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**The making of meaning: Three children's responses to three
researcher-composed narratives**

Everett, Mary S., Ph.D.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1991

**THE MAKING OF MEANING:
THREE CHILDREN'S RESPONSES
TO
THREE RESEARCHER-COMPOSED NARRATIVES**

A Dissertation

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

**by
Mary S. Everett
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1966
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1980
December, 1991**

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ABSTRACT

Three children's responses to three researcher-composed narratives were investigated. Participants were eight-year-old girls from the lower S.E.S., African-American culture.

Study focuses on the composing processes used to write three children's stories and the responses of children to the stories. The author's intended meaning was compared with the children's construction of meaning.

After each story was read aloud, response was elicited by each participant retelling the story and answering open-ended interview questions. One week later the participant was asked to retell the story a second time to determine changes in concept of story.

Data were analyzed according to grounded theory methodology. Applebee's (1978) six stages of narrative form were used to examine the children's retellings, as well as Golden's (1984) criteria which considers plot structure.

Data analysis indicated that the individual, selective, and active meaning that the children brought to the stories was influenced by their daily lives and the critical lenses through which they viewed the stories. All three of the children actively filled in gaps (Iser, 1978) which the researcher left open during the composing process. The participants found the moral

lessons and happy endings important in the stories, with responses indicating a possible connection between proper behavior and a happy outcome.

Responses indicated that the young reader does not necessarily derive the same interpretation of the texts as an adult attributes to the tales. Rather, children often gain an interpretation that is effected by their experiences and needs. Also, a child mishearing parts of a story may not indicate a mistake so much as his/her mind actively at work in order to have the story make sense to him/her. All three participants arrived at interpretations that seemed valid to the researcher according to Rosenblatt's (1978) criteria.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The Nature of the Problem

Historically, literary criticism has been influenced by changing trends in the focus of attention. During the 1700's and early 1800's when the classical ideas prevailed, the focus was on the literary work itself, leaving the writer and the writer's motives in the background. Toward the end of the 1800's, the emphasis shifted to the writer. Under the influence of John Stuart Mill (1859), the writer gained preeminence, as the focus was placed on the writer and the act of creation. The reader was disregarded, as the battle cry became "art for art's sake."

In the 20th century, the New Critics reacted against the obsession with the poet, to return to the autonomy of the text. Under the influence of Northrop Fry, literary criticism became concerned with text as object, disregarding both writer and reader. I. A. Richards (1929), a second New Critic, saw the influence of the reader's past experience and personality on the interpretation of the literature to be a problem; that is, individual perceptions interfere with the "correct" interpretation of text.

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) and other literary theorists have countered New Criticism with the view that the meaning of a literary work does not exist simply on the printed page, but that it is constructed by the reader during the literary experience. According to Rosenblatt, the reader is seen as crucial to the construction of a literary experience rather than a hindrance as Richards

had argued. Rather than the text carrying a precise meaning which readers must try to discern as the New Critics believed, Rosenblatt proposed that a literary text was merely symbols on a page, and the literary work, or "poem," came into being only in the transaction that occurred between the reader and text.

Response to Literature: Theory

Rosenblatt (1978) defined the literary experience as a synthesis of what the reader brings to the text in the way of knowledge, feelings, and desires, and what the literary text itself offers. She argued that, given certain criteria for validity of interpretation, different interpretations of the same text may be acceptable. Rosenblatt stated that although readers can have different interpretations, the reader must detach sufficiently to seek whether his/her intention corresponds to what the author actually intended. Therefore, a sound understanding of a work requires both a consciousness of the reader's own personal meaning and the knowledge of any information that can illuminate the author's intention.

Similarly, Wolfgang Iser (1978) in Germany shifted the focus of the meaning from the page to the meaning that is created by the reader. The text itself does not carry meaning, but rather guides the active creation of meaning. Iser had a similar perspective as Rosenblatt and believed that a given literary work may have more than one meaning.

Contributions of This Study

This study addresses the void that exists in the area of research in children's response to literature by comparing the author's intended meaning with children's interpretations of the same literary works. First, it analyzes a single writer's processes in attempting to create meaning through composing literary works during the writing process, and second, it compares the author's intended meaning with children's interpretations of the same literary works. Rosenblatt states at the beginning of her book The Reader, the Text, the Poem (1978) that she will discuss the writer to some length. But throughout the text she focuses on the reader's transaction with the text and what the literary text offers.

Reader response theory, in focusing on the reader and the text, has left the writer in the background. Like the reader, the writer is also transacting with a personal and a social environment in constructing a literary work. The purpose guiding the writing process, along with an awareness of the intended audience, steers the writer toward choices in composing. Beginning with the writer's intention in writing, links are created among the writer, the text, and the intended audience.

This study examines children's responses to stories written by the researcher. Researchers have studied interpretation and analyses of text as well as children's responses to text, but no one has investigated what relationship, if any, there may be between the writer's process in constructing meaning and the reader's construction of meaning of the same literary texts.

This study draws from theory and research in the area of reader response to literature, but expands its focus to include the writer's processes in composing three children's stories.

The participants chosen for the study were of African-American background. As Sims (1983) has noted, most studies of children's response to literature have drawn participants from the white mainstream culture. This present study addresses a need in the body of reader response research by examining the responses of African-American children to literary works.

Therefore, this study contributes to research in the following areas:

1. There is a body of research in children's response to literature, but it has been limited to the transactions between children and text. This study focuses on both the writer's processes in construction of meaning in composing stories for children and the children's construction of story meaning. Close analysis is given to the relationships, or lack of relationships, between the meaning constructed by the writer and the meaning constructed by the children.
2. This piece of research is unique in that the researcher is a writer of children's books and so reports first hand the writer's processes and intent in writing.
3. Participants in the study were of African-American background, a segment of American culture that has been largely ignored in research.

This study was generally guided by the following questions: What are the composing processes used in the writing of three children's stories and what are the responses of three children to these stories?

Specifically, the major questions of investigation were:

1. What processes leading to the making of meaning does the writer go through while composing a story for children?
 - a. Is there intent to convey a specific meaning during the composing process?
 - b. Are there any shifts in the meaning intended?
 - c. After composing, does the writer perceive a range of meaning in the story?
2. How do the children respond to the stories?
 - a. What are their concepts of the stories?
Do their concepts of the stories change over a one-week period following the initial reading of the story?
 - b. What meaning do the children derive from the stories?
What relation do these meanings have to the meanings intended by the writer?
 - c. Do the children find moral lessons in the stories? Are these the moral lessons the writer intended for the children to derive?

- d. Is there evidence that difference in interpretations is caused by language differences, especially with respect to word meanings?
- e. Do the children arrive at interpretations that do not seem valid to the writer? If so, what criteria for validity are used?

Methodology and Approach

The approaches taken to the investigation were qualitative and descriptive. It is a multiple case study of three African-American female children's responses to three literary works composed by the researcher. The number of participants and texts was limited to three to allow for intensive analysis of data.

Limitations of the Study

Because the composing processes of only one writer and the responses of only three children were examined, the study is not intended to be generalizable to a larger population of writers or readers. Rather, its purpose is to explore phenomena that have before been unexamined and to provide a frame for further research.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provides a description of the background of the problem, and includes research questions that guided the study. Chapter II presents a review of the literature in the several areas which relate to the study. A description of the methodology that was used, including procedures and design for data

collection and analysis, is included in Chapter III. Chapter IV is an analysis of the writer's processes of composing meaning, and in Chapter V, the three case studies are described. Chapter VI presents a discussion of the relationships between the writer's intent in constructing meaning with the children's construction of meaning. The conclusions and implications for teaching and further research are included in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The study is informed by research from several different areas: schema theory, developing concept of story, reader response to literature, and children's reading preferences.

Schema Theory

Bartlett (1932) was one of the first researchers who attempted to define schemata--the mental structures used during the encoding and retrieval of information. He argued that recall of stories is not an exact reproduction, but involves transformation with omissions and blending. He felt that subjects tended to get an impression of the whole story, and on this basis they would reconstruct the details of the story. Bartlett concluded that memory is constructive and a product of the interaction between the incoming information and the structures used by the subject. This concept of a mental schema or structure which influences story comprehension contributed to memory theories.

Bartlett (1932) proposed that a schema was an "active organization of past reactions and experiences which are always operating in any well-developed organism" (p. 201). He emphasized the relationship between incoming information and existing mental structures by stating that incoming information is actively integrated into a subject's existing mental structure but, at the same time, new information modifies the organization of existing mental structures.

According to schema theorists, all knowledge is organized into units in the mind called schemata (e.g., Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1983). Inside this package of knowledge are both the knowledge itself and information about how this knowledge is to be used (Rumelhart, 1980). At the Center for the Study of Reading in Champaign, Illinois, schema theorists applied their research to reading comprehension and discovered that different people reading the same text take away various meanings (e.g., Anderson, Reynolds, Goetz, & Schallert, 1980). American and East Indian readers were both given a passage to read from which they reported vastly different accounts, as each group brought their own cultural experience to their text interpretation. In a second study, readers from different occupations were given the same passage to read. The physical education teachers reported that the passage was about a wrestler, while the English teachers said it was about a prisoner. It was clear that no "one right meaning" was derived from the text.

Schema theorists have shown that with a framework for organizing knowledge and recalling what we know, we can remember more because we have a "frame" or script to hang things onto (Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1983). Good story structure and topic familiarity was found to affect comprehension (Asher, Hymel & Wigfield, 1978). Furthermore, Bruce (1981) found that continuity where ideas connect with one another is necessary in a good story. He also found that conflict, along with continuity, provides scaffolding for events that children need for making sense of stories. Bruce suggested that the reasons for better memory of connected text is that readers

are more able to remember things in frameworks and are, therefore, better able to relate text to what they already know. In short, Bruce proposes that connected discourse allows the reader to organize elements in a text.

Based on the idea that stories have an internal structure which is built in a hierarchical network, story grammar was proposed as one way to analyze texts (Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda, 1983). Rumelhardt (1975) developed a text grammar with a set of summarization rules. He attempted to process internal organization of story material by composing rules that described how a story can be broken down into units and how these units relate to one another. Rumelhardt assumed that the organizational principles formalized in his grammar corresponds to the organizational strategies used by participants. In developing this grammar, Rumelhart analyzed the structure of folktales and myths. In his schema for stories, Rumelhart's primary units of analysis are defined as categories, which are described as specific types of information serving different functions within the story.

Stein and Glynn (1978) also developed a story grammar approach to comprehension. They validated the theory that incoming information is encoded in relationship to already existing psychological structures. In comprehension, these existing structures determine the information gained and the inferences generated. While reading or listening to a story, subjects expect certain patterns of information, attend to information that matches these patterns, and organize incoming information into similar patterns. If the story grammar corresponds to the internal structure used by the participants during

story comprehension, predictions concerning the organization of incoming information and the generating of new information can be made.

Stein and Glynn (1978) deleted some of Rumelhardt's categories and added new categories in order to analyze story recall protocols. The seven new categories consisted of the following: (a) setting, (b) initiating event, (c) internal response, (d) internal plan, (e) attempt, (f) direct consequence, and (g) reaction.

Applebee (1978) spoke of schemata that guide a child's reaction to literature. The schema is formed by previous experiences with literature and acts as the basis for constructing reasonable expectations for what is to follow in a story. He proposed that any effect that literature has upon a child is in terms of changes in the child's schema. Applebee claims that what a reader knows through experience and knowledge of story conventions will affect comprehension.

According to Piaget (1962), the schema is altered through the process he identifies as accommodation. In accommodation, the schema is changed, refined, or a new schema is created. If, however, the individual does not perceive a difference between what is anticipated and what is encountered, the new information is assimilated into the existing schema.

Neisser (1976) proposed that schemata are abstract mental structures of knowledge which anticipate, and are thus used as the medium by which the past effects the future; information already acquired determines what will be picked up next. Anticipatory schemata guide perceptions, whereby at each

moment the perceiver is constructing anticipations of certain kinds of information that enable him or her to accept it as it becomes available. The outcome of the explorations, which is the information picked up, modifies the original schema. Thus modified, it directs further exploration and becomes ready for more information, resulting in the creation of a perceptual cycle.

McConaughy (1982) proposed that the internal cognitive schema, or "mental-set," which readers or listeners bring to a story text sets up expectations for what is coming next during encoding and operates in reconstruction of story information during recall. Also significant is the fact that story schema determines what information is considered most important by the reader or listener. McConaughy stated that there are developmental differences between what children and adults emphasize in stories, shown by what each considers most important in their retellings. She added that there are at least two different types of cognitive schemata, the use of which is dependent upon the age of the participant. The less cognitively complex schema is called the "causal inference" schema, which emphasizes the chain of physical causality in the story. Included in this schema are the initiating event and resolutions, as well as the specific attempts and outcomes, all of which makes up the plot of the story. In short, this causal inference schema is the "what happened" version of the story. A more cognitively complex schema, on the other hand, is represented by what is called the "social inference" schema. This schema focuses on initiating events and outcomes as well as motivation

and goals of the characters, making up the theme of the story. This more complex schema is the "why it happened" version of the story.

McConaughy (1982) made a distinction between physical causality and psychological causality. Descriptions of actions of the characters and relationship of events are referred to as physical causality. Psychological causality, on the other hand, is a chain of internal states and dispositions such as traits, feelings, or intentions which motivate and precede the characters' actions. Physical causality leading to the resolution represents the plot structure, whereas the motivation or psychological causality leads to the goal or theme of the story.

The dynamic schemata described by Piaget (1962) and Neisser (1976) were compatible with the view of Rosenblatt (1978), who emphasized that the reader brings expectations into the act of reading, thereby influencing the quality of the literary event. Neisser's perceptual cycle parallels Rosenblatt's description of the transaction between reader and text as an "active, self-ordering, and self-correcting" process, in which the reader makes adjustments while proceeding through the text.

More specifically, Rosenblatt (1978) claimed that in aesthetic encounters with the text, the reader interprets later passages in light of former ones. Rosenblatt proposed that in aesthetic encounters with text, there are moments of disequilibrium as well as equilibrium, which are a part of the refining process of interpretation.

