greedy because he said those bad words because he wanted the gold."

"He shouldn’t have eaten the cake because it could have killed him."

"He didn’t learn his lesson because in the book it said he forgot all about it."

This study would seem to suggest that these evaluative responses, which were earlier defined as those indicating a higher level of moral engagement, are indeed those by which students wrestle with concepts of right and wrong, seek to gain insight into intentions, and arrive at conclusions through their individual weighing of principles. It is here that teacher guidance could enhance these moments of wrestling and weighing by continuing to ask why, and to help them make connections and their own conclusions.

Written responses provided the same combination of the three levels of responses. One limitation to the written
form, however, was that I wasn’t able to question a student further about a response to either clarify or to probe a little further into the exact meaning. Also the students did not have access to other opinions and, therefore, could not compare theirs and evaluate. In this sense, I found written responses to be less helpful in terms of engagement.

**Engagement in Feedback**

Another area of engagement was provided when the story sessions were completed. As a wrap-up activity the students were given a list of the stories they had heard and asked to respond to several questions. This feedback was intended to provide insight into the students’ feelings and lasting thoughts about particular stories. This was an attempt to glean information about the impact particular stories had on the individual, perhaps without their own awareness that it had done so. The final question delved into what their own perceptions were about the importance of these stories to our lives.

**Table 2. Story Feedback**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Hear Again</th>
<th>Thought About</th>
<th>Favorite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pages of Music</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wooden Bowls</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Favorite Story.

Asking students to discriminate between choices requires them to go through a process of critical thinking. Often students will opt to give a blanket answer like, "All of them," or "None of them" in order to avoid going through this process. The difficulty of this task was apparent as students were asked to choose their favorite story. They were given a list of the stories they had heard, as well as a brief verbal description of what the story was about in order to refresh their memories. They were then asked to underline their favorite story.

Receiving the most votes as favorite was the story, Pierre, chosen by five students. Six stories were not
chosen by anyone. It is not clear why these were not chosen since all six ranked rather high in other categories to be discussed later; those categories being those stories they wanted to hear again and stories they thought about later. The rest of the votes were widely spread over the remaining 8 stories. Three students didn't mark any as their favorite, perhaps intentionally because they didn't have a favorite or because they ran out of time or simply forgot to mark one.

Pierre also was chosen as the second highest of stories students wanted to hear again. So what was it about Pierre that would account for these high scores? This was a fun, fanciful tale, which the students immediately became actively involved in as they repeated the character's infamous line, "I don't care!" at the end of every page. Giggles and gasps punctuated the telling as Pierre ignored the care of his parents, and eventually was eaten by a lion. Relief came as the lion expelled Pierre, and he became a boy who did, indeed, care after all. The tale lent itself to being revisited within the learning environment over the next few days as the teachers asked the students to show through their work that they cared. Students would often smile as she said this, seeming to
acknowledge the connection to the story by this one simple phrase and its meaning within this new context. Whether or not it actually made a difference in their work cannot be determined in this setting. But the connection was made. So finding stories high in humor, audience participation, and relevance to daily life may build the cornerstone of a class' repertoire of stories for moral engagement.

Stories I'd Like to Hear Again.

The students were asked to circle any stories on the list that they would like to hear again. This was asked as another way of accessing the affective domain without any need to justify or explain their answer. In spite of the fact that students usually have academic favorites, one notices that the time spent listening to these stories seemed popular across the board. All students marked at least six stories they wanted to hear again, with four students indicating they wanted to hear all of them again. If we ultimately conclude that classrooms would benefit by the lessons learned in these kinds of stories, we should find no resistance from the students themselves, if these results are the norm.

It is particularly interesting to notice the top three stories that were voted to be heard again. Out of a total
27 children voting, one story received 25 votes and the other two stories received 24 votes. A shared characteristic of these three stories was the high level of animation and vocal expression in their telling. While one story was read and the other two told, each story contained a heightened element of humor, which lent itself to a more humorous telling. The students initiated their own participation throughout two of them, chanting with the teacher, repeating phrases or sequences, and adding recurring hand motions.

Among the stories students wanted to hear again, there was no distinguishable difference between those which were read and those which were told. There also was no difference between stories told at the beginning of the study and those told a month later at the end of the project. This indicates that children are not just interested in the stories they only recently heard, but are responding to some other quality within the stories themselves. One interpretation might be that stories seem to have a staying power that transcends time, even within the classroom where subjects and activities become layered upon one another, and ideas sometimes get lost or forgotten in the pile.
A student may not consciously realize a story's role in their thinking or behavior. They may not even realize why they do or do not like a story. But the fact that they want to hear a story again is at the least evidence that there was something within the story to which they related. Why a particular story grabs a particular student's attention may be of interest to the teacher who works with that student, especially one that may be at risk, low achieving, or a behavior problem in the classroom. But for the purpose of this study, the fact that a story grabs so much attention from so many is itself significant.

**Stories Thought About Later.**

Students were asked to mark any story on the list which they had subsequently thought about any time after first hearing it. To clarify the question, times when they might have thought about a story were suggested as perhaps while playing, while watching TV, while lying in bed, or while talking with someone.

One student reported recalling twelve different stories out of the fifteen told, two marked ten different stories, and at the low end, two students marked no stories at all. The rest of the students marked a number somewhere between these high and low marks. Again, there was no
difference between stories that were read or told, and no
difference in scoring was dependent on when within the
month the stories were heard. It would seem, therefore,
that neither the method of delivery nor the lapsed time
since hearing the story influenced the ability of that
story to be revisited in the mind of the child. The story
receiving the lowest score here was also the story that was
the lowest scored in the category of stories the children
wanted to hear again. In simple terms, it would seem that
a good story bears repeating—whether aloud or mentally—and
a not-so-good one doesn’t.

The high level of incidence of recalling stories seems
to indicate that narratives have the ability to play
themselves over and over again in the mind of an
individual, perhaps as she continues to make connections
between the story and her life. These are the dialogues
that Tappan describes as part of the process of developing
one’s own moral authority (1991b). It is this ability
which may prove useful in developing moral intelligence as
that individual finds herself in situations where choices
are being made, and a particular story has relevance to
those choices. As Coles stated:
The whole point of stories is not "solutions" or "resolutions" but a broadening and even a heightening of our struggles—with new protagonists and antagonists introduced, with new sources of concern or apprehension or hope, as one's mental life accommodates itself to a series of arrivals: guests who have a way of staying, but not necessarily staying put (1989, p. 129).

Also of significance is the fact that this recall occurs on a personal, individual basis, on their "own" time rather than within a structured lesson or activity. If we may assume that the recall may be part of a larger picture of making meaning, it may be viewed as the child's own psyche continuing to dialogue with other voices to define and refine its own conclusions. While structured lessons may begin this process, moral reflection continues on its own path to develop its authority within a child's own reasoning.

One drawback of the condensed time frame of this study is that there was little time to afford reflection on any one story before moving on to the next. Possible consequences of this may be that students were forced to move much too quickly, which may have crowded out lessons they may have incorporated on their own through their private reflection over a longer period of time. Future
studies may find that a slower pace would provide a richer environment for reflection to germinate and grow deeper roots.

**Why Stories Are Important:**

We often joke about needing to hide from children the fact that something is good for them for fear that they would then avoid it. However, one does not always need to recognize an object’s goodness in order to benefit from it. For instance, we may readily enjoy biting into a hearty sandwich without consciously recognizing that its carbohydrates are providing energy to our bodies or its proteins are being utilized to build muscle. Likewise, children can enjoy and benefit from stories without being cognizant of specifically how they are benefiting from it. As Oklahoma professional storyteller Fran Stallings put it, “What good is the sugar coating of Story if you always scrape it off to show the kids the vitamins you have tucked inside?” (1998). For the purpose of this study, however, I wanted to look at what the students understood about Story’s beneficial nature simply as a means to check their own sense of it.

The children were asked to write down why they thought these stories were important. By far the majority of
students (16 out of the 28) understood that these stories provided lessons or morals that could help them. Typical indications of this understanding were statements like, "It shows us what to do and what not to do," "Because if you ever have a problem, these stories may help you," and "Because they have a moral and can teach you things."

Their responses seem to indicate an awareness of how the lesson of a story might equip them in handling a situation or problem in their future. One student also recognized Story’s ability to inform us about our past as well when he stated, "I thought they were important because they remind me of a time in my life." So looking backward in time and applying truth found in a story can be as helpful as anticipating applications for the future. Seven students made general, unspecific statements, saying the stories were "good," "fun," or "interesting." Three students made statements about specifics stories and the lessons involved.

When I first was analyzing the responses, I thought the more general responses were perhaps from students whose typical thinking patterns were more concrete, less complex than the average student. But that did not prove to
be the case. In fact, one student who responded that the stories "were all interesting" was our highest student in all academic areas. He would typically pick up on the more subtle aspects of a story or lesson, and be able to make applications that others were unable to make. So his "interesting" comment would seem to be either a quick, dismissive answer or truly his sentiment about an activity in a world of school which perhaps may not always capture his interest. The students with typically lower critical thinking ability, whom I had expected to make such a general comment, were included in the group that talked about the lessons learned. The students who responded with the direct application from the story may have misunderstood the instructions because they wrote about the lesson from the particular story that they had chosen as their favorite.

It is notable that many of the students who had given Level 2 and Level 3 responses were also among those who pointed out that the stories were important because of their lessons for living. While many other students also indicated the importance of the lessons, there seems to be some correlation between the level of moral engagement as scored by this study's coding system and the recognition
that the stories offer lessons which can help in knowing how to live our lives.

**Engagement in Application**

As mentioned previously in the section, Engagement in Feedback, this study provided limited opportunity for application to be made within the classroom due to its time constraints. However, the applications that did occur were effective, easily providing connections between a story and a situation within the classroom. Having a shared background of these stories provided the class a common culture of character, images, conflicts, and solutions to which anyone could refer. Whether it was a solicitation by the teacher for students to show they cared (reference to *Pierre*), dealing with bully behavior on the playground and its consequences (reference to *Big Bad Bruce*), or reminding of the importance of how we speak to each other (reference to *The Prince and the Rhino*), the reference was immediately recognized with smiles or nods from students and provided an instant platform from which to discuss the current situation. While being greatly constricted in time and crowded by back-to-back stories, the class in this study still was able to take advantage of opportunities within the daily routine to point to the
stories which could inform current choices. The results here can only hint at what opportunities would come through a year-long enrichment of stories told and referred to by both teacher and students.
Conclusions

While many attempts have been made through the decades to teach morality in our schools, no program has proven to be effective in changing behavior. Increasing moral failure has been recorded not only in the research, but daily in our newspapers, especially in recent days. As a result, various elements of our society have clamored anew for values to be addressed within all its realms: the media, entertainment, the school, the church, and the home. But how do we do this successfully and what are the obstacles hindering us from doing so?

The literature supports the hypothesis that the telling of stories is an important tool in stimulating moral development, due to our very natures as humans, the way we think, and the role of language. Narratives encompass all facets of our being so that we respond in logic, emotion, and action. Stories grip us in a powerful way to engage us in purposeful reflection, requiring that moral meaning be sought by both the teller and the listener.

This study has described how one classroom engaged in moral conversations around issues they faced collectively and individually through stories. It portrayed a group of
students who, with their teachers, dealt with their feelings, questions, and judgements about issues within stories that were not unlike those they themselves face. Through this engagement, students were shown to be moral beings, struggling with issues of right and wrong. Narratives proved a very safe medium through which these struggles could be aired and looked at from different perspectives, and also became a reference point from which further application could be made.

Recommendations

From the observations done in this study, the following recommendations are made for anyone attempting to conduct similar focused storytelling sessions:

- Utilize a combination of reading and telling stories. While this study did not find a clear difference in levels of engagement as defined earlier between the two types of story delivery, there may exist some differences not measured here. Through the experience of this study, I noted a greater interaction with the students when I told a story since I did not have to focus my attention on a book I was holding. Being able to make sustained eye contact, for instance, allowed me to draw them deeper
into the story with me and to hold them there. I was able to respond to body language that indicated that they were following the story closely (nods, smiles, grimaces) or that they were distracted (fiddling, lack of eye contact, talking) and needed to be drawn back. This kind of immediate feedback allows the teller greater control over the interaction with the audience.

- The findings here seem to indicate that stories that are high in humor, opportunity for audience participation, and relevance to students' lives are ones that become favorites and want to be heard again. In choosing stories, then, one would keep these elements in mind.

- Another element in story choice is looking at how any one story affects you personally. Professional storytellers speak about looking for stories that choose you—ones that have a profound effect on you for some reason. These stories are ones that are apt to have an equally powerful effect on those to whom you tell.

- Allow a considerable length of time to elapse between stories in order to allow enough time for reflection and application to occur. Not rushing on to another story might help to ensure that a child has time to ponder
(either consciously or subconsciously) one story's meaning and how it relates to him or her personally.

- Carry out these sessions over an extended period of time.

Creating a culture of stories shared by a classroom requires a considerable length of time over which references can be made back to stories as appropriate. Because a teacher usually cannot "plan" occasions within the classroom whereby a story's message can be applied in an authentic way, it is precisely a matter of time before situations occur on their own. As stories are told over a school year, and if one has chosen stories relevant to students' lives, one would expect occasions to occur naturally that lead to easy reference back to a particular story and its application. As Coles recommends,

"...letting the stories 'stand on their own', and quietly referring back to them when a particular moment or event prompts such a reference to be appropriate. That's what I try to do in my teaching (personal correspondence, 1998)."