Particularly relevant to the present study is the research of schema theorists who acknowledge that each reader modifies and self-corrects his/her expectations according to their experiences, acquired habits, and assumptions. There are two types of internal cognitive schemata (McConaughy, 1982). These are the "casual inference" schema, which focuses on the physical causality of the story, and the "social inference" schema, which focuses on the psychological causality of the story.

Developing Concept of Story

Children's developing concept of story has a direct effect upon their response to particular literary works. In analyzing children's tellings and retellings of stories, Applebee (1978) found developmental differences in children's response to narrative text that correspond to the cognitive development stages described by Piaget. In the pre-operational stage, which lasts until the age of six or seven, the child uses egocentrism and centration when discussing a story, and the child's response has little sense of coherence. In this stage there is a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the original experience, with little or no evidence of reorganization. With the advent of the concrete operational stage, the child begins to take on the ability to organize the experience with more thorough story discussion-- responses which are best described as summaries. Whereas retellings are attempts to retell the story in the original form, summaries reorganize the experience into hierarchies of categories and subcategories with relationships between them.

Applebee (1978) used the category membership of Vygotsky (1978) to define a series of stages in concept development which provide a model for analysis of narrative form. In the stories told by children, six basic types of structures were found which are defined as follows: (a) heaps, where unrelated objects are linked together by chance; (b) sequences, where each event is linked to another on the basis of one shared attribute, such as A does X, A does Y, and A does Z; (c) primitive narrative, where events are organized around a central situation; (d) unfocused chain, where incidents lead directly from one to another and the attributes which link them continue to shift, resulting in the head bearing little resemblance to the tail; (e) focused chain, where the main character goes through a series of events linked to one another, each event developing out of the previous one; and (f) narratives, where each incident not only develops out of the previous one, but at the same time elaborates a new aspect of the situation. Stories at this final stage have a consistent forward movement with a climax at the end.

Applebee (1978) claimed that at early ages the stories of children are "disconnected strings" of sequential ordering, and at later ages, the stories contain "story markers." One such story marker is a formal opening such as, "Once upon a time," and a formal ending such as, "The end." Applebee stated that five-year-olds use the past tense in telling a story, in addition to lowering their speaking voice to a dramatic quality.

In an earlier study, Applebee (1973) interviewed five, six, and seven-year-old children to determine their perception of the events of a story, of

what makes a good story, and of where stories come from. From the analysis of the data, Applebee found that young children were likely to equate story and book, with little differentiation between the composing and the manufacturing process. When asked to explain why a story was good or bad, the children had difficulty. If pressed, many children turned to characters' actions as evidence. Overall, Applebee concluded that young children were more adept at recounting story detail than in talking about stories. Most provocative is the fact that children moved from an acceptance of story characters as real people, through a transitional stage in which they were real but far away, toward an understanding of the characters as "made up."

Applebee (1979) considered the child's sense of story as a way of structuring the everyday world. The stories which children hear lead them to a rich and highly structured set of expectations about what new stories will be like. They come to expect a consistent structure with a definite beginning and definite end which resolves the problem in a satisfying way. Also, children develop a set of conventional characters and situations which provide a kind of story short-hand for dealing with complex notions such as wickedness or deceit. These expectations come to bear when children encounter a new story, and are also brought to bear in the children's own storytelling. Children are engaged in a search for meaning, a search for structures and patterns that will suggest order and consistency in the world around them. Children gain pleasure in mastery-knowing the rules and being able to manipulate them so that things come out right in the end. This is particularly important in the fascination of

highly stereotyped, formula stories, such as cowboys and Indians, comic books, and later the detective story.

Similar to Applebee's research (1973, 1978) on developmental differences in childrens' retellings, Sutton-Smith (1978) described the stories of two, three and four-year-old children. The results of the findings were as follows: (a) the youngest children of two could not distinguish between a story and a personal chronicle, but had no trouble placing the events in the correct order; (b) children before the age of three told cyclical patterned stories about third-person imaginary characters where one character goes through a series of actions; (c) children used the past tense and boundary rules in starting and ending stories ("that's all, the end, once upon a time"); and (d) although the storytelling abilities showed marked development in children from two to four years of age, it is not until the age of five or six that children used clear-cut stages of conflict and resolution, their stories usually having the conflict without the resolution.

Using Applebee's (1978) model of developmental structure of stories as a basis for assessing the retellings of fourth, sixth, and eighth-grade students sophistication with elements of the story, Cullinan, Harwood, and Galda (1983) confirmed that there continues to be a developmental progression in the older children. The form of reader's story recall progressed from retelling to summary and analysis. The fourth-grade students remained at the literal level, sixth-grade students were able to make inferences, and eighth-grade students could make evaluative judgments from the text.

Pitcher and Prelinger (1963) added to the research on developmental stages used by children in their retellings by investigating the storytelling of two, three, four, and five-year-old children. Findings indicated that there were several formal dimensions into which stories could be evaluated on a scale of 1-5: (a) expansion of space, (b) inner complexity of the characters, (c) realism vs. fantasy, and (d) action vs. thought of the characters. The researchers found that four and five-year old children used the greater area of space for character movement and that internal complexity of the main figure increased with age. As age increased, so did the imaginative quality of the story, and their stories included more fantastic elements. The four and five-year-old children also elaborated more upon the thought of the characters, whereas the two and three-year-old children concentrated more upon the action of the story.

Children's retellings were investigated by Golden (1984), who proposed that the child's prior knowledge of story structure, which is a mental representation of the organization of the story, plays an active role in how children interpret and construct stories. Three elements--setting, character, and plot--are interrelated and the development of one affects the development of the other. The concept of story helps the reader to have a set of expectations through which the reader predicts and processes stories. Predictions can evolve from settings such as "a little cottage in the deep woods" (p. 578); from the characters such as "a forsaken princess" (p. 578); and from the events such as "the youngest son leaves home on a journey" (p. 578).

In examining the children's retellings of stories, Golden (1984) suggested that it is important to consider which story elements the children draw upon. In terms of overall story structure, Golden suggested that the following be considered: (a) the beginning, middle, and end of children's retellings; (b) whether children identified the setting and basic plot structure with specific events, or if they compressed the plot into summary statements; (c) whether children's retellings resembled the language of the story, or if the children deviated, elaborated, or varied from the original story line; and (d) whether children included characters' motivations, descriptions, and roles in the plot.

Particularly relevant to the present study is the research acknowledging that there are developmental differences in children's response to narrative text. In the pre-operational stage, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the representation and the original experience, with little or no evidence of reorganization. In the concrete operational stage, the child reorganizes the experience into summaries.

Reader Response to Literature

In The Reader, the Text, the Poem (1978), Rosenblatt proposed a theory in disagreement with the theory that a text carries a precise meaning which readers must discern. She proposed that a text was only symbols on a page until the "poem," or literary work, came alive during the transaction between reader and text. According to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literary response, a "live circuit" is created between the reader and text during the reading transaction, each conditioning the other, creating a unique event for

the reader in time and place. This literary experience is a synthesis of what the reader already knows or feels or desires with what is offered by the text. Readers actively select and organize elements of the text according to their already acquired habits, assumptions, and expectations. The "poem" that is created at any one time and place by the reader is unique to that particular reader. This transaction between reader and text consists of a reader's bringing meaning into the symbols on a page and the construction of that meaning through the material in the text. The active reader constantly builds and synthesizes meaning, paying attention to the referents of the words processed, while aware of the images being created. The text does not carry meaning, but rather guides the active creation of meaning.

Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1978) distinguished between efferent and aesthetic reading, which represent two stances along which the reader's focus of attention must move. Efferent reading is information-centered; the reader is concerned with what can be carried away from the text and blocks out feelings which could be associated with the text. An example of the efferent stance is scanning the label on a bottle of poison to quickly read the antidote information. In contrast, during an aesthetic response, the reader experiences the text by paying attention to feelings, associations, and images.

In discussing the problem of validity of interpretation, Rosenblatt (1978) stated that interpretation encompasses the possibility of a diversity of viewpoints. She adds that two standards of adequate interpretation are as follows: (a) the reader should not contradict something in the text, and (b) the

reader should not infer something in the text for which there is no verbal basis.

Wolfgang Iser's (1978) theory is similar in many ways to Rosenblatt's transactional theory. He proposed a theory of aesthetic response in which the work is described as coming into being when an interaction occurs between the reader and the text. The meaning of the text is a dynamic happening of self-correction, in which the reader continuously modifies his or her expectations in projections of what the text is offering. The reader is continually casting forward a "future horizon yet to be occupied," while retaining the "past horizon that is already filled" (p. 111).

According to the theory of Iser (1978), asymmetry in the reader-text relationship occurs by gaps in the text. The gaps occur when information is not made explicit by the author. The reader is drawn into the text by supplying what is meant from what is not said, resulting in the reader's filling in the gaps by making inferences. According to Iser, the interaction between the reader and text fails if the blanks are filled solely by the reader's projections. The text offers guidance in the continual correction of the projection.

In agreement with Rosenblatt, Iser (1978) stated that many meanings on the part of the reader are valid, due to reading being a dynamic happening of individual interpretation where the text is happening, and the experience of the reader is activated by this happening. The reader's reception of the text is based upon the interaction between the old experience of the reader being acted upon by the new experience of the text.

The question of how the reader contributes to the creation of meaning becomes important when the reader is considered an essential part of the reading transaction. Contributing to the field of theoretical literature in learning how the reader contributes to the creation of meaning, is the field of psychology. Holland (1975), who developed a response theory based on Freudian psychology, claimed that readers have a characteristic manner of responding which is linked to their personalities and holds across texts. Holland's theory suggests the following: (a) there is variability in different readers' recreation of text, for each reader searches out an idea that matches his or her particular needs for making sense of the text; and (b) the act of making sense of a text works as a defense against anxiety in the reader. His theory proposes that each reader has an "invariant style," or "identity theme," which affects that person's response. Therefore, each reader projects fantasy into the text according to his or her invariant style. In short, the readers respond to the text according to their own psychological process. Holland's (1975) principles of the inner dynamics of the reading process include: (a) readers reenact their own lifestyles, (b) readers find something in the work that reflects how they cope with needs, and (c) readers use the literary work to create a wish-fulfilling fantasy.

Holland (1975) proposed that there is no correct or incorrect interpretation of the text, but that each reader reads and interprets what is already within himself/herself, or the story is understood in relation to that which lies inside the reader's mind. Differences in interpretations stem from

differences in the interpreters' personalities. Because all readings originate in the reader's personality, all are subjective. Holland stated that a valid interpretation is evident only in the psychological process the reader creates in himself/herself when responding to literary works.

Reflecting a model of developmental trends in second, fourth, and sixth-grade children's retellings, Pillar (1983) investigated children's responses to fables in each of four dimensions: intentionality, relativism, punishment, and independence of sanctions. In responding to intentionality, second-grade children judged an act for the physical consequences rather than its intent to do harm. In relativism, second-grade children thought an act was either totally right or totally wrong, and that everyone viewed it in the same way; fourth and sixth-grade children were aware of possible diversity in views. In addition, Pillar found that second-grade children advocated severe and painful punishment for characters, whereas fourth and sixth-grade children favored milder punishment leading to restitution of the victim and reform of the culprit. In independence of sanctions, second-grade children concluded that an act was wrong if it elicited punishment, while fourth and sixth-grade children concluded that it was wrong if it violated a rule or did harm to others.

The variety of the response found in Pillar's (1983) study bore out Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional model insofar as children gave unique recreations of fables in terms of their individual sensibilities. The range of response was accounted for through citing Iser's (1978) description of the gap-filling process in which readers engage in making personal meaning from a

text. Immature responses were directed toward obedience and punishment, whereas mature responses indicated that students were looking at the situation from the point of view of the characters in the fable. Responses showed that children pass through a series of increasingly complex moral stages; higher levels require the ability to understand what another person may be thinking and feeling. The findings of Pillar's research question the appropriateness of using fables with seven-year-olds, as the abstractions of wisdom and folly are elusive to the minds of those children who respond in only the most concrete terms.

In examining three eight-year-old girls' responses to fairy tales, Trousdale (1987) found that each of the participants found moral lessons which were concrete and direct in the stories. The lessons did not reflect abstract moral lessons or the particular meanings which many adults attribute to the tales. The meanings that the children found were shaped by their unique experiences which they brought to the text.

In investigating the types of responses that are common at particular age levels, Hickman's (1979) dissertation revealed that kindergarten and first-grade children had some familiarity with story frames and showed it through conventional beginnings and endings, relying on prototyped characters, identifying lessons of the story, and noting similarities to other stories. Fourth and fifth-grade children were more concerned with the probability of stories--their reality--rather than their possibility. Also, kindergarten and first-grade

children attended to character roles, while fourth and fifth-grade children questioned if "people were really like that."

Hickman (1979) also found that fourth and fifth-grade children seem to be better critics than kindergarten and first-grade children, but the effect was most pronounced when both were working with simple picture books. Also, Hickman found that children did some of their best critical thinking when reading material that was easy for them, easy material being that which was well-known and more predictable.

When making further comparisons across kindergarten through grade five for responses to a picture book using The Magical Drawings of P. Moony Finch (McPhail, 1978), Hickman (1981) found the following: (a) children at all levels seem to have a priority for explaining puzzling items in a story; (b) children at all levels remarked on story similarities rather than differences; (c) kindergarten and first-grade children were more likely to make personal statements that were tied to literature; (d) kindergarten and first-grade children were more likely to talk about whether a story was true, while fourth and fifth-grade children commented about its likeness to real life; (e) kindergarten and first-grade children tended to state the lesson or moral in terms of the story itself, while fourth and fifth-grade children made disembedded theme statements; and (f) kindergarten and first-grade children frequently retold or summarized a small part of the story as a response, while fourth and fifth-grade children used more comprehensive summaries.

An additional claim of Hickman (1983) is that most reader response studies include a temporal dimension that doesn't move beyond the first meetings of a reader with a text. Therefore, she investigated a dimension of repetition and successive responses, nonverbal modes of responding, and the nature of spontaneous expressions of response in kindergarten through fifth-grade students. When comparing responses across age groups, the findings showed: (a) kindergarten through first-grade students were the most likely to use their bodies to respond, and primary children sometimes demonstrated or acted out answers as an alternative to struggling for words; (b) the second through third-grade group was set apart by the children's involvement with the task of becoming independent readers with a willingness to read or listen to stories which they did not fully understand; (c) the fourth through fifth-grade group showed use of abstracted or generalized language in summaries, classification, and theme statements; and (d) first and second-grade students offered literal explanations based on their own experiences of the world when asked about real and make-believe, whereas the fourth through fifth-grade students regarded the reality of a picture book as a silly thing to be talking about. In considering the quality rather than the nature of response events, it was generally true that children's responses reflected their level of thinking and language development.