- Be sensitive to the danger of over-processing a story, thereby destroying the enjoyment of the story for its own sake and perhaps its very power. While there have been
many theories offered as to how stories work on the subconscious, there has not been enough research to prove the validity of any particular one. Even so, that this power, this "magic", exists is realized each time we find ourselves recalling a story, a movie, a conversation with a friend, and discovering a new truth about our world or ourselves as it connects to the story. We did not purposefully set out to deconstruct the story in order to discover a set of possible truths to apply to our lives. It happens on its own simply because that is what Story does. So while advocating dialogues about stories with students in order for them to engage in shared reflection and perhaps hear new perspectives from which to evaluate their own, I, at the same time, advise caution at doing so with every story or at carrying the process out with such deliberation that it kills the story.

Kilpatrick makes a strong case for the necessity for schools to include moral education in its curriculum. Even academic reform depends on putting character first. Children need courage to tackle difficult assignments. They need self-discipline if they are going to devote their time to homework rather than television... If they don’t acquire intellectual virtues such as commitment to learning, objectivity, respect for the
truth, and humility in the fact of facts; then critical-thinking strategies will only amount to one more gimmick in the classroom (1992, p. 226).

If we agree that moral education is not only a valid part of school curriculum, but also an essential one as well for our society, what would keep us from fulfilling this duty? The obstacles come in the form of deep, but conflicting concerns from each of the three main parties involved.

Parental concern takes several forms. Some parents are concerned that indoctrination will occur which conflicts with the moral values held in the home, so they reject any form of moral education in the school without exploring whether or not such a conflict actually exists. Other parents are concerned that the schools are not doing enough, as they have placed the entire responsibility of moral training on the schools. Whatever the school might be doing to confront moral issues, it is considered ineffective since the need is so great and realistically cannot be dealt with in isolation from other factors influencing the child.

Administrators are concerned about lines being crossed in dealing with anything relating to values or morals. They are fearful of teachers who would use the classroom as a
pulpit from which to preach their own personal set of morals. So, to protect themselves within our litigious society, it is simply easier to treat it as a taboo subject area. While having to acknowledge, if pressed, that state mandates exist for moral education in the classroom, they provide no direction in how to meet this requirement, and nervously balk at any attempt.

Educators are concerned about not offending or contradicting any student's (or, more accurately, any student's parent's) personal moral system. The result is that teachers usually cut a broad path around anything that might be a sensitive issue, steering clear of even language that might indicate a value judgment. Consequently, rarely are words like "right" or "wrong" used when talking about issues or behavior, choosing the safer word "inappropriate" if discussed at all. In more general terms, any topic that might be deemed "sensitive" is most often simply avoided out of fear that they will somehow be seen as using bad judgment for even broaching the subject. Somehow sidestepping issues has become the more accepted means of dealing with sensitive topics, being viewed as indicative of greater wisdom than to take the chance of directly dealing it and incurring negative repercussions.
The fact is that educators cannot help but be teachers of moral education. We teach morals both directly and indirectly in our dealings with people (young and old) and situations in a world of good and evil. We are always being models of morals, of values, and choices in our own behavior before our students. Added to this is the state mandate as well, which exists whether or not it is acknowledged. We have no choice. What is needed is clear support and direction for this facet of our job instead of duplicitous acknowledgement of its obligation shrouded in hesitancy and caution at its practice.

Given the reality of the environment within which we currently teach, educators are faced with a personal choice when dealing with moral issues. Making that choice may be a question of courage, the courage to confront these obstacles. An old definition of "courage", found in the Oxford English Dictionary, is "to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." To not shy away from the important issues of right and wrong which so determine future as well as present choices in life, does indeed require action from the whole of our very beings. As educators, we must possess a unity of mind and heart which
cannot separate out truths simply because it may not be safe to do so within the current school environment.

Having the courage may relate to one's own personal philosophy of education, of why we entered the field in the first place. If our motivation was to make a difference, to change lives, then having the courage to take a stand in confronting moral issues seems to be a logical extension of how we view our responsibility. It requires courage to be able to justify this stance to both administrators and parents due to the conflicting concerns and fears, and courage to tackle issues sensitively and honestly.

If we were willing to change this environment, what are the conditions under which moral engagement can most effectively take place within the school? There needs to be a collaboration of administrators, teachers, and parents. Together we need to examine not only our varied concerns as outlined above, but even more, our mutual commitment to seek an environment within which the moral imagination is stimulated, and within which moral conversations can take place (Coles, 1998, Kilpatrick, 1992, Tappan, 1998.) Together, we must look at exactly what we can agree on, what that would look like at our
school, and how we will proceed to accomplish this goal. While perhaps not satisfying any one group completely, mutual compromise for the greater good can produce a community of moral players being allowed to interact with the children based on shared values.

It seems clear that as administrators, parents, and teachers solidify their energy together behind the education of their children, we should all join in sharing our own moral lives with children, engaging them in moral conversations. This effort would do much towards creating the place which Wooster (1990, p.55) spoke of in which honorable men and women regularly teach good books...helping students become decent and just.
## APPENDIX A: STORY BANK

A Collection of Stories for Moral Engagement

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ACCEPTANCE

Big Al
Andrew Clements
Simon & Schuster 1988
5-9
A big ugly fish has trouble making friends until he has a chance to save his friends. He proves that looks aren’t everything.

Fish is Fish
Leo Lionni
Pantheon 1970
5-8
A frog teaches his friend that it’s OK to be what you are.

Frederick
Leo Lionni
Pantheon 1966
5-8
A resourceful mouse who gathers words, colors, and dreams for the winter.

How My Parents Learned to Eat
Ina R. Friedman
Houghton Mifflin 1984
6-10
A girl’s parents, mother from Japan and father from the U.S., lean how to eat in deference to each other.

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson
Bette Bao Lord
A Chinese girl and her family begin a new life in Brooklyn. She has a difficult time when school starts until her ability to play baseball gains her acceptance.

**The Midnight Fox**

Betsy Byars  
Puffin 1981  
10-13  
A boy struggles between wanting to keep a renegade black fox free and his uncle's desire to kill it.

**The Mouse Bride**

David Christiana  
Scholastic 1995  
5-8  
A mouse goes on a journey to marry the strongest person on earth, finding his answer close home.

**My Name is Maria Isabel**

Alma Flor Ada  
Aladdin 1995  
8-12  
A new girl in school struggles to be accepted for her own name and her religion.

**Old Henry**

Joan W. Blos  
William Morrow & Co. 1987  
5-10  
A stranger buys a run-down house and neighbors anticipate he'll fix it up. He doesn't, and it causes problems, so he leaves. Open ended plot.
The Pinballs
Betsy Byars
Scholastic 1979
11-13
Three foster children prove that they can have some control over the livers.

Tacky the Penguin
Helen Lester
Houghton Mifflin 1988
5-9
A unique penguin saves the day

Toliver's Secret
Esther Wood Brady
Crown 1976
9-11
A 10-year-old is asked by her grandfather to carry a secret message through the British lines during the Revolutionary War.

Toot & Puddle
Holly Hobbie
Little, Brown & Co. 1997
5-9
Two friends appreciate each other's adventures.

Stellaluna
Janell Cannon
Harcourt Brace & Co. 1993
6-10
A bat learns that her differences are wonderful.
Willie Was Different
Norman Rockwell
Dragonfly Books 1994
6-10
Willie, a wood thrush, is different and creative. He becomes famous, but doesn’t like his celebrity, so returns to his simple life.