In analyzing the children's retelling of the stories, Hickman (1981) found that the kindergarten and first-grade students retold the story all or in part, as if the text could speak for itself better than the child could speak for it.

Children in the fourth and fifth-grade class involved more summarization than straight retelling and more purposeful level of manipulation.

Sims (1983) has noted that, historically, studies of response to literature have centered on adolescents or college students; only recently has attention turned to elementary school-age students. She further stated that of these elementary school studies, only a small percent have included black children as participants in the study.

In selecting reading materials for black children, attempts to create materials for black children may be overestimating the uniqueness of black children's interest and underestimating the extent to which black children have common interests with white peers of the same sex. With respect to race, Asher's (1979) data indicated overlap in interest among black and white children. Black males' and white males' interest ratings were significantly correlated. Black females' and white females' interest scores were also correlated, although somewhat less.

In examining the preferences of minority children in literature, Sims (1983) investigated what factors an 11 year-old black girl considered most appealing, as well as what factors turned her away. Sims found that the black reader expressed the following: (a) a desire to see and read about people like herself; (b) a preference for reading about experiences which were similar to her own; (c) a preference for books filled with humor; and (d) a preference for the rhythmic, poetic, lyrical use of language.

Asher (1979) examined the contribution of topic interest to race differences in reading comprehension of fifth-grade children of different races. Black children's reading achievement test performance is typically lower than white children's performance, and the discrepancy increases as children mature. Asher's findings indicated the following: (a) both black and white children comprehended better when the material was of high interest, (b) girls as well as boys achieved higher scores on high interest material, (c) boys' interest scores were highly correlated with masculine sex typing and negatively correlated with feminine sex typing, and (d) girls' interests were moderately related to feminine sex typing and only somewhat negatively related to masculine sex typing. The general pattern, then, is that boys' interests were sex typed and girls' interests were moderately sex typed, but both genders improved their comprehension by reading material that was of high interest to them.

McLoyd (1990) claimed that the intensity with which developmental psychologists study minority children waxes and wanes with changes in America's political and economic conditions. The Civil Rights Movement and Head Start led to a rise in research studies of African-American children during the late 1960's and early 1970's. McLoyd stated that in the 1990's there is again a need for studies in the area of minority children, as America will increasingly depend on this population for its cultural and economic development.

Furthermore, McLoyd (1990) claimed that controversy has been a mainstay of research on minority children. African-American children, even though they are the most studied of America's minority ethnic population, are at the center of the race-comparative paradigm. The race-comparative paradigm, which compares African-American children to Anglo-American children, has resulted in literature commenting on how African-American children do not behave rather than literature on how they do behave. In addition, the literature has fostered a tendency to ignore intragroup variability. Consequently, relatively little is known about individual differences among African-American children from within the African-American population. Because the studies have emphasized the race of the subjects, such studies have fostered the view that African-American children are abnormal, incompetent, and in need of changing. In short, McLoyd called for research studying African-American children in their own right without a "control" group composed of Anglo-American children.

Heath (1982) proposed that the different literary events used in three different communities effected the child's performance in school-based literary events. She suggested that the middle-class mothers' use of similar literary events as those used in the school had a direct influence on the middle-class child's success in school events, for example reading comprehension.

Pellegrini, Perlmutter, Galda, and Brody (1990) examined the behaviors of black Head Start children and their mothers around a series of experimental joint reading contexts in their homes. Results indicated that genre, not format,

affected the mother's teaching strategies. Further, black mothers adjusted their level of teaching, or teaching strategies, to children's level of task competence.

Particularly relevant to the present study is Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory which states that a "live circuit" is created between the reader and the text when the reader synthesizes his/her knowledge, feelings, and desires with what the literary work offers. The reader continuously modifies his/her expectations as he/she fills in gaps not made explicit by the author (Iser, 1978).

Children's Reading Preferences

The child's choice of a favorite book with a familiar character, story, or author finds support in the developmental learning theory. At the core of this theory is the notion that learning is self-motivated and occurs as a child's mental structure is ready to accommodate or assimilate new information. Therefore, a child's choice of a favorite book with familiar characters, story, or authors may reflect an interest in building upon, or reinforcing, mental structures that reflect that place in the child's development (Robinson, 1983).

Kiefer (1983) stated that previous research related to children and picture books has remained grounded in adult paradigms of how children operate, and that researchers have seldom looked at the child's understandings or at the world through the child's eyes.

One of the best known studies that looked at children's interests through the child's eyes was conducted by Norvell (1958). The purpose of his investigation was to determine the interests of 124,000 children in terms of

intelligence and gender. Norvell's study drew the following conclusions on children's interests in literature: (a) humor was the most enjoyed characteristic of reading materials; (b) young children preferred verse of personified objects and humanized animals; (c) as early as third grade gender played an important factor in reading choices--girls enjoyed books with a male child protagonist as the central character, but boys rejected books with a female child protagonist as the central character; and (d) superior, average, and slow pupils enjoyed the same kinds of reading materials, which were those filled with action, humor, animals, patriotism, and holidays. Norvell found that the children did not object to stating reading preferences, but did object to being examined as to why they have such preferences.

Adding to the research of Norvell (1958), King (1967) researched the reading interests, preferences, and habits of elementary school children. King's findings indicated the following: (a) children throughout the elementary grades showed a preference for narrative material, with fiction being preferred and read more frequently than non-fiction; (b) girls showed a greater interest in poetry than boys, and prose form--particularly narrative--was preferred to poetry; (c) primary grade children favored a story with a good plot and lots of action, humor and nonsense; (d) lower elementary school children preferred larger type and a page that is uncluttered; (e) there were few sex differences in reading interests up to age nine; (f) lower elementary school children preferred fairy tales, animal stories, and realistic stories which were based on everyday

activities; and (g) reading interests of children who were above average in intelligence matured faster than those of slow learners.

Another study revealing childrens' preferences in books was conducted by Peterson (1972). This study revealed that children across grade levels in fourteen elementary schools liked to hear dialect stories read aloud, but the stories which they preferred to read themselves were written in standard dialects with conventional spellings. In addition, this study showed that boys and girls across the fourteen elementary schools had similar favorite storybooks with the following characteristics: (a) the plot tended to be vigorous and episodic; (b) the literary style was straightforward; (c) the main characters were usually the age of the reader and did not develop throughout the story; (d) the illustrations were realistic in nature, contained strong and bright colors, and at times dominated the text; and (e) the theme related to the child's need for a fun-filled, action-packed, vicarious adventure.

Furthermore, Peterson (1972) found that of the four general subjects and literary forms (information, stories, poetry, and jokes), the lower elementary school children found fanciful stories the most appealing--the most popular being modern fantasy stories about animals. Children reported that a main determinant of book selection was subject matter.

Goldfarb (1945) conducted one of the early investigations on reasons why children preferred animal stories. He suggested that the preference for animals over humans is related to a child's identification with animals, which progressively weakens by age eight.

An investigation into fourth-grade children's reading preferences in relation to their sex and reading ability was conducted by Chiu (1973). The results showed that in the fourth grade boys' reading preferences were different from those of girls' in the following ways: (a) boys preferred biography, science, social studies, and sports; girls preferred adventure, fantasy, humor and poetry; and (b) girls enjoyed reading stories with boys as central characters, but boys seldom read stories with girls as central characters. There were no differences in the preferences for animal and mystery stories, both groups rated them quite high. Furthermore, Chiu found that both boy and girl readers became better readers by reading materials of interest to them.

Tucker (1983) proposed that children ages two through seven prefer stories that are not too long and are told in a language they can understand. In addition, their favorite tales often revolve around simple, stereotyped situations which are heavily repetitive in their predictable symmetry. Yet, at the same time, these same children can occasionally relish stories that break such conventions, as in the case of Dr. Seuss stories. While wild animals usually appear as fearsome objects in fairy tales, modern picture books will sometimes offer a contrasting view featuring a happy lion, which children are quite able to accept. Finally, while young readers like justice to be done where "bad" characters step out of line, these same children are willing to accept deviations where "bad" characters are not reprimanded for their behavior. Tucker states that even though children seem to welcome deviations

from such norms from time to time, children must learn the fictional norms of stories before they can appreciate the ab-norms.

Children move at individual rates from the known or expected to the new (Tucker, 1983). Although each child's response to the balance of the strange and familiar in a book differs, the best children authors seem to know intuitively how to mix the stimulating with the reassuring, and how to balance conservatism and innovation in language and plot (Tucker, 1983).

Looking at the child's interest in a topic, Asher (1980) found that interest did affect comprehension and that fifth-grade children's comprehension of high interest material was greater than their comprehension of low interest material. In addition, Asher found that boys showed stronger effects than girls. That is, girls performed better than boys on low interest material, but on high interest material there appeared no sex differences. In short, interest in the topic of what they read has a stronger effect on boys' comprehension than it does on girls' comprehension.

The above study confirmed findings in an earlier study by Asher et al. (1978), in which findings indicated that girls, as well as boys, comprehended better on high interest material. Previous research had also indicated that children comprehended more of high than low interest material when each child was given a mixture of both types of material (Dorsel, 1975). Asher concluded that this effect could be due to a contrast effect whereby children selectively responded to the more appealing topics.

Young children's preferences for poetry were examined in grades one, two, and three through a national sampling of 792 children (Fisher & Ntarella, 1982). In examining poetic form, children at all three grades showed the highest preference for narratives. The content of the poems also played an important part in children's preferences. Children across grade levels best liked poems about the fantastic and strange, then poems about animals and childhood experiences. There was a descending degree of liking poetry across the three grade levels.

In developing my stories, I employed the research findings stating that humor was the most enjoyed characteristic of reading materials, and that boys did not enjoy reading books with girls as central characters, but girls did enjoy reading books with boys as central characters (Norvell, 1958; Chiu, 1973). The age selection of the participants chosen for the study was based on the research stating that at age eight or nine gender begins to affect response (Norvell, 1958; Chiu, 1973).

CHAPTER III

Research Design

Qualitative and descriptive methodologies guided the overall design of this study, including the selection of participants and the collection and analysis of data. Procedures were adapted from a trial study which was conducted during the fall of 1990. The trial study was a case study of one seven-year-old child's response to "Billy's Treasure," a story I wrote prior to beginning this study. The number of participants in the present study was extended to three in order to gain a broader source of data while still allowing intensive analysis. Also, the number of stories used in the present study was extended from one to three. Contact with the participants was extended from one session concerning each story to two sessions. Also, the trial study indicated that young children may not be practiced in articulating responses to narrative freely, and that structured solicitation of verbal response was needed for data collection. Grounded theory methodology in data analysis had proven effective in the trial study, so was adapted to the analysis of data for the dissertation.

The text of each of each of the three stories was built around a similar theme in which the child protagonist experiences conflict on his birthday. My purpose for working with similar themes in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," was to control effects of response due to differences in theme. The text of each of the three stories is included in appendix A.

Selection of Participants

Participants for this study were chosen by criterion-based selection. In this type of sampling, the researcher begins by identifying criteria according to which participants are chosen (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). Research in children's response to literature provided the basis for selection criteria.

Applebee (1978) provided the research necessary for age selection criterion of the participants. Applebee found that children who have not entered concrete operations lack the ability to express themselves beyond a simple retelling of the story, but during the concrete operational stage can organize and synthesize response. In order to maximize ability to articulate response, and because the stories were aimed for primary grade children, participants seven years of age were chosen. In addition, it is at this age that stories filled with humor, action, animals, and holidays are most enjoyed (Norvell, 1958). It is also at this age that gender begins to affect response (Norvell, 1958). Because differences in response caused by gender differences were not this study's focus, participants of one gender were selected.

When a researcher is beginning to study a particular area, it has been recommended that differences among comparative groups be kept at a minimum (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Participants in this study were of the same socioeconomic and ethnic background as well as the same gender. Because Sims (1983) and McLoyd (1990) have articulated a need for black children's response to literature, and because I teach black children in my professional life, this study drew participants from the African-American population.

The number of participants was limited in order to allow for intensive analysis of data. Given constraints of the number of texts, I was concerned that using only one participant would not yield a broad enough source of data, and using two participants might provide only a study in contrasts. Therefore, I decided to use three case studies, to provide balance and depth to the data while still allowing for intensive analysis.

The participants were drawn from two schools in the lower socio-economic area. They were located through professional reference of principals, guidance counselors, and teachers. I interviewed both the child participants and their parents in order to discover the general literacy level of the parent, as well as the reading tastes and background experience of the participants. The adult chosen to read all three stories to the participants was highly recommended by both a principal and teacher from a school in the same area from which the participants were drawn.

Description of Stories

Because humor and celebrated days of the year are of high interest to the children at this age (Chiu, 1973; King, 1967, Norvell, 1958), all three of the stories composed for the study focused on birthdays as their primary theme. In addition, the three stories--"Mom, Don't You Like It?," "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party"--used humor throughout the text to appeal to the children.

The humor involved in all three of the stories centers around a central character who experiences conflict with people and events on his birthday;

each story ends with a happy, surprise episode. In two of the stories, the traumatic events experienced by the child protagonist during the story are offset by the giving of a surprise party; in the third story, the catastrophic events are offset with the surprising discovery of a monkey. The text in two of the stories, "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," consisted entirely of dialogue between the child protagonist and the mother.

In "Mom, Don't You Like It?," the child protagonist named Leroy has received birthday money from his uncle and attempts to purchase presents which would both bring him enjoyment and be acceptable to his mother. Each of the purchases made by Leroy, however, are found troublesome to the mother for one reason or another, and at the mother's suggestion, are returned to the store by Leroy. In the end, Leroy tells his mother that because he can find nothing to please her, he will no longer attempt to purchase a gift. Leroy's mother then surprises him with a birthday party.

In "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Harry, the child protagonist, experiences a sequence of traumatic events occurring throughout his birthday. Not only do his family and teacher forget it's his birthday, but "bad luck" follows Harry everywhere he goes--aboard the school bus, and into the classroom, playground, cafeteria, car, doctor's office, department store, and restaurant. Not until Harry arrives home and finds his father and friends waiting to give him a surprise party, do the unhappy events take a happy turn.

In "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," the birthday boy experiences a sequence of catastrophic events at his birthday party at the amusement park, caused by his bringing a pet iguana. After allowing a friend to hold the pet, the animal is dropped, resulting in a chain reaction of fantastic episodes. In the end, the pet iguana is lost but a surprise monkey is found.

Collection of Data

Data were collected through written protocols which were kept during the composing of three childrens' stories, video and audiotaped sessions with the respondents, interviews with the parents and participants, and field notes. Some of the information was gained at other times than the scheduled sessions, such as in the car when I transported each participant to and from my home where the sessions were held.

Data collection consisted of two phases, the first of which was my composing three children's stories. Reflective, handwritten field notes were written before, during, and after the composing of the three children's stories. Notes were examined to determine my preactive, interactive, and postactive thought processes while composing. Specifically, I accompanied the composing of the story with a written protocol describing the processes while writing. The written protocols addressed the following points: (a) my main goals in writing the story; (b) the things I considered when writing the story; (c) the theme I considered in writing the story; (d) what I hoped children would learn from the story; (e) the devices I used to get ideas across; (f) whether or not I deviated from the original theme; (g) the amount of revision I conducted while writing;

(h) the type of things I changed in revision; (i) some possible reasons for changing, or not changing, a story; (j) the things I chose to include in the story; and (k) the things I purposely left out of the story, which I hoped the reader would extract from the story.

The second phase of the study consisted of five sessions with an adult African-American female reading each of the stories to three participants on separate occasions. Galda (1981) found in a study of fifth-grade readers that the participants lacked ability and experience in sustaining group discussion of the literary works they had read. It seemed probable, therefore, that this inexperience and inability would be even more likely in the case of younger children.

Following each of the readings, the child retold the story, then answered open-ended questions which I asked concerning the story. The questions focused on plot, characters, filling in gaps, real or make-believe, and the lessons found in the stories. On the week following the initial reading, the child retold the story a second time to determine whether, and to what extent, the child's sense of the story changed over time, and whether or not a difference existed in the short-term memory recall of the story and the child's concept of story as it settles on the long-term memory.

Specifically, the first session with each child consisted of a preliminary videotaping of an adult reading to the participant the story "Billy's Treasure," a book which I wrote prior to beginning this study. The reasons for this preliminary session were as follows: (a) to minimize the differences in

response due to the novelty effect of the experience, (b) to familiarize the participant with the context of the situation, and (c) to determine if the participant would be comfortable enough with me to articulate freely. The adult's reading was followed by the child's retelling the story, followed by the respondent answering questions which I asked concerning the story. I explained to each child that I was interested in finding out what the child thought about the story, and that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions I asked. At the conclusion of this session, I conducted an interview in which I asked the participant questions concerning her reading and television preferences.

The second session, which marked the actual beginning of data collection, proceeded in the following order: (a) the adult read the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" to the child, (b) the child retold the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," and (c) I asked the child open-ended questions concerning the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?"

The third session consisted of the following sequence of events: (a) the child retold the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," (b) the adult read the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," (c) the child retold the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," and (d) I asked the child open-ended questions concerning the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World."

The fourth session proceeded as follows: (a) the child retold the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," (b) the adult read the story

"The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," (c) the child retold the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," and (d) I asked the child open-ended questions concerning the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party."

The fifth session consisted of the child retelling the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party."

Analysis of Data

The data for this study were analyzed according to qualitative methodologies. Analysis of the data is a process requiring going over notes, organizing the data, looking for patterns, and making linkages among the various parts of the data and the emergent dimensions of the analysis (Patton, 1980). Inductive analysis of data allows recurring themes to "emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, p. 306). Data were analyzed according to grounded theory methodologies, allowing categories of response to emerge from the data at hand (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In analyzing the content, I pulled together and organized the data into a comprehensive package. Patton (1980) suggests reading through all the fieldnotes and interviews and making comments in the margins--the beginning of organizing the data into categories.

The categories encompassed topics for which there is the most substantiation as well as topics the researcher wished to explore (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). The first attempt in assigning coding categories to the data

was to discover the workability of the categories created. The coding categories to the data were then modified, new categories developed, and the old ones discarded.

Spradley (1980) says that the key to the truth lies in the recurring patterns in the data. This effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires judgment about what is really significant and what is not.

Major aspects of the interview schedule explored the child's retelling of the narrative, expectations about various characters present in events, expectations about characters' ages and roles in the story, reasons for interpreting who the most important character was and the character the child would most like to be, expectations about the most important thing in the story, the child's sense of the fictional element, and the lesson to be learned from the story (Pitcher and Prelinger, 1963). An interview schedule is included in Appendix B.

The several sources of data collection--audiotaped interview with parents and respondents, video and audiotaped sessions with the respondents, field notes, researcher's journal of ongoing observations and reflections, and contrasting my construction of meaning with the child's processes and construction of meaning--provided material for the constant comparative method of data analysis. Triangulation of audiotaped interviews, fieldnotes, and videotapes undergirded this qualitative study.

Before presenting the stories to the participants, I held two audience readings. For the first audience reading, I used my eight-year-old nephew for two of the stories, and my 21-year-old son for one of the stories. The second audience reading was done before students in a second grade classroom consisting of primarily African-American students. I also received feedback on the stories from an English professor at the university.

Data analysis was conducted by myself and two trained doctoral students with expertise in reading education.

Researcher's Role in the Study

The role of the researcher in this study was that of full participant in the narrative-composing phase of the study, and participant-observer in the storybook readings, retellings, and discussion phase. While I was observing and recording the participants' response to the narratives, it was also necessary for me to interact with them in eliciting response. This role also allowed for pre-study interviews with parents and respondents.

Triangulation of audiotaped interviews, fieldnotes, and videotaped undergirded this qualitative study.

CHAPTER IV

Researcher's Processes Leading to the Making of Story Meaning

During the Composing Process

Before writing any of the three stories, I made three decisions. First, I decided to build each of the stories around a birthday party theme, as celebrated days of the year are of high interest to children seven years of age (Norvell, 1958). My second decision was to end each of the stories with an unexpected surprise. Thirdly, in each of the three stories, I decided to create lots of trouble in the life of the child protagonist.

I completed the composing process of one story before beginning the composing of the second, and completed the second story before starting the third. However, for purposes of simplicity, I will discuss all three stories as I describe the overall phases of composition.

As events happening around me supplied ideas for each story's plot, I recorded the idea in my personal journal. This journal consisted of a small spiral notebook which I carried at all times during the first stages of the composing process.

The idea for "Mom, Don't You Like It?" came after observing my mother exchange a birthday gift, a scarf for a necklace, then exchanging the necklace for a bottle of perfume, then returning the perfume and getting credit for the gift. I thought of how often a child must return a toy, after that toy meets with a parent's disapproval. I then jotted a summary for this story in my personal journal as follows:

Birthday boy's uncle gives him money to buy a birthday gift. Each gift the boy brings home is returned at the advice of the mother. In the end, the discouraged boy goes out to play and finds a free gift. The free gift is neighborhood friends which are allowed to stay and help celebrate the boy's birthday party.

After examining the summary closely, I realized that the first story would present events as quite possible and true-to-life; the tone would be humorous.

The idea for "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" came when my seven-year-old nephew told me about "...the worst day in my whole life when every single thing went wrong at school." He asked me to read to him Judith Viorst's book, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (1977), which recounts calamitous events during a day in the life of young Alexander. My nephew found it easy to identify with the child protagonist on this particular day because he remarked, "I'm just as unlucky as Alexander."

After completing the book's reading, I decided that my second story would be similar to Viorst's book with two exceptions: (a) the episodes in my narrative would all evolve around the child protagonist's birthday and, (b) my story would end happily, with a surprise birthday party.

A summary to the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was recorded in my journal as follows: "Boy has one misfortune on top of another as he lives through a typical week-day routine on his birthday. He is delighted at the way his unfortunate day ends in a happy surprise." After

closely examining the summary, I realized the this story would present events as true-to-life and quite possible; the tone of this story would also be humorous.

The idea which motivated the composing of the third story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" occurred while I was observing my nephew participate in a birthday party at the amusement park. While watching the children as they participated in the various events, I visualized how effective a fantastic, cause-effect story would be where one catastrophic event caused a second to occur, which caused a third to occur, etc.

I jotted the following summary for the third story in my journal:

During the celebration of a birthday party at the amusement park, one humorous event occurs causing a second to occur, causing a third to occur, etc. The cycle of events begins with the eating of the birthday cake, and ends with the birthday cake scene. Something climactic happens at the end leaving the birthday boy surprised and delighted with the way the birthday events turned out.

When examining the summary of the third story, I realized that I would present the story events as impossible or nonsensical; the tone of the story would be humorous.

Having recorded a summary for each story, I began writing possible story endings in my personal journal. For example, for the ending of the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," which would be built upon the gift-returning idea, I recorded, "A child brings friends home to help celebrate in the giving of his

birthday party." For the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," which would be built around disastrous events happening to the child protagonist on his birthday, I wrote the following ending: "Disappointed in the way his birthday has turned out, the boy returns home to find that his friends are all waiting to participate in a surprise birthday party." Finally, the ending I wrote for the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," which would involve the cause-effect sequencing of catastrophic events at the amusement park, was as follows: "The birthday boy is not disillusioned with his party, but rather delighted in the way things turned out. A surprise ending, a surprise present, makes it all worthwhile."

By recording both a summary and ending for each story, I was allowing space and visualization for several avenues through which plots could be developed. My purpose in writing each story was to express a truth rather than relate a moral lesson, that truth being that although bad things happen, good will eventually follow.

My next step was to brainstorm possible story events which would make up the plot. Brainstorming is putting everything down on paper that comes to your mind at a fast pace. My brainstorming lists for "Mom, Don't You Like It?" consisted of several lists of toys. I gradually reconstructed the lists, leaving only those toys with the greatest appeal to a child seven years old, toys that a parent would find unattractive for one reason or another, toys within the same price range, and finally, toys with distinctively different characteristics from any other. For example, in an earlier brainstorming list I wrote wagon, bike, and

motorbike; in a later brainstorming list I deleted all but the bike, as the three vehicles were too diverse in price and possessed too many of the same characteristics. The second type of brainstorming list used in "Mom, Don't You Like It?" was an outline form made up of three sections titled "Beginning," "Middle," and "End." Beneath each of these sections were the main events that could occur in that part of the story. The following is the list as it appeared:

Beginning

1. child receives money
2. child goes out to buy gift

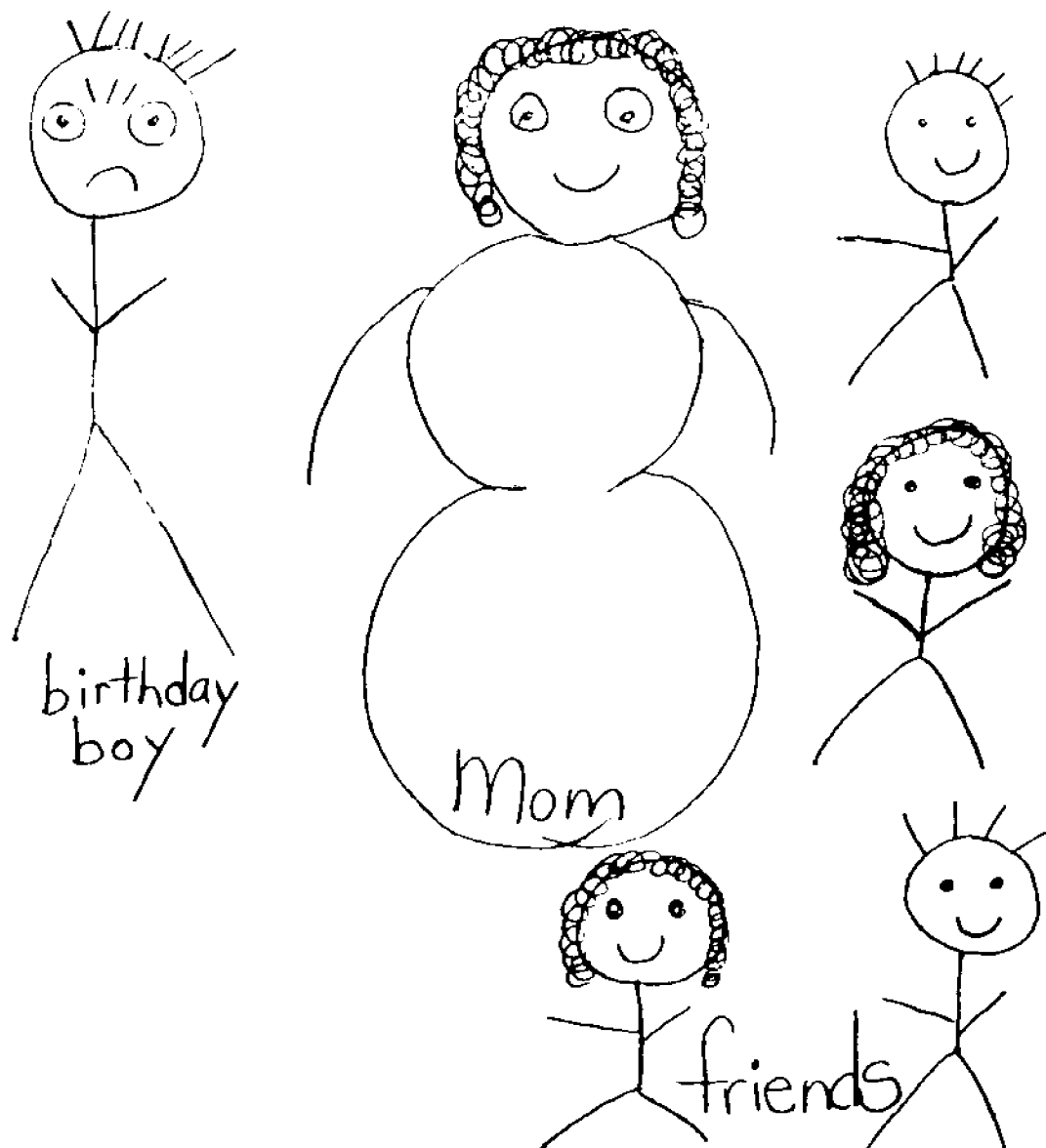
Middle

3. child brings home gift 1, Mom says no
4. child brings home gift 2, Mom says no
5. child brings home gift 3, Mom says no
6. child brings home gift 4, Mom says no
7. child brings home gift 5, Mom says no
8. child brings home gift 6, Mom says no