AGING

Encore for Eleanor
Bill Peet
Houghton Mifflin 1981
4-9
An elephant, retired from the circus, finds a new career as the resident artist in the city zoo.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Roald Dahl
Knopf 1964
8-12
A young, poor boy, from a close family, eventually reaps rewards for his selflessness.

Drop Dead
Babette Cole
Knopf 1996
7-11
Two grandparents tell the story of their lives and predict their futures in an upbeat way.

Love You Forever
Robert Munsch
Firefly Books 1986
The warm tale of a baby boy growing up in relationship to his mother.

**Now One Foot, Now the Other**
Tomie de Paola
Putnam 1980
5-8
A little boy helps his grandfather recover from a stoke.

**Sea Swan**
Kathryn Lasky
MacMillan 1988
7-10
An spunky, aging woman takes on new challenges.

**The Wooden Bowl**
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
A husband and wife learn from their young son how to care for the aging.

**ARROGANCE**

**Big Bad Bruce**
Bill Peet
Houghton Mifflin 1977
4-9
A bear bully is put in his place by a small, but spunky witch.

**Fire On the Mountain**
Jane Kurtz
Simon & Schuster 1994
6-12
A young African shepherd boy and his sister outsmart the proud, rich master.

The Lion Makers
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
A tale from Ancient India about four friends walking along the road to the royal city. Three boast of their knowledge, and end up being the most foolish.

The Parts of the House Argue
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
A tale from the Philippines of a family, and then their house where everyone argues about being the most important.

BIGOTRY

Words By Heart
Ouida Sebestyen
Bantam 1981
11-15
A black family struggles as the only black family in an 1910 Texas community.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
Mildred Taylor
Bantam 1978
A Black Mississippi family struggles against social injustice during the Depression.

The Friendship
Mildred Taylor
Dial 1987
9-11
A black man breaks the rules by calling his friend, a white man, by his first name.

CONSCIENCE

Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse
Kevin Henkes
Greenwillow Books 1996
A little girl lashes back at her teacher after he disciplines her, only to regret it later.

Miracle at Clement’s Pond
Patricia Pendergraft
Scholastic 1988
12 and up
Three teens discover an abandoned baby and place it on the doorstep of the town spinster, who believes a miracle has occurred. The town also views it as a miracle, and the three struggle with the truth.

North to Freedom
Anne Holm
Harcourt, Brace, and Co. 1974
10-15
A 12 year old boy, having lived in an East European prison
camp, escapes and travels through Europe, confronting
normal experiences for the first time.

COURAGE

Ali, Child of the Desert
Jonathan London
Lothrup, Lee, & Shepard 1997
6-9
A boy is separated from his father in the Sahara, and faces
tough decisions.

The Boy Who Held Back the Sea
retold by Lenny Hort
Dial 1987
5-12
The story of the Ditch boy who saves his village by
plugging the hole in the dike.

Brothers of the Heart
Joan W. Blos
Aladdin 1985, 1993
9-12
A crippled boy, abandoned in the wild by fur traders, finds
his way home.

Call It Courage
Armstrong Sperry
Macmillan 1940, 1971
8-13
A boy struggles to overcome his fear of the sea.
The Courage of Sarah Noble
Alice Dalgliesh
Scribner 1954
8-10
A young girl is asked to stay in their new cabin while her father leaves to get the rest of the family.

Cowardly Clyde
Bill Peet
Houghton Mifflin 1979
5-8
As a war-horse, Clyde is a coward, but decides that even if he isn't brave, he can at least act brave.

Dear Mr. Henshaw
Beverly Cleary
Morrow 1983, Dell 1984
9-13
A boy has an assignment to write to a favorite author. His correspondence through the years reveal growth in relationships and within himself.

Fire On the Mountain
Jane Kurtz
Simon & Schuster 1994
6-12
A young African shepherd boy and his sister outsmart the proud, rich master.

The Legend of the Bluebonnet
Retold by Tomie de Paola
Putnam 1984
3-9
Legend of the Comanche Indian orphan who sacrificed her only doll to end a drought in her village.
Li Sun, Lad of Courage
Carolyn Treffinger
Walker & Co., 1947, 1975
9-14
A Chinese boy, afraid of the sea, is banished to the mountaintop where he proves there are many kinds of courage.

Oh, the Places You’ll Go!
Dr. Seuss
Random House 1990
6 and up
A great inspiration for anyone to face the future with courage and a smile.

Pearl’s Promise
Frank Asch
Dell 1984
5-10
A pet store mouse promises to save her brother from a threatening snake.

Sarah Crewe
Frances Hodgson Burnett
Scholastic 1986
9-12
An orphan is mistreated by a boarding school’s headmistress.

Sheila Rae the Brave
Kevin Henkes
Scholastic 1987
4-9
Sheila gets a help from her little sister after she finds she’s not quite so brave after all.
**The Sweetwater Run**  
Andrew Glass  
Doubleday 1996  
7-12  
Fictional account of Buffalo Bill Cody as a young boy  
riding for the Pony Express, carrying news of Lincoln’s  
election.

**Victoria Flies High**  
Becky Ayres  
Cobblehill Books, 1990  
4-8  
A magician helps Victoria win a kite flying contest, but  
she must do her part.

**Thy Friend, Obediah**  
Brinton Turkle  
Viking, 1969  
8-11  
A colonial boy and his family in the early days of  
Nantucket—an historical novel.

**FAMILY**

**Annie and the Old One**  
Miska Miles  
Little, Brown, and Co. 1971  
6-9  
A grandmother prepares her granddaughter for her death,  
which the granddaughter then tries to postpone.

**A Chair for My Mother**  
Vera B. Williams  
Greenwillow 1982  
4-8  
A girl struggles to save money to buy a chair for her  
mother to fall into when she comes home from waitressing.
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Roald Dahl
Knopf 1964
8-12
A young, poor boy, from a close family, eventually reaps rewards for his selflessness.

Danny The Champion of the World
Roald Dahl
Knopf 1975, Puffin 1988
8-13
The tender, humorous adventures of a English boy and his father.

Dicey’s Song
Cynthia Voight
Atheneum 1983
9-12
Four children grow in relationship with their grandmother, and learn to accept their mother’s death.

Grandpa’s Face
Eloise Greenfield
Philomel Books 1988
4-8
A young girl is scared by her grandfather’s acting ability.

The House of Wings
Betsy Byars
Viking 1972
9-13
A young boy, left with his grandfather while his parents look for a house, tries desperately to be known by him.
If I Were Queen of the World
Fred Hiatt
Margaret K. McElderry Books 1997
7-11
A young girl share her imaginative world with her little brother.

Introducing Shirley Braverman
Hilma Woltzer
Farrar 1975, 1987
9-11
Family life in Brooklyn during World War II.

Jacob Have I Loved
Katherine Paterson
Harper 1980
9-14
The story of sibling rivalry between twins. The younger feel cheated, but maturity and experience eventually bring reconciliation.