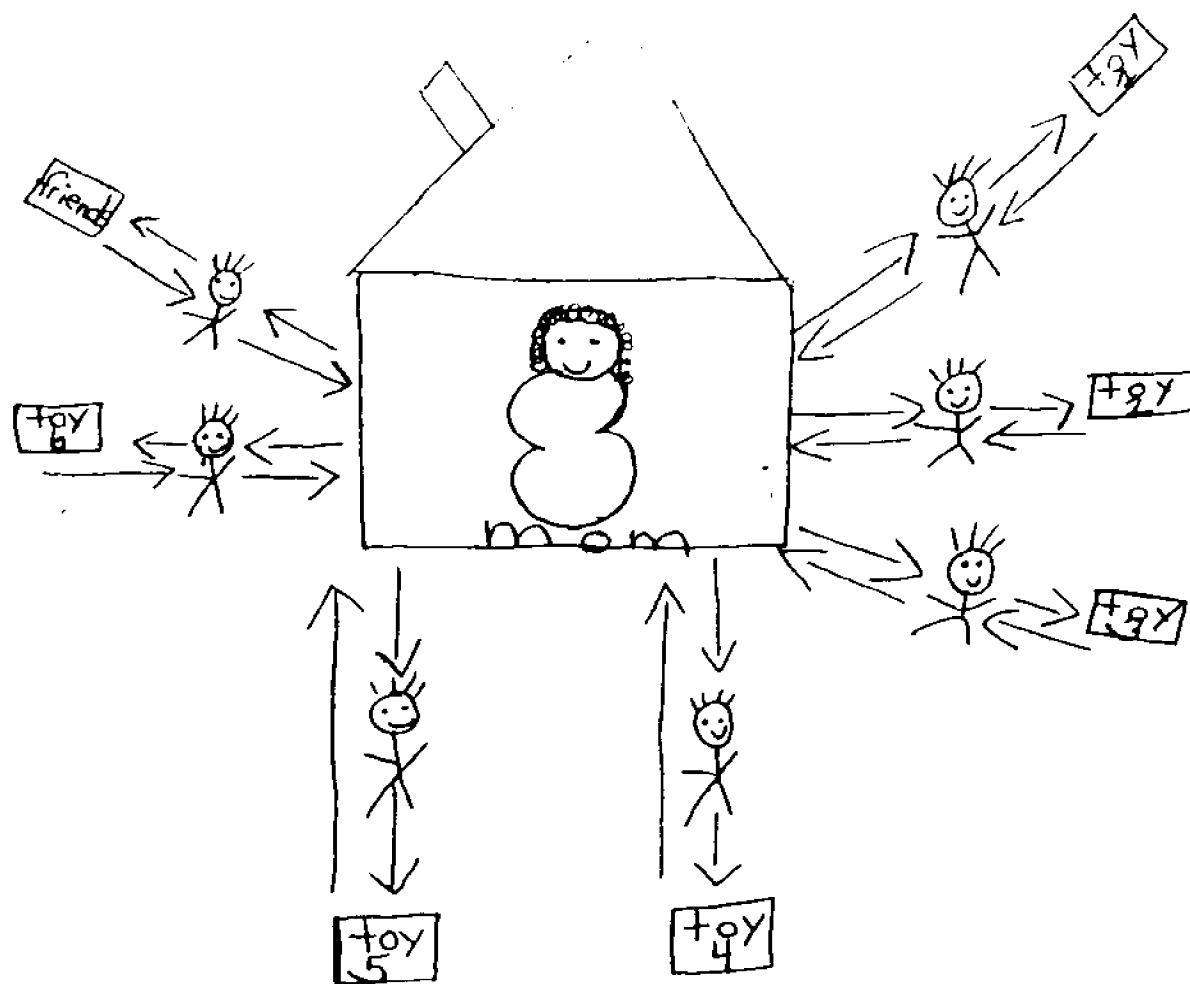
End

9. child brings free gift, Mom says yes
10. all celebrate with party

I next played around with possible designs that revealed a pattern of meaning for the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" I began with an image of the characters I would use in the text. For example, my first design appeared as follows:



The second design for "Mom, Don't You Like It?," was the layout of story events. This illustration appeared with the mother inside her house at the center of the drawing, and the boy entering and leaving as he brought home each toy purchased.



In composing "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," my brainstorming lists consisted of settings, or locations, where the traumatic episodes involving the child protagonist could take place. I gradually reconstructed the lists, leaving only those settings most familiar to a seven-year-old, settings easiest to elaborate with humor, and settings with characteristics distinctively different from any other. For example, in the first brainstorming list I included a Cub Scout meeting, a school room, a library, and an office. After deciding that the four settings included too many similar features, I deleted all but the school room. Also, in the first brainstorming list, I included both a gas station and laundry; I later deleted them both, as I could think of nothing humorous about either of them.

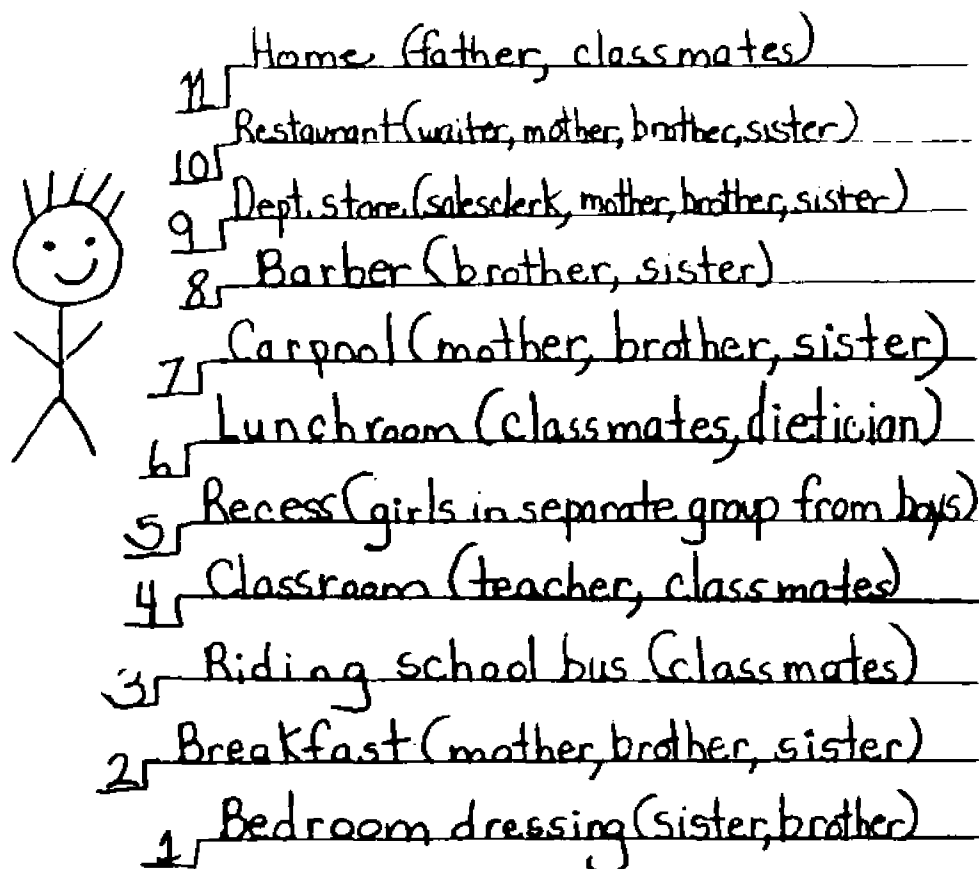
The second brainstorming list for "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was a type of outline which included everything I could think of to be included in the story. Taking 11 locations selected from the first brainstorming list, I wrote possible catastrophes that could take place next to those locations in a left-handed column. I selected only some of the things listed in the left-handed column for the story, but it served as an inventory of material that could be used. I have included only the first section of this brainstorming list as follows:

<u>Possible items</u>	<u>Beginning</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>End</u>
dirty socks	bedroom		
unmatched socks	dressing		
dirty clothes	in A.M.		
unmade bed			
overflowing tub			
mom forgetting birthday			

empty toothpaste tube
 slipped on skates
 can't find homework
 shoes don't match
 missing buttons
 broken zipper
 torn hat
 missing brush

After composing brainstorming lists, I visualized designs for the pattern of meaning in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World."

What I visualized for this story was a series of stairs representing events which extended out from the main character. The less important characters were written beside each stair, and represented those characters involved in each event. The following diagram from my journal helped me visualize what to write:



In composing "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," my first brainstorming list consisted of two columns, the left-handed column being happenings which could possibly occur, the right-handed column representing the event or ride in which the happening would most likely be affiliated. The events and characters which were used in this brainstorming list were those which were appealing to persons of all ages. For example, I included the children eating and opening presents, the ferris wheel, the train, and the music man who carried a monkey and balloons, because all were attractions that drew persons of all ages. Some of the things in the left-handed column were not used, but it became an inventory of material that could be used. I have included only the first part of this brainstorming list below.

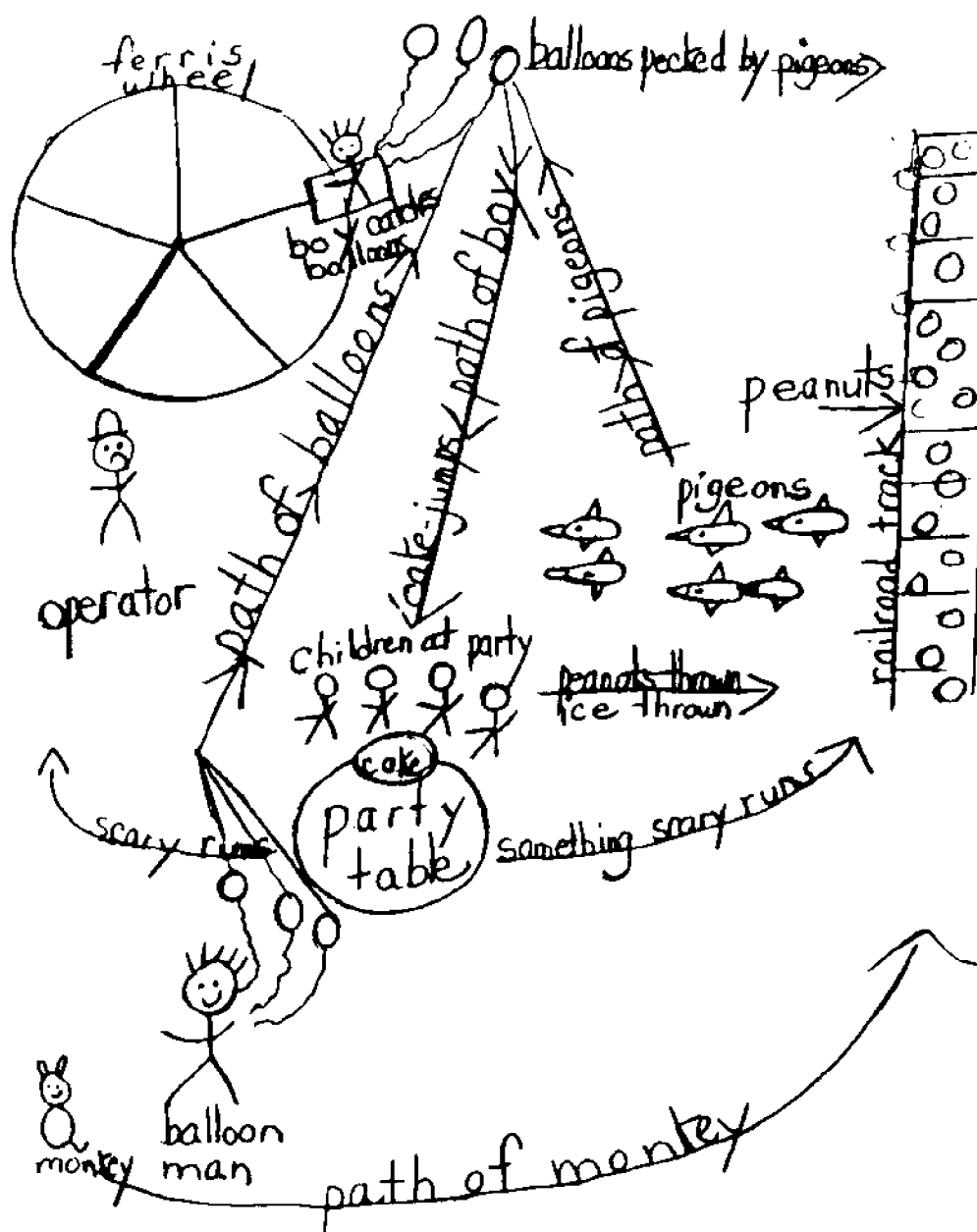
<u>Possible Happening</u>	<u>Event</u>
cake fight	children eating
children throwing snowballs	and opening ice
fight	presents
popcorn fight	
peanut fight	
child crash lands in birthday cake	
ice cream thrown in child's hair	
child sticks finger in cake and it collapses	
child blows out candles and wax flies	
candles catch tablecloth on fire	
child opens present and it comes alive	
presents dance off	
animal eats cake before it's cut	
children fight over presents	
one child doesn't have present	
not enough ice cream to go around	
children don't like ice cream flavor	

I then drew three different types of maps for "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" which helped me visualize connections in the story before I

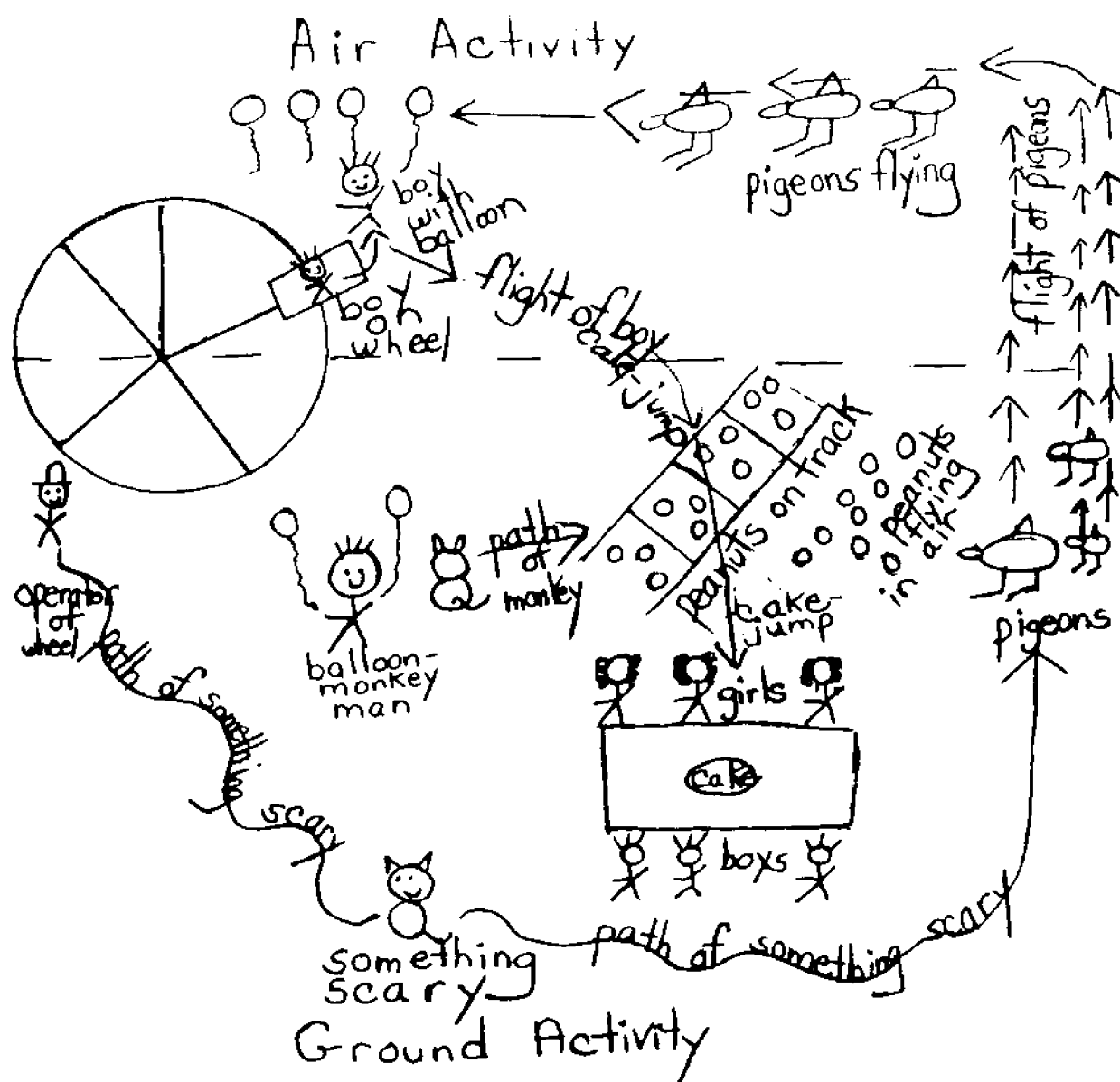
actually committed it to paper. Mapping is like brainstorming in that it is putting everything down that comes into your head at a fast pace. After I mapped, I looked at what I'd written to see what connected. The connections made me aware of things I hadn't seen before.

I didn't worry about spelling or sentences; each phrase of words had a particular meaning in my own mind. For example, the phrase "cake jump" appeared in the mapping list, and it reminded me of a particular image--a boy crashing into a cake from a popped helium balloon. Mapping showed me the connections between what I knew and what I needed to know.

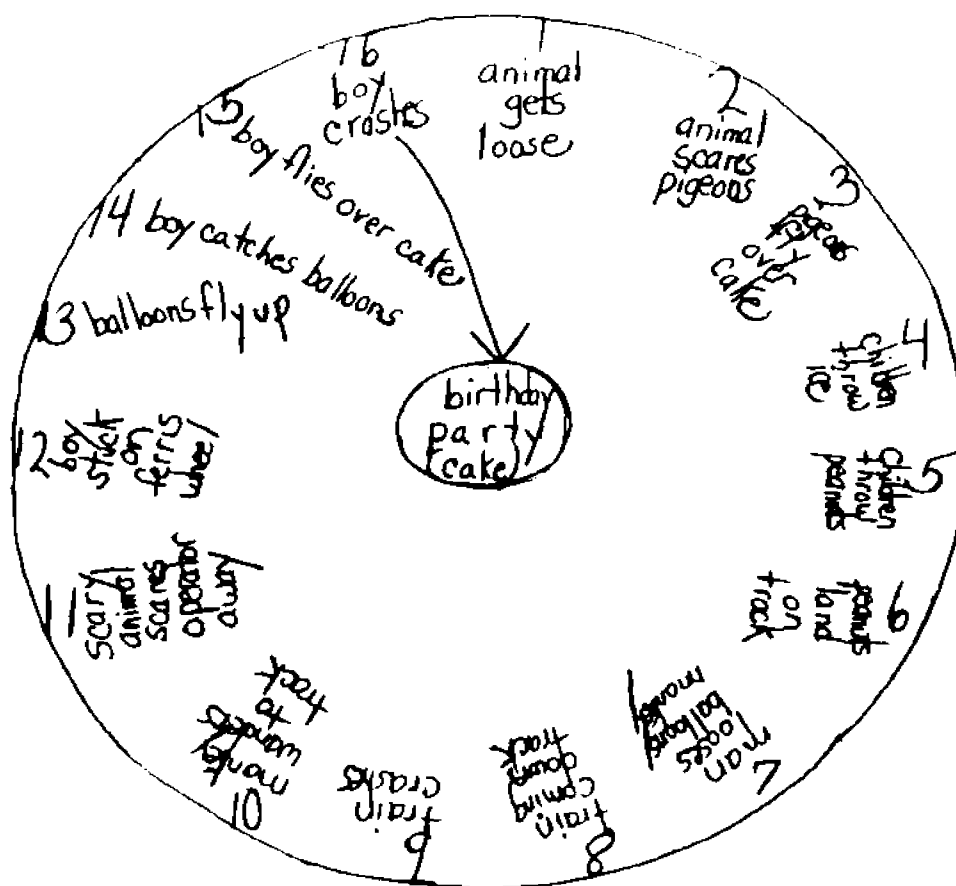
I started the mapping by putting the main focus of the story in the center of the page and then drew out lines as a thought occurred to me. On the following page is the first mapping diagram which I drew:



It became evident that the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" would have two dimensions, those events that occurred on the ground and those that occurred in the air. I decided to make a second map outlining the ground and air traffic that could reasonably take place in the story. The second map, which was the most helpful of any of the maps when writing the first draft of the story, appeared as follows:



The third and last mapping technique I used for "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was a circular map. In the center of the circle was the single, dominant meaning, and around the circle I outlined the mass of information in the sequence I visualized for the story. The purpose of this map was to decide if the sequencing of events was confusing or contradictory to the reader. The circular map appeared as follows:



I reflected upon the lists and maps over a period of several days, analyzing them from time to time. Having selected the events to be included in each story, I wrote those events on color-coded cards which I tacked to a cork board. These cards were moved around until I was sure each event flowed smoothly into the next one. I shifted and re-shifted the cards until I could see the pattern of the entire piece, or until the writing line up in a natural, flowing order.

My next decision was to decide the genre, point of view, and style of each story. For all three stories, the genre would be that of a picture book format which, for the purposes of this study, would be presented to the participants without the illustrations. The story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" would be written in the first person point of view; the other two stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" would be cast in the form of a dialogue spoken between the child protagonist and the mother. All three stories would be written from the perspective of the child protagonist as he saw disastrous events happening around him. Finally, the style found in each story would use short sentences imitating those of a child speaking. The story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" would use patterned, repetitive language and, due to its simplicity, would be the first story read to the participants.

Having made these decisions about the story, I began to brainstorm several leads in order to establish the voice and set the pace and tone. Before writing the first draft of any story, I find it important to have the right lead.

When starting to write a story without an appropriate lead, I find the story lacks direction and goes off in tangents. Therefore, I wrote about five or six leads for each story, each lead being from three to five lines long, and later selected one lead for refinement. Each lead selected was chosen both because it announced what I needed to say in a few words, and because it set the tone for the reader's expectation of events to follow. For example, the leads brainstormed for "Mom, Don't You Like It?" were as follows:

Lead 1:

"Mamma, look at the money Uncle Frederick sent me for my birthday!"

"Why don't you go out and buy something with it?"

Lead 2:

"Henry, Uncle Frederick sent you an envelope for you birthday.

Why don't you open it?"

"Look, Mom. It's money. I think I'll go out and spend it."

Lead 3:

"Henry, Uncle Frederick sent you money for your birthday."

"Oh, wow! I think I'll go out and spend it!"

Lead 4:

"Mom, I'm going out to spend the money that Uncle Frederick sent me for my birthday. I'll be back home with a present soon."

Lead 5:

"Henry, Uncle Frederick sent you this money for your birthday.

Why don't you go out and buy something?"

I decided to use lead 5 because it got the reader immediately into the story, and it was simple. It omitted the opening of the envelope, which is irrelevant to the plot development, introduced the mother into the story, and allowed the boy to leave immediately for the store to make his purchase without making a comment back to his mother. In short, the last lead gives all the needed amount of information in the least amount of space. I visualized that my next line of dialogue would be spoken by the son as he presented his first birthday purchase to his mother.

After I brainstormed leads, I brainstormed possible sentences to end each of the stories. By brainstorming endings before drafting the body of the story, I never know how far away the end is--only what it is. I know the ending of a story before I develop the details of the body of the story. By writing the start and finish before the body, it gives me a sense of the story's form and destination. Sometimes the ending changes after the first draft is written, but it still helps me during the writing process.

For example, the endings that I brainstormed for the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" were the following:

Ending 1:

"Well, it certainly sounds like Willy had an exciting birthday party."

"Yea, well, it was sort of fun, if you like amusement party birthdays."

Ending 2:

"Well, I'm sure that's the best birthday Willy ever had."

"Yea, not bad for an eight-year-old. But I'll bet his next birthday will even be better."

Ending 3:

"Well, that certainly wasn't a dull birthday party. You must be exhausted."

"Not really. But I was wondering. For my birthday, how about one at the amusement park?"

I decided to use the first line of ending 1 and the last line of ending 3 because it leaves the reader hanging as to the outcome of the question. The ending used for the first draft of the story read as follows:

"Well, it sounds like Willy had an exciting birthday party."

"Yea, and I was wondering, Mom...for my next birthday, how about one at the amusement park?"

Having brainstormed, mapped, and selected the episodes to be included in each story, as well as selected the appropriate leading and ending sentences, I began writing the first draft. When the draft was completed, I read the story three times to myself before allowing anyone else to read it.

The first reading was done for large, global questions of meaning and was done at a very fast pace. The second reading was somewhat slower than the first and done for structural questions of order. The third reading was done for line-by-line questions of voice, and done at a careful, slow pace. In this third reading, I cut, added, and reworded each line of the text in a wide, left-handed margin which I left for editing purposes.

Using my editing remarks in the left-handed margin, I revised each narrative. The revised story was then read to two audiences, on two separate occasions, for feedback purposes. The first audience reading varied for the three stories; for "Mom, Don't You Like It?" the audience was my 21-year-old son, for "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" the audience was my eight-year-old nephew. The second audience reading for all three stories was done before a lower S.E.S. second grade class of African-American students.

After reading the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" to my son, I revised the ending. Before revision, the ending read,

"Mom, I brought home these friends I saw playing outside. They won't clog up your vacuum cleaner, they don't bounce in the house, they aren't messy, they don't run on batteries, they don't make a lot of noise, and they don't have claws that scratch. Please, Mom, don't you like them?"

"I do Henry. And they're welcome to stay. Now how about us all sitting down and having some birthday cake. Happy birthday, Henry."

After reading this ending to my son, he advised me to change the ending. He felt that it was out of character to have the mother refuse each of her son's birthday purchases throughout the story then suddenly have a change of heart at the end of the story, accepting the friends he brought home to play. I therefore changed the ending, striving to achieve a text in which the mother behaved more consistently and the mother's behavior was more believable to the reader. The revised story ending, which was used in the interview sessions, was the following:

"Mom, I can't find anything that won't clog up your vacuum cleaner, that doesn't bounce in the house, that isn't messy, that doesn't run on batteries, that doesn't make a lot of noise, and that doesn't have claws."

"Well, I know of something, Henry, and here they are.

Surprise, surprise! Happy birthday, Henry."

This revision in the story ending shifted the meaning from one where the boy's gift is eventually acceptable to the mother, to one where the mother's gift is received enthusiastically by her son. In addition to the new ending making the behavior of the mother more believable to the reader, the change alleviated any feelings of animosity the reader may feel toward the demanding mother in the first ending, when she insisted her son return each of his

birthday purchases. Also, this final story ending left a gap open for the reader to fill concerning what the surprise was that the mother had awaiting Henry. It was now possible for the reader to perceive a range of meaning. For example, the reader may think the mother is surprising Henry by giving him a surprise birthday party with friends, or the reader may think that the mother is surprising Henry with those same gifts which she demanded he return earlier in the story, which was my intention when writing the revised ending. This was the only one of the three stories I composed in which I changed the ending in the composing process, making a broad range of meaning possible for the reader's interpretation.

Because the original idea for "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" came from my nephew when he experienced an unhappy day at school, I decided that my first outside audience for this story should be my nephew. My nephew suggested that I change the barber shop scene in the original draft to a different setting because he said, "Most girls don't go to a barber shop unless they're weird or something. So his sister wouldn't go get her hair cut there." He also stated that the cereal I used in the original draft, which was Bran Buds, should be changed because "Lots of kids don't know what Bran Buds is, and also it doesn't come in little boxes." I therefore changed the Bran Buds to Bran Flakes. The final change my nephew suggested was changing the sentence that read, "I'm moving to Saudi Arabia where they don't have Bran Buds." He stated, "Saudi Arabia does have Bran Buds 'cause my class mailed a package with them in there to some soldiers over there." I therefore deleted

the sentence about the child protagonist moving to Saudi Arabia where they don't have Bran Buds.