Kind Blue
Ann Grifalconi
Little, Brown, & Co. 1993
5-8
An uncle confronts his young niece who is feeling lonely.

Miracle at Clement’s Pond
Patricia Pendergraft
Scholastic 1988
12 and up
Three teens discover an abandoned baby and place it on the doorstep of the town spinster, who believes a miracle has occurred. The town also views it as a miracle, and the three struggle with the truth.
Music, Music for Everyone
Vera B. Williams
Greenwillow 1982
4-8
Sequel to A Chair for My Mother. All loose change goes for Grandma’s medical expenses. She looks for a way to make money and to cheer up her grandma.

My Mama Needs Me
Mildred Pelts Walter
Lothrop 1983
6-8
A boy struggles between wanting to play with his friends and staying around home to help with his new baby sister.

Nobody Asked me If I Wanted a Baby Sister
Martha Alexander
Dial 1971
5-8
Oliver has decided to give away his sister, but eventually changes his mind.

Now One Foot, Now the Other
Tomie de Paola
Putnam 1980
5-8
A little boy helps his grandfather recover from a stroke.

Owen
Kevin Henkes
Greenwillow 1993
5-7
Owen can’t part with his favorite blanket, Fuzzy, until Mom has a plan.

Something for Me
Vera B. Williams
Greenwillow 1982
4-8
Sequel to A Chair for My Mother. This time the money saved in the jar is to be spent on the girl’s birthday present.

**So Much**
Trish Cooke  
Candlewick Press 1994  
3-5  
A baby is loved by his extended family—so much!

**A Special Kind of Love**
Stephen Michael King  
Scholastic 1995  
6-8  
A father has a unique way of telling his son he loves him.

**Thunder Pup**  
Janet Hickman  
MacMillan 1981  
8-11  
A young girl, dealing with a new home, manages to overcome her fear of storms with the help of a stray pup.

**The Two of Them**
Aliki  
Greenwillow 1979  
5-9  
The story of the relationship between a grandfather and his granddaughter. She must eventually deal with his death.

**Wolf Story**
William McCleery  
Shoe String Press 1988  
5-9  
A father’s bedtime story is edited by his 5 year old son. It’s the story of a clever wolf outsmarted by a hen.
FEAR

**Albie, the Lifeguard**
Louise Burden
Scholastic 1993
6-10
A boy overcomes his fear of the town pool by using his imagination.

**The Climb**
Carol Carrick
Clarion Books 1980
Two cousins learn to accept their fears and to be sympathetic towards each others'.

**Darkness and the Butterfly**
Ann Grifalconi
Little, Brown, and Co. 1987
6-9
A little girl learns to overcome her fear of the dark.

**A Dog Called Kitty**
Bill Wallace
Holiday 1980, Archway 1984
7-11
A boy struggles to overcome a fear of dogs caused by a traumatic experience when he was younger.

**Foolish Rabbit’s Big Mistake**
Rafe Martin
Putnam 1985
3-8
Rumor and panic abound—a "sky if falling" story.
Harry and the Terrible Whatzit
Dick Gackenbach
Clarion 1977, 1984
3-9
Harry thinks his mom has been captured by the monster he believes lives in the cellar.

The Knight Who Was Afraid of the Dark
Barbara Shook Hazen
Dial 1989
6-9
A knight attempts to rescue a princess, but has to confront his fear of the dark to do so.

Thunder Pup
Janet Hickman
MacMillan 1981
8-11
A young girl, dealing with a new home, manages to overcome her fear of storms with the help of a stray pup.

What's Under My Bed?
James Stevenson
Greenwillow 1983, Puffin 1984
3-8
The imaginative stories of their grandfather's childhood reassure two worried grandchildren.

FRIENDSHIP

The Adventures of Pinocchio
Carlo Collodi
Knopf 1988
7-11
A puppet faces all the trials of growing up.
Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse
Leo Lionni
Pantheon 1969
5-9
A mouse befriends a wind-up toy mouse and wants to be like him.

Annie Bananie
Leah Komaiko
Harper Trophy 1987
4-7
Two best friends must say goodbye.

A Blind Man Catches a Bird
Peace Tales
Margaret Read MacDonlad
Linnet Books 1992
5-12
A young man learns about forgiveness and friendship.

Bridge to Terabithia
Katherine Paterson
Crowell 1977, Harper 1987
10-14
Two lonely children escape to their own private kingdom, a real place they made based on fantasy stories they’d read. Tragedy comes, and one must deal with the loss, resulting in building a bridge to their Terabithia.

Brothers of the Heart
Joan W. Blos
Aladdin 1985, 1993
9-12
A crippled boy, abandoned in the wild by fur traders, finds his way home.

Chester’s Way
Kevin Henkes
A new kid finally makes some new friends, his own way.

Earl's Too Cool for Me
Leah Komaiko
Harper Trophy 1988
6-9
Earl's too cool for many reasons, but becomes a friend, too. Then they're both cool.

Frog and Toad Are Friends
Arnold Lobel
Harper 1970, 1979
3-8
Five stories about these two best friends.

A Girl Called Al
Constance Greene
Viking 1969
10-14
A story, told in the first person, about a friendship between the narrator, another girl Al, and Mr. Richards, the building's assistant superintendent.

The Giving Tree
Shel Silverstein
Harper 1964
5-10
The story of a boy who loved a tree, and the tree's sacrificial love.

The Hating Book
Charlotte Zolotow
Misunderstanding causes a girl to hate her best friend, then make up.

**Hurry Home, Cody**
Meindert DeJong
Harper 1953
6-9
A puppy's growth during its first year.

**I'm Terrific**
Marjorie Weinman Sharmat
Holiday House 1977
5-8
Jason Bear learns how to be a terrific friend, not just terrific.

**Magical Hands**
Marjorie Barker
Picture Book Studio 1989
6-10
A barrel-maker surprises his three friends on their birthdays, and then has the kindness returned.

**The Mountain That Loved a Bird**
Alice McLerran
Picture Book Studio 1985
5-12
A mountain is kept company by a bird until she has to leave. She returns each spring, brings a tiny seed. Tears from the mountain's loneliness nourish the seed.

**The Red and Blue Coat**
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
Two friends learn the importance of seeing things from the 
other’s perspective.

**The Secret Garden**
Frances Hodgson Burnett
Viking 1989
8-10
An orphan finds friendship on the grounds of her cold-
hearted uncle’s mansion.

**Stevie**
John Steptoe
Harper 1969
5-8
A boy is annoyed with a boy who stays with them while his 
mother works, then ends up missing him when he has to 
leave.

**A Taste of Blackberries**
Doris Smith
Crowell 1973
9-12
A boy’s grief is deep when his best friend dies.

**Thank You, Jackie Robinson**
Barbara Cohen
Lothrop 1986
11-13
A young boy becomes friends with a 60 year old black cook 
who begins to teach him about baseball and life.
Thy Friend, Obediah
Brinton Turkle
Viking, 1969
8-11
A colonial boy and his family in the early days of Nantucket, and his experiences with a friendly, but annoying seagull.

The Wizard, the Fairy, and the Magic Chicken
Helen Lester
Houghton Mifflin 1983
4-9
Friends learn that they work best and accomplish more together.

The Whipping Boy
Sid Fleischman
Greenwillow 1986
9-13
A spoiled prince and a peasant boy (who'd always received the prince's spankings) reverse roles.

Willy and Hugh
Anthony Browne
Dragonfly 1991
5-8
Two unlikely characters become friends.

Zeee
Elizabeth Enright
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1965
7-11
Zeee is a fairy who has decided she doesn't like people—any people—until she finally finds a place of her own and a little girl becomes friends with her.
GREED

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Roald Dahl
Knopf 1964
8-12
A young, poor boy eventually reaps rewards for his selflessness.

Blinded By Greed
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
A thief steals brazenly and is caught because he is so blinded by the riches.

Clay Boy
Mirra Ginsburg
Greenwillow 1997
5-8
An old grandmother and grandfather create a boy to keep them company—with disastrous results!

The First Forest
John Gile
Worzalla 1978
5-9
A creative account of how the forest was created and why some trees lose their leaves every fall.

Me First
Helen Lester
Houghton Mifflin 1992
5-9
A pig gets what he thought he wanted when he is tricked by a “sandwich”.

**Princess Penelope’s Parrot**

Helen Lester
Walter Lorraine Books 1996
5-10
A spoiled princess is undone by her parrot.

**GRIEF**

**The Accident**

Carol Carrick
Clarion 1976
5-8
A boy’s dog is run over by a truck and killed. A stranded pup helps him recover.

**Annie and the Old One**

Miska Miles
Little, Brown & Co. 1971
6-9
A grandmother prepares her granddaughter for her death, which the granddaughter then tries to postpone.

**Bridge to Terabithia**

Katherine Paterson
Crowell 1977, Harper 1987
10-14
Two lonely children escape to their own private kingdom, a real place they made based on fantasy stories they’d read. Tragedy comes, and one must deal with the loss, resulting in building a bridge to their Terabithia.

**Dicey’s Song**

Cynthia Voight
Four children grow in relationship with their grandmother, and learn to accept their mother’s death.

**Everett Anderson’s Goodbye**

Lucille Clifton
Holt, Rinehart, and Winston 1983
4-7
A boy’s struggle to deal with his father’s death.

**I Had a Friend Named Peter**

Janice Cohn
Morrow 1987
5-8
When Betsy learns about the death of a friend, her parents and kindergarten teacher answer questions about dying, funerals, and the burial process.

**I’ll Always Love You**

Hans Wilhelm
Crown 1985
6-9
A young boy and his dog grow up together, sharing good times. The whole family grieves when the dog dies.

**Lassie-Come-Home**

Eric Knight
Dell 1972
10 and up
The struggle of a collie to return 100 miles to her master.
**Mustard**
Charlotte Graeber
Macmillan 1982
9-12
A girl struggles with the failing health of her 14 year old cat.

**My Grandson Lew**
Charlotte Zolotow
Harper 1972
6-9
Together Lewis and his mother remember Grandpa, who used to come in the night when Lewis called.

**Nadia the Willful**
Sue Alexander
Pantheon 1983
8-13
A sheik orders no one to mention his dead son’s name. His daughter eventually convinces him that the only way to keep the son’s memory alive is through memories.

**Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs**
Tomie de Paola
Penguin 1978
6-9
A boy’s visits with his bed-ridden great-grandmother.

**Saying Goodbye to Grandma**
Jane Resh Thomas
Clarion 1988
5-8
A young girl is afraid of what her grandma’s funeral will be like.
Sophie
Mem Fox
Harcourt, Brace 1994
5-8
The loss of a grandfather is eventually filled.

A Taste of Blackberries
Doris Smith
Crowell 1973
9-12
A boy’s grief is deep when his best friend dies.

The Tenth Good Think About Barney
Judith Viorst
Atheneum 1971
5-8
A little boy is helped to come to grips with his cat’s death.

The Two of Them
Aliki
Greenwillow 1979
5-9
The story of the relationship between a grandfather and his granddaughter. She must eventually deal with his death.

HONESTY

A Big, Fat Enormous Lie
Marjorie Sharmat
Dutton 1978
4-8
A child’s simple lie grows out of control.

A Blind Mat Catches a Bird
Peace Tales
Margaret Read MacDonald
Linnet Books, 1992
5-10
A young man learns about forgiveness and friendship.

Dawn
Molly Bang
Morrow 1983
4-10
Adaptation of a Japanese fairy tale—a sailor marries a mysterious woman who weaves sails for him on the condition that he never watch her weaving. He breaks his promise with disastrous results.

A Day's Work
Eve Bunting
Clarion Books 1994
6-10
A grandpa and a boy looking for temporary work in the big city. The boy's dishonesty causes trouble, but he learns a big lesson.

Miracle at Clement's Pond
Patricia Pendergraft
Scholastic 1988
12 and up
Three teens discover an abandoned baby and place it on the doorstep of the town spinster, who believes a miracle has occurred. The town also views it as a miracle, and the three struggle with the truth.

Pied Piper of Hamelin
Barbara Bartos-Hoppner
Lippincott 1984
6-10
The Pied Piper rids Hamelin of a rat infestation, but isn't rewarded as promised. The town suffers the consequence.

The Turkey Girl
Penny Polluck
A Zuni Cinderella story. A girl who cares for turkeys is transformed by her charges, but she breaks her promise to return by dawn.

**Thy Friend, Obadiah**  
Brinton Turkle  
Viking 1969  
8-11  
A colonial boy and his family in the early days of Nantucket—an historical novel.

**The Wise Master**  
Wisdom Tales From Around the World  
Heather Forest  
August House 1996  
5-10  
An Indian tale of how a master in a run-down temple tests the honesty of his students.

**Wolf! Wolf!**  
Elizabeth and Gerald Rose  
Faber 1984  
3-8  
The naughty shepherd boy who cried "wolf!"

**KINDNESS**

**Big Bad Bruce**  
Bill Peet  
Houghton Mifflin 1977  
4-9  
A bear bully is put in his place by a small, but spunky witch.
Feathers
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
A woman learns how hard it is to take back unkind words.

Horton Hears a Who
Dr. Seuss
Random House 1954, 1982
4-9
Horton saves Whoville because "a person's a person, no matter how small."

The Rough-Face Girl
Rafe Martin
Scholastic 1988
6-9
A scarred young woman is rewarded for her kind heart.

Rose Blanche
Christopher Galloz and Roberto Innocenti
Creative Education 1985
10-12
One child gives food to children in a concentration camp.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Roald Dahl
Knopf 1964
8-12
A young, poor boy eventually reaps rewards for his selflessness.

**The Giving Tree**
Shel Silverstein
Harper 1964
5-10
The story of a boy who loved a tree, and the tree's sacrificial love.