Like the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," the first audience reading for "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was my nephew. He made no editing comments, but laughed especially loud when the boy crashed into the birthday cake, and when the child protagonist found a monkey in the car at the end of the story.

Like the first audience reading, the second audience reading was done for feedback purposes. After two of the stories were read, "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," I received no specific editing comments from the audience, but observed the audience's laughter and seeming enjoyment of both stories, particularly the latter. There were two significant places in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" which generated lots of laughter from the children--during the picking out of costumes at the department store and during the child protagonist's food ordering at the restaurant.

After the second audience reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," I made two story revisions. First, the children were confused by the line that read "Jimmy's mom rushed us off..." because Jimmy had not been introduced earlier in the story. I therefore substituted Jimmy's mom for Billy's mom, as she was the one giving the birthday party. Secondly, one child suggested that a surprise ending with Henry asking his mother if he could have a party at the zoo would be more effective than his asking if he could have a

birthday party at the amusement park. I therefore changed the ending to read as follows: "Yea, and I was just wondering, Mom. How about for my next birthday party, we have one at the zoo?"

One final change that I made across stories was using proper names for story characters that would appeal to children of both Caucasian and African-American cultures. For example, I chose the name Carlos for the child protagonist in the first draft of the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" because that was the name of my nephew who gave me the original idea for the story. However, the name of the child protagonist was later changed from Carlos to Harry.

The last step in writing each of the narratives was brainstorming possible titles. I waited on assigning a title until after each story was completed, because so often during the writing process the direction of my story changes. The three titles selected each had the following characteristics: (a) each title revealed the main idea of the story without giving the plot away, and (b) each title caught the attention of the reader immediately. For example, for the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" the titles brainstormed were the following:

"Mom, Don't You Like It?"

"Friends for My Birthday"

"A Birthday Surprise"

"The Best Birthday Gift of All"

"They Don't Clog Up Your Vacuum or Bounce in the House, They Aren't Messy and They Don't Run on Batteries, They Don't Take Up a

Large Amount of Floor Space and They Don't Have Claws on Their Hands and Feet"

The title I selected from the brainstorming list was "Mom, Don't You Like It?" because it was the patterned, repetitive dialogue spoken by the child protagonist throughout the entire story, it revealed the plot without giving the ending away, and it was short, yet effective, in drawing attention from an audience.

I was now ready to present each of the three stories to the three participants.

CHAPTER V

Findings of This Study

Case Study: Gertrude

Gertrude was seven years and six months old when the study began. She is sturdily built, with dark brown skin, and a round face set off by pigtails on either side of her head. Gertrude's mother is manager of public relations for McDonald's restaurants and was pregnant with her second child at the time of this study. Since the announcement of her pregnancy, the mother told me that Gertrude developed a stuttering problem. A speech therapist had begun working with Gertrude at school, and had suggested that the mother try spending more time with her at home.

When asked about the time she and Gertrude spent together, the mother answered the following:

Gertrude and I have become very close. Now every afternoon when she comes home from school, we sit in the living room and talk about what went on that day at school and any problems that may have occurred. Gertrude and I have good communication, we talk about everything. I try to spend time teaching her important lessons here at home. At first, Gertrude was very jealous of the fact that I was pregnant, but now on Saturdays we go shopping for the baby. That has helped to make her a lot more accepting. I think she's stopped stuttering so much.

The mother went on to talk about Gertrude's father, and said that they have had no contact with him over the past several years. Her uncle and two

cousins, however, had close family ties to Gertrude and her mother and were mentioned in several of Gertrude's responses.

Regarding her interest and habits in reading, Gertrude told me The Children's Bible was her favorite book. Other favorites were monster books and Walt Disney books. The mother said she read to Gertrude approximately two or three times a week when Gertrude was a small child, mostly Walt Disney books and The Children's Bible. The mother added that in the past year Gertrude read library books to her each night before bedtime. On Saturdays, they went to the public library where she and Gertrude picked out three books for the week's reading. "Those three books," stated Gertrude's mother, "are usually read on the first day." When asked what her favorite subject was in school, Gertrude answered, "Reading, of course."

The mother explained why she thought Gertrude had such a great love for reading. She stated, "Gertrude loves to read because her teacher tells her to read. She'd do anything her teacher told her to do." The mother elaborated on Gertrude's high opinion of her teacher, and told me her daughter talked about being a teacher when she grew up. "In the afternoons after school," the mother explained, "Gertrude goes into her room and practices teaching and reading books to her dolls." Gertrude's driving ambition to be a kindergarten teacher was reflected in the way she responded to stories. In addition, the mother told me that Gertrude practices her teaching skills on her dolls each night before bedtime.

Throughout the interview sessions, Gertrude seemed entirely comfortable. She sat back in her chair and relaxed, smiling often. At times during the reading of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she laughed aloud while slapping her knee. In examining Gertrude's responses to stories, I will discuss her concept of story, examples of her filling in gaps, other uses of personal experience and interpretation, response to the characters, distinguishing between fact and fiction, response to humor, response to plot, and her understanding of the moral of stories.

Concept of Story

Using the six stages in concept development which provided a model for narrative form developed by Applebee (1978), it appeared that Gertrude's stories fit into the fifth stage which was the focused chain. In its most typical form, the center is a main character who goes through a series of events linked to one another, similar to such adult genres as radio serials and adventure stories.

In further examining the retellings of narratives, Golden (1984) suggested that it is important to consider which story elements the children draw upon. Specifically, in terms of overall story structure, Golden examined the following: (a) the beginning, middle, and end of children's retellings, (b) whether children identified the setting and basic plot structure with specific events or if they compressed the plot into summary statements, (c) whether children's retellings resembled the language of the story or if the children deviated, elaborated, or

varied from the original story line, and (d) whether children included characters' motivations, descriptions, and roles in the plot.

Gertrude's retellings captured the beginnings of the overall story structure. When the original story line began with initial character action, Gertrude's retellings paralleled that action. For example, in the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude began with the following:

Well, it was Harry's birthday and as he went to bed at night he thought that in the morning when he woke up he wanted his mamma to say, "Surprise! Surprise!" But when he woke up that morning his Mamma woke him up and instead of saying, "Surprise!" and singing him "Happy Birthday" she said, "Hurry up and get dressed 'cause the alarm went off three minutes late."

Also, when the story line opened with character dialogue, Gertrude's retellings imitated that dialogue. An example is in her second retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" when she stated the following:

"Harry, how was the party at the amusement park?"

"Fine, fine, fine," said the boy, "'cause of the splash into the birthday cake."

"Splash into the birthday cake? How did he do that?"

Similar to her beginnings, Gertrude captured the story endings paralleling the closing action and character dialogue of the original story line. For

example, Gertrude ended her second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" with the statement:

Then when he went home, then when he went home, it was so dark, then they opened the door and, and they turned the lights on and, and everyone jumped up from behind the furniture and said, "Surprise! Surprise! Happy Birthday, Harry!"

Gertrude's overall pattern was compressing the plot structure of the stories into summary statements, deleting most of the episodes in the story. For example, when she compressed the plot of "Mom, Don't You Like It?" in her first retelling, Gertrude stated, "Leroy's uncle gonna give him some money for his birthday and his mamma told him to go to the store and buy something for his birthday, and he came back with stuff his mamma didn't want." The many presents Leroy purchased and the mother's reason for demanding the return of each gift were omitted from Gertrude's retelling.

Again, in the first retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude compressed the plot structure into a summary statement, omitting most of the episodes of the story:

It was Harry's birthday as, as he went to bed at night he thought that in the morning when he woke up he wanted his mamma to say "Surprise!" But she didn't and lots of bad things happened. He went to school, no, he got on the bus...,then he had to eat lunch with his mother...,then the waiter came and he had to get some of the broccoli...,then he had a surprise party.

Finally, Gertrude's retellings included character motivation for actions and reactions. An example was in Gertrude's first retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" when she stated,

Billy wanted to hold the, the, birthday, the birthday boy's iguana so the boy let him hold it. But the iguana made the operator scared which made the boy get scared on top of the ferris wheel when he ran away. Then the music man got mad 'cause his monkey ran away and he forgot about his balloons so they flew off. The kids threw ice at the pigeons 'cause they were scared, too. But the pigeons were the scariest 'cause they got hit by the ice.

In summary, Gertrude began and ended her retellings with initial character action and character dialogue paralleling the original story line. Her overall pattern was to compress the plot into summary statements in the middle of her retellings, omitting most of the episodes of the story but linking the events in a focused chain. Motivations and reactions of characters to events were included in Gertrude's retellings.

Filling in Gaps

During her retellings, Gertrude actively "filled in gaps" (Iser, 1978) left open by the writer. These gaps included psychological causality, characters participating in events, age of main character, and setting.

Psychological causality. According to McConaughy (1982), psychological causality is a chain of internal states and dispositions such as traits, feelings, or intentions which motivate and precede the character's actions. Gertrude gave

numerous examples of psychological causality in her responses. In describing characters' feelings or intentions which motivated their actions and reactions, Gertrude filled in gaps left open by the writer. In "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," for example, Gertrude stated why she thought the waiter pointed Harry to the bathroom when he brought out he broccoli. She said, "The waiter pointed to the bathroom 'cause Harry didn't want to eat the broccoli and throw up." Furthermore, Gertrude explained why she thought Henry, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," asked his mamma if he could have a party at the zoo. Gertrude explained, "He wanted all the animals could [sic] get loose and jump in the cake, and he could have an exciting party just like Willy, and that's why he asked to have the party at the zoo."

Characters participating in event. Gertrude also filled in gaps by interpreting the persons participating in story events in light of family relationships and experiences. For example, after the reading of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," when Gertrude was asked who the guests were that participated in the birthday party, Gertrude replied, "The mamma, the cousins, and the uncle were there." Furthermore, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she responded, "The people talking were the mamma and the son." Interestingly, each time I picked Gertrude up for an interview session, her uncle and two cousins were visiting at her home.

Ages of characters. Gertrude also filled in the ages of the characters in light of her own family relationships. In each of the stories, the ages of the

child protagonists were the ages of her two cousins. For example, in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude said, "Leroy was seven because he always got little children toys. My cousin is seven and he always lets me play with them 'cause I'm seven, too." Also, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude responded that "Harry was seven because his brother calls him a crybaby and I call my cousin a crybaby and he's seven." Finally, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Gertrude stated, "That boy with the birthday was nine because the amusement park is where my cousin who's nine had his birthday party. My cousin says you have to reach the top of the pelican before you can ride the bumper cars, and that usually happens when you're nine."

The setting. Gertrude filled in gaps by interpreting the setting in two of the stories. After reading both "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Gertrude said that the two conversations between the mother and child took place in the living room. On the two occasions when I brought Gertrude home after an interview session, I was invited into the living room for coffee. Gertrude's mother told me, "The living room is where I like to entertain my guests. My sofa's new, and no one sees it if we sit in the kitchen."

Other Uses of Personal Experience and Interpretation

There were other times Gertrude drew upon her daily life in order to interpret or explain the motivations of characters in the stories. For example,

in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude related the motivation of the child and mother to her own family experience. She stated the following:

My mamma is like Leroy's mamma. Once my cousin went to the store for my mamma. And she was supposed to, to get bread. And she came home with two big ole bags. She had bread, milk, candy, and cake mix stuff. So my mamma made her take it all back, just like Leroy had to.

Also, in the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party,"

Gertrude based her reaction upon personal experience, namely an event she had once experienced at her cousin's birthday. Gertrude asked, "How come only one boy rode on the ferris wheel?" She went on to say, "For that story to really happen at Fun Fair Park there would have to be more people at the top of that ferris wheel riding it. There were more people than that at my cousin's party."

Characters

Authority figures. Gertrude focused on minor characters who played authoritative roles in the story. For example, she responded to "Mom, Don't You Like It?" by stating, "If I was the mother I'd teach him right from wrong." Also, her response to "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," was, "If I was the mother of the birthday boy and they had an accident I would get the children home safe."

Gertrude saw the minor, authoritative characters in a more positive light than the younger, main characters. For example, in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude called Leroy "greedy 'cause he wanted everything he

saw," but she saw Leroy's mother as one who "tried to teach him what was right." Also, in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude said, "Harry was bad like my cousin but the teacher tried to help him learn." Finally, after being read "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Gertrude stated, "The birthday boy was bad to bring his iguana to the party, but the mother was the lady who watched the children all through the party so they wouldn't get hurt."

Identifying with character responses. Although Gertrude found the child protagonists "bad" or "greedy," Gertrude did identify with a certain number of their responses. For example, in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude said that "Leroy had a surprise party and he was surprised 'cause he didn't know he was gonna have one. And neither did I." Also, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude stated, "Harry felt sad about his sister and brother 'cause they always got the best stuff that he wanted. And he felt sad about his mamma, too, because she didn't let him pick out his costume what he should have for Halloween. I would have been sad, too."

In most instances, Gertrude identified character emotions as she classified them into one of two categories, happy or sad. For example, in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude explained, "Leroy was sad because he was returning all those gifts, and I don't blame him." "But," she added, "Leroy was happy at the end 'cause we [sic] had a surprise party." Also, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude said, "Harry was sad because he had a bad day on his birthday and I thought he was gonna have a

good day, but we [sic] were happy when he got home 'cause he had a surprise party."

The most important character. After the initial reading of each story as well as the following week, Gertrude was asked to name the most important character. Her tendency was to name minor characters who played authoritative roles in the story. When I asked her why that character was chosen, she gave literal reasons related to the character's role performance. Furthermore, in all instances but one, Gertrude named the same character in the first and second interview sessions and gave paralleling reasons for choosing that character.

For example, Gertrude named the most important character and gave literal reasons for choosing that character after the reading of "Mom, Don't You Like It?" when she said, "The mom is the most important person, because she taught him right from wrong." In addition, after "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude chose the teacher as the most important person. When I asked why she chose the teacher, Gertrude answered, "The teacher helps you learn and memorize words." Finally, after the reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Gertrude responded, "The operator's the most important 'cause he was good to help and operate things." However, after a week of reflecting upon this story, Gertrude described the mother as the most important person. She replied, "I think the most important one is the mamma because she keeps the kids safe."