**Hurry Home, Cody**
Meindert DeJong
Harper 1953
6-9
A puppy's growth during its first year.

**The Pumpkin Child**
Persian Folk and Fairy Tales
Ann Sinclair Mehdevi
Knopf 1965
A woman wants a daughter so much, she wishes for one, even if she looked like a pumpkin. A prince later agrees to marry the girl, hence breaking the spell.

**Koala Lou**
Mem Fox
Gulliver Books 1988
5-8
A young koala learns she is loved even when she loses a singing contest.

**The Man Who Kept His Heart in a Bucket**
Sonia Levitin
Dial 1991
5-9
A hard-working man learns the true meaning of love.

**Mrs. Fish, Ape, and Me, the Dump Queen**

Norma Fox Mazer
Dutton 1980, Avon 1982
9-12
A harassed girl is rescued by a crazy school custodian.

**So Much**

Trish Cooke
Candlewick Press 1994
3-5
A baby is loved by his extended family—so much!

**OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

**Sara Crewe**

Frances Hodgson Burnett
Scholastic 1986
9-12
An orphan is mistreated by a boarding school’s headmistress.

**Buford the Little Bighorn**

Bill Peet
5-10
A bighorn’s flow become an advantage.

**Child of the Silent Night: The Story of Laura Bridgman**

Edith Fisher Hunter
Houghton Mifflin 1963
9-11
The true story of a dear, mute, and blind girl, similar to Helen Keller.

**Dear Mr. Henshaw**
Beverly Cleary  
Morrow 1983, Dell 1984  
9-13  
A boy has an assignment to write to a favorite author. His correspondence through the years reveal growth in relationships and within himself.

**Hang Tough, Paul Mather**
Alfred Slote  
11-14  
A boy battles against leukemia and his basketball opponents.

**In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson**
Bette Bao Lord  
Harper 1984  
8-12  
A Chinese girl and her family begin a new life in Brooklyn. She has a difficult time when school starts until her ability to play baseball gains her acceptance.

**The Island of the Skog**
Steven Kellogg  
Dial 1973, 1976  
4-8  
A boatload of mice discover an island, but find a fearful monster.

**Jump Ship to Freedom**
A slave seeks to recover the money that can buy freedom for himself and his mother.

**Knots on a Counting Rope**

Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault

Henry Holt and Co. 1966, 1987

6-10

An Indian boy learns how to overcome his blindness.

**Lassie-Come-Home**

Eric Knight

Dell 1972

10 and up

The struggle of a collie to return 100 miles to her master.

**Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt**

Deborah Hopkinson

Knopf 1993

9-11

A young slave girl makes a quilt that helps her make her way to freedom.

**Snow-Bound**

Harry Mazer

Dell 1975

11-13

Two teens are in a car accident and must survive many ordeals.

**Wagon Wheels**
Barbara Brenner
Harper 1978, 1984
3-9
A family of black brothers try to follow a map to their father's homestead on the western plain.

Who is Carrie?
James L. and Christopher Collier
Dell 1986
11-15
The adventures of a kitchen slave in George Washington's household.

The Witch on Fourth Street
Myron Levoy
Harper 1972
8-12
Collection of stories set among the tenements in New York in the early 1900's among the neighborhood melting pot.

PEER PRESSURE

Michael's New Haircut
Karen G. Frandsen
Children's Press 1986
4-7
Michael thinks his hair is too short. He covers up to avoid anyone noticing, avoids his friends—until his hat falls off.

Ira Sleep Over
Bernard Waber
Houghton Mifflin 1972, 1975
5-12
A young boy struggles over whether to take his teddy when he spends the night at a friend's house.

**Stephanie’s Ponytail**
Robert Munsch
Annick Press 1996
5-9
A girl tires of everyone copying her hair style.

**Respect**

**Feeding His Clothes**
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest, Ed.
August House 1996
6-12
A rich man illustrates that "clothes do not make the man."

**Lily’s Purple Plastic Purse**
Kevin Henkes
Greenwillow Books 1996
A little girl lashes back at her teacher after he disciplines her, only to regret it later.

**The Wooden Bowl**
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest
August House 1996
5-10
A husband and wife learn from their young son how to care for the aging.
Please
Alicia Aspinwall
The Book of Virtues
William Bennett, ed.
Guideposts 1993
4-8
"Pleases" that live in two brothers' mouths.

Slops
Peace Tales
Margaret Read MacDonald, Ed.
Linnet Books 1992
5-10
A farmer and his wife come to discover a new world once they are willing to see things from another's perspective.

RESPONSIBILITY

The Gorilla Did It
Barbara Shook Hazen
Athenium 1990
6-9
A boy finds a unique way to not accept responsibility.

The Indian in the Cupboard
Lynne Reed Banks
8-12
When a boy's toy Indian is accidentally brought to life, he learns the responsibility of caring for this person from another time and culture.

My Mama Needs Me
Mildred Pelts Walter
Lothrop 1983
6-8
A boy struggles between wanting to play with his friends and staying around home to help with his new baby sister.

**Henry Bear’s Park**
David McPhail
Puffin 1978
6-12
Henry’s dad leaves him in charge of his newly purchased park. He does all right until his loneliness for his father wears him down.

**The Corn Grows Ripe**
Dorothy Rhoads
Puffin 1993
12-15
A boy must take care of his father’s corn field, as well as appease the Mayan gods.

**The 18th Emergency**
Betsy Byars
Viking 1973
9-14
When his actions offend the biggest boy in school, Mouse decides to stop running and face up to his actions.

**Pages of Music**
Tony Johnston
Putnam 1988
6-10
A young man repays an entire village for its earlier kindness to his mother and him.

**The Parts of the House Argue**
Wisdom Tales From Around the World
Heather Forest, Ed.
August House 1996
A tale from the Philippines about a family and their house
where everyone argues about being the most important.

**Pierre**
Maurice Sendak
Scholastic Books 1962
5-8
A little boy learns that consequences to not caring.

**SELF DISCIPLINE**

**How I Hunted the Little Fellows**
Boris Zhitkov
Dodd 1979
6-12
A boy is fascinated by the ship model on his grandmother’s mantel, but is forbidden to touch it. He imagines, and is so convinced that a crew lives on it that he takes it apart. Grandma comes home. Ending is left unresolved.

**Listen Buddy**
Helen Lester
Walter Lorraine Books 1995
4-8
A young rabbit learns to listen—the hard way!

**The Man Who Kept His Heart in a Bucket**
Sonia Levitin
Dial 1991
6-9
A hard-working man learns finds true love.

**Me First**
Helen Lester
Houghton Mifflin 1992
5-9
A pig gets what he thought he wanted when he is tricked by a "sandwich".

**Please**
Alicia Aspinwall
The Book of Virtues
William Bennett, ed.
Guideposts 1993
"Pleases" that live in two brothers' mouths.

**The Signmaker's Assistant**
Ted Arnold
Puffin 1992
6-9
An assistant makes his own signs, never realizing what the consequences would be.

**The Tickle-Octopus**
Audrey and Don Wood
Harcourt Brace 1994
3-8
A creature brings new discoveries to a prehistoric family.
SELF ESTEEM

But Names Will Never Hurt Me

Bernard Waber
Houghton Mifflin, 1976
6-9
A girl learns to live with the name Alison Wonderland.

Chrysanthemum

Kevin Henkes
Greenwillow 1991
5-8
A young girl comes to appreciate her unusual name.

Cleversticks

Bernard Ashley
3-5
A Chinese boy goes to school, discouraged about all the things he doesn't know how to do. Then he teaches peers how to use chopsticks, and they teach him things they know.

Crow Boy

Taro Yashima
Viking 1955
6-9
A lonely Chinese boy's ability to reproduce crow calls earns him respect.

I Wish I Were a Butterfly

James Howe
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1982
A cricket learns about his own value.

**Jeremy’s Decision**
Ardyth Brott
Kane/Miller Books 1996
6-9
A boy decides what he wants to be when he grows up.

**Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back**
Shel Silverstein
Harper 1963
8-12
Lafcadio seeks happiness by trying everything—except just being himself.

**Leo, the Late Bloomer**
Robert Kraus
Harper Collins 1971
4-8
Leo couldn’t do anything, much to his father’s dismay. Mother knows he just needs more time.

**Michael’s New Haircut**
Karen G. Frandsen
Children’s Press 1986
4-7
Michael thinks his hair is too short. He covers up to avoid anyone noticing, avoids his friends—until his hat falls off!

**Miserable Marabou**
Franz Berliner
Gareth Steven’s, Inc 1989
5-9
A vulture learns that what makes a person important and valuable is not what is on the outside.
**Miss Rumphius**  
Barbara Cooney  
Viking 1982, Puffin 1985  
8-12  
A woman’s search for a way to fulfill her grandfather’s wish that she do something that makes the world a more beautiful place.

**Never Fear, Flip the Dip Is Here**  
Philip Hanft  
Dial 1991  
7-10  
A boy learns about himself as he learns to play baseball.

**Otto is Different**  
Franz Brandenberg  
Greenwillow 1985  
5-7  
An octopus comes to discover that being “different” has its advantages.

**Owen**  
Kevin Henkes  
Greenwillow 1993  
4-7  
Owen can’t part with his favorite blanket, Fuzzy, until Mom comes up with a plan.

**Sleeping Ugly**  
Jane Yolen  
Coward, McCann & Geoghegan 1981  
6-8  
When beautiful Princess Miserella, Plain Jane, and a fairy fall under a sleeping spell, a prince undoes the spell in a surprising way.
STEREOTYPES

Babe, The Gallant Pig
Dick King-Smith
Bullseye Books 1995
9-14
A brave, but polite pig who wants to be a sheepdog and succeeds!

Babushka
Patricia Polacco
Trumpet 1993
5-9
A forest witch proves that she’s not what everyone thought she was.

The Ordinary Princess
M.M. Kaye
Simon and Schuster 1986
8-11
A princess with the gift of ordinariness breaks through some stereotypes.

Rebound Caper
Thomas J. Dygard
Morrow
12-14
A high school boy joins the girls’ basketball team.

Tough Boris
Mem Fox
Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1994
4-8
A story which shows the softer side of a pirate.
Winning Kicker
Thomas J. Dygard
Morrow 1978
12-14
A girl joins a high school football team.

Williams' Doll
Charlotte Zolotow
Harper 1972, 1985
3-10
More than anything, William wants a doll, much to his father’s dismay. Grandma’s opinion helps everyone.

Zeeee
Elizabeth Enright
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1965
7-11
Zeeee is a fairy who has decided she doesn’t like people—any people, until she finally finds a place of her own and little girl who becomes friends with her.

WAR

Anna Is Still Here
Ida Vos
Puffin 1986
10-14
A young girl in Holland has difficulty recovering from the effects of the Holocaust even years later.

Faithful Elephants
Yukio Tsuchuya
Houghton Mifflin 1988
6-10
The story of three elephants, memorialized at the Ueno Zoo in Tokyo, who died during the final stages of World War II.

**Hide and Seek**

Ida Vos
Puffin 1981
10-15
A young Jewish girl in Holland goes into hiding from the Nazis.

**Hiroshima No Pika**

Toshi Maruki
Lothrup, Lee, and Shepard 1980
10-15
A young girl and her family are changed forever by the flash of Hiroshima's bombing.

**The Miracle Tree**

Christobel Mattingly
Gulliver Books, 1985
10-14
Three survivors of the bombing in Nagasaki are reunited years later through a tree. A Christmas story.

**My Brother Sam Is Dead**

James L. and Christopher Collier
Four Winds 1974, Scholastic 1977
11-15
A family from Connecticut is divided by the Revolutionary War.

**Rain of Fire**

Marion Dane Bauer
Clarion 1983
9-13
A boy is confused by his older brother's reaction to World War II and comes to his defense with near-tragic results.

**Rose Blanche**
Christopher Galloz and Roberto Innocenti
Creative Education 1985
10-12
One child gives food to children in a concentration camp.

**The Sign of the Beaver**
Elizabeth George Speare
Houghton Mifflin 1983, Dell 1984
9-14
A white boy and Indian grow up during pre-Revolutionary War era.

**Sarah Bishop**
Scott O'Dell
Houghton Mifflin 1980
11-14
A girl struggles to survive after her father and brother are killed during the Revolutionary War.

**The Tin Heart**
Karen Ackerman
Atheneum 1990
9-12
Two girls learn that even the Civil War cannot separate them as friends.
**Twenty and Ten**
Claire Huchet Bishop
Puffin 1952, 1978
9-13
School children in France hide some children from the Nazis.

**War Comes to Willy Freeman**
James L. and Christopher Collier
Dell 1986
11-15
A free black girl searches for her mother who was captured by the British.

**WORK**

**A Day's Work**
Eve Bunting
Clarion Books 1994
6-10
A grandpa and a boy looking for temporary work in the big city. The boy's dishonesty causes trouble, but his grandfather teaches him a big lesson.

**Gluscabi and the Magic Game Bag**
Wisdom Tales from Around the World
Heather Forest, Ed.
August House 1996
Gluscabi is a lazy hunter, and is given a magic game bag from Grandmother Woodchuck. He tricks all the animals into the bag, but reconsiders when Grandmother confronts him about the consequences.

**Leprechauns Never lie**
Lorna Balian
Abingdon 1980
6-10
A young girl learns indirectly the rewards of work from a leprechaun.

**Picking Peas for a Penny**
Angela Shelf Medearis
Scholastic 1990
7-10
A brother and sister earn pennies from the grandfather during the Depression.

**Pelle's New Suit**
Elsa Beskow
Floris Books 1989, 1994
5-8
A boy earns his new suit.

**The Three Little Pigs**
Paul Galdone
Clarion 1970, 1984
2-7
How the third pig outsmarts the wolf due to his hard work.
References


Trafzer, Clifford. (1998). Interview on January 28, 1998. Dr. Trafzer is a full professor of history and Native American Studies at University of California, Riverside. He also is the director of Costo Native American Research Center located at the university.