The character you would most like to be. Similar to the most important character, Gertrude was asked to name the character she would most like to be both immediately after the reading of each story and a week later. In all instances but one, Gertrude named the same characters that she gave for the most important character; that is, she named those characters who played authoritative roles in the story. For the most part, when I asked her why that particular character was chosen, she gave reasons similar to those given for the most important character; that is, she gave literal answers related to the character's role performance. With one exception, Gertrude consistently named the same character, and gave the same reason for choosing that character, in the first and second interview sessions.

For example, Gertrude wanted to be the mother in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" because she said, "The mom teaches you." Also, in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she responded, "I want to be the teacher 'cause she helps you learn." After the reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Gertrude stated, "I'd like to be that birthday boy 'cause his party was fun and exciting," but after a week of reflecting, Gertrude changed her response to the person she wanted to be. Gertrude replied, "I want to be the mamma 'cause she watches you and keeps you from getting hurt."

Fact and Fiction

According to Applebee (1978) young children's understanding of fiction as a convention of storytelling develops over time. Young children tend to

view stories historically as true; only gradually sometime between the ages of six and nine, do they come to understand that a realistic fictional story may not be actually true.

For children at the early stages of developing a concept of story, a story is untrue only if it inverts the normal order of events or presents events that are impossible or nonsensical. A story that presents events which the child perceives as possible is regarded as historically true. These children may develop two categories for stories; I used the terms "real" and "make-believe" to represent these two categories.

Before asking Gertrude if each story was real or make-believe, I explained to her that a real story was one which was true, or that had actually happened; a make-believe story, on the other hand, was a product which I, as a writer, had created or made-up. Gertrude responded that she thought each of the three stories was real. For example, after reading "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude said, "I know that story was real because something just like it happened to my cousin when my mamma kept sending her back to the store. She bought all kind of stuff we didn't need." Similarly, Gertrude stated that the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was real "Because," she explained, "a train can come off a track, and they can have a birthday party at an amusement park."

I next asked Gertrude if each story could have possibly happened and explained to her that a realistic story was one which could have taken place. Gertrude said that each of the stories could have happened. For example, in

"Mom, Don' You Like It?," Gertrude stated, "The reason I know that story could have happened is 'cause I remember when it did happen." Similarly, Gertrude later stated that the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" could have happened but added, "If someone was on top of the ferris wheel there would be more than just one person if it happen at Fun Fair Park. So it must have happened somewhere else. But I'm sure it could have happened."

It seems that Gertrude could relate the stories to her personal life and so she saw them as real.

Humor

Gertrude enjoyed the humor in each of the stories. Most of her laughter during the reading of the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" was after the repetitious calling of Leroy to his mother saying, "Mom, I bought this... ." Similarly, she laughed aloud in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" during the children's ice fight and when the boy dropped into the birthday cake. When asked to identify some funny parts in the story, Gertrude stated, "The boy fell inside the birthday cake."

Furthermore, during the reading of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Gertrude screamed out in laughter, slapping her hands upon her knees, when Harry ordered the "monkey spit" and the "gorilla nails." She also chuckled when the only costume left at the department store was a ballerina suit. When asked to name some funny things that happened to Harry in the story, she stated, "He always got stuff that he didn't want." Gertrude did not,

however, understand the intended humor when Harry continuously threatened that he was moving to Saudi Arabia. She stated, "He is really gonna move 'cause he said he was gonna move. I don't know where Saudi Arabia is. Somewhere where they ride camels, I think. But he is gonna move there." Gertrude missed the intended humor of Harry's threats about Saudi Arabia due to the fact that the location of Saudi Arabia was unknown to her.

Perhaps related to the issue of humor is the fact that moving was something which Gertrude and her mother seemed to take seriously. Gertrude's mother told me she and Gertrude had moved six times over the past seven years. The home in which they resided at the time of this study had only been their place of residence for the past six months.

Plot

What is remembered best. When Gertrude was asked what she remembered best about each story, she consistently related the happy ending of the story. For example, the surprise party was remembered best after the reading of "Mom, Don't You Like It?" as well as after "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World." Furthermore, the birthday boy's finding the monkey in the car was what she remembered best after reading "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party."

What is most important. Both immediately after reading the story and a week later, Gertrude was asked what she thought was most important about each story. After each reading, Gertrude gave answers which were similar to what she had previously stated as the thing remembered best. She said the

surprise party was the most important thing that happened in both "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World." Also, following the reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she said the most important thing was the boy's finding the monkey.

After a week of reflecting upon the stories, Gertrude changed her responses to what was most important in the story. While giving a happy ending to the story in the first session, in the second session Gertrude answered with a literal, and practical moral lesson which was directed toward behavior. For example, a week after reading "Mom, Don't You Like It?," she said that the most important thing was "Always ask your mamma what toys to get before you go out and buy some or you may have to take them back." Similarly, her response to the most important thing a week after reading "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was "We go to school to learn and not play." Furthermore, after reading "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she said that the most important thing was "Never have a party near a railroad track or you can get hurt."

Morals or Lessons of the Story

Gertrude's answers to the question of whether there were lessons in the stories reflected the "lessons" she said were most important about the stories. For example, after reading "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Gertrude stated, "The lesson is first ask your mamma what to get before you buy it." In addition, following the reading of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she said, "I know what the lesson is. School is a place to go and learn and not

play." Finally, after reading "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Gertrude stated, "Don't throw nuts near a track. That's a good lesson."

Gertrude's answers in the second interview session were consistent with the first, with some elaboration. For example, her second response to the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" was "Always ask your mom what to buy first 'cause she may get mad at you. If she's mad about what you buy you'll have to take it back." Likewise, Gertrude's second response to "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was, "When you go to school make sure you pay attention. It's not a place to go and cut up." Furthermore, the lesson Gertrude gave a week after reading "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was, "Never throw nuts or play near a railroad track 'cause a wreck can happen."

When I interviewed Gertrude's mother, I asked her what things she had taught or emphasized with Gertrude at home. The following was her response:

There's just two of us living here, me and Gertrude. I want her to get the best education possible, and so I preach on school all the time. I teach her a lot about manners and being a lady. That train track runs right by my house and I sure warn her to keep away from it. She minds pretty good.

It seems that some of the lessons Gertrude has been taught in the home have been reflected in many of Gertrude's responses.

Case Study: Onessa

Onessa is a tall, slim girl with a light brown skin color. She was seven years, three months old when I began her case study, and was extremely observant with a keen sense of humor. Although Onessa was the youngest participant in the study, her responses to the stories and her mastery of the storytelling mode were the most mature. In addition, her vocabulary was the most developed of the participants. Perhaps related to her mature storytelling mode was the fact that Onessa's grandmother, a middle-school science teacher, told me she encouraged Onessa's storytelling in her home.

The grandmother, who has taken care of Onessa since the beginning of the school term, related the history of Onessa's moving in with her. She said, "The mother had to move to another state to find work. She works as a telephone operator. But she and Onessa are very close. They talk every single day on the telephone." The grandmother went on to tell me that Onessa's father is an engineer who also resided out of state but visited Onessa periodically.

In addition, the grandmother spoke about Onessa's drive for seeking approval from adults, particularly that of her mother. The grandmother remarked, "Onessa misses her mother terribly and tries to always make her mother proud. I'm doing the best I can to fill that void." Onessa's high respect for the mother and the role she plays is evident in some of Onessa's responses. When asked about her reading habits and interests, the grandmother responded, "Onessa began reading picture books at age two.

Since then she has gradually progressed. When she gets home from school, she reads and writes stories. I encourage Onessa's storytelling, but she makes up so many stories that I can't tell what is real from what's not. She tells these involved stories all the time at home." Onessa added that her favorite subjects in school were reading and writing; her favorite books were The Children's Bible, funny books, mystery books, monster books, and stories which she writes herself. She said she preferred reading and writing stories to watching television, and when she grew up dreamed of becoming an author. She commented, "I want to write books, then give them to movie stars to act out. I practice writing plays and acting them out at home after school." Onessa's grandmother acknowledged that Onessa had written and produced several plays for the neighborhood children to perform in the yard. Onessa's desire to be a writer and play producer colored her views in responding to the stories.

Onessa shared with me some of the stories and plays which she had written and produced with neighborhood children. She was particularly proud of her version of "Snow White" to which she added colorful dialogue. In this play, Onessa elaborated on the plot of "Snow White," giving it a different ending.

Not surprisingly, Onessa was the most open and dramatic of the participants. Using the living room floor as a stage, she would act out the stories as she retold them, moving from one side of the room to the other. Onessa took on the personalities of the characters, using different voices for each of them. In examining Onessa's responses to stories, I will discuss her

concept of story, personal evaluation of stories, examples of her filling in gaps, other uses of personal experience and interpretation, predicting, response to the characters, distinguishing between fact and fiction, response to humor, response to plot, and her understanding of the moral of stories.

Concept of Story

Using the six stages in concept development which provided a model for narrative form developed by Applebee (1978), it appeared that Onessa's stories fit into the sixth, or final stage, which is the "narrative." Characteristic of this stage, each incident not only develops out of the previous one as in the focused chain, but, in addition, each incident elaborates a new aspect of the situation. Such narratives seem to have a consistent forward movement with a climax at the end.

In further examining the retellings of narratives, Golden (1984) suggested examining the overall story structure used by the participants. In Onessa's retellings, I found that her overall pattern was to begin with the initial action of the child protagonist which paralleled the original story line. For example, in the first retelling of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa opened with the following statement: "...there was a boy named Leroy and it was his birthday and he went to the store." Likewise, Onessa began her retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" by saying, "...there was a little boy that had his birthday at the fair. And his friend brought the iguana for everyone to see."

Like her beginnings, Onessa's retellings closed with the final action of the child protagonist similar to the original story line. For example, in the second retelling of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa ended with the birthday party. The following excerpt is from that retelling: "And so the last time when he came back from Mr. Quigly's store his mamma said, 'I have a surprise for you and they're right here. And out popped four friends.'" Similarly, Onessa closed the second retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" with the birthday boy finding the monkey in the car. She stated, "And when they came in the car the little boy thought he saw the iguana but it was the monkey the man had lost."

Onessa used a series of techniques and conventions of literary form, such as formalistic or ritualistic beginnings and endings. These beginnings and endings help mark a discourse as a "story" (Applebee, 1979). Onessa's pattern was to begin her stories with "Once upon a time..." and end her stories with "The end" or "...and that's the end of the story."

Following her openings, Onessa clearly compressed the plot structure into summary statements. For example, during the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa summarized the episodes in the following way:

Lots of things went wrong for him on his birthday. Like everything for him was girl stuff. Like he had to sit by a girl on the bus and like he got a pink ballerina suit and a purple barrette. All that is girl stuff. And all the food that he ordered, well, it was all animal food.

After compressing the plot structure into summary statements, Onessa focused upon selected events. For example, in the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa stated, "And there was a bunch of stuff that went wrong. Things went wrong on the bus, in the restaurant, in the department store, and at the birthday party. First let me tell you about the bus..."

In addition, the middle of Onessa's retellings were marked by elaboration upon selected episodes to give them meaning, thereby varying the original story line. For example, in the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa embellished the bus scene with the following story details:

He got on the new, yellow bus and he had to sit by this fat ole girl. And she took out her tuba and she blows it. And he was like, all upset and said that he needed cork screws for his ears.

Later, in that same retelling, Onessa elaborated upon the restaurant scene:

And then they went to the nice, new restaurant and his sister got pepperoni pizza with chocolate chip cookies on top and his brother got the same thing. And he didn't want pepperoni pizza with chocolate chip cookies 'cause he didn't like that. The chocolate chip cookies were all melted into the pepperoni.

Furthermore, Onessa varied the original story line by elaborating upon character attributes using created dialogue. For example, in "The Iguana Got

Loose at the Birthday Party," Onessa developed the attributes of the monkey with the following statements:

And the monkey saw the peanuts and then, he thought, "That must be elephant peanuts, I might bring them to the elephant act at the zoo when I get back. Yea, the elephants would like that all right. That is the thing that I feel I should do."

Similarly, in the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa developed the personality of Michael and the birthday guest with the following dialogue:

And so, Michael sat down on the couch and then somebody invited to the party jumped out from behind the couch and said, "Surprise! How you doing Michael? Have you had a bad day?" And that made Michael jump up and break the glass dish off the table and he said, "Uh-oh. Not another bad time. I'm sick and tired of bad times."

Also, Onessa used sound effects to elaborate upon the attributes of inanimate objects. For example, she developed the attributes of a tuba in the first retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" with the following: "...and the girl on the bus had a tuba. A tuba is an instrument about this long and it goes, 'Bloop! Bloop! Bloop!'" In addition, she described the train in the second retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" saying, "...and the train came down the track and it was a fast, new train with steam coming out the top and it was going, 'Toot! Toot!'"

Furthermore, Onessa took on the personalities of the characters, using different voices for each of them. She was quite effective in imitating the older female character with a high, squeaky voice; the older male with a deep, hoarse voice; and the child protagonist using her natural voice tone with much added expression.

After Onessa elaborated upon selected episodes, she brought the story back to the original plot. For example, in her second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," after Onessa elaborated upon the food in the restaurant scene, she brought the story back to the surprise awaiting Harry at home. The following excerpt is taken from that retelling:

And so his mamma said, "I'm gonna give you some of my spinach so you can be strong like Popeye." And then he said, "I'd rather die than eat spinach and I'd rather eat flowers more than eat spinach." And so then they got home and it was dark, it was midnight. And then his daddy opened the door.

Also, Onessa clearly elaborated upon character motivation for actions and reactions, thus differing from the original story. The following excerpt taken from the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" is an example:

And he said, "Mom, are you really gonna buy me this pink ballerina suit?" And she said, "Well, it only three dollars [sic]. And we might have to 'cause it's the only thing left in a small." So his mother bought it and

he went to the costume party with it on and that's why he was very embarrassed.

Finally, Onessa's embellishments upon the motivations and reactions of the characters were quite humorous. For example, in the first retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa stated, "...and his mamma said, 'I'm gonna give you some of my spinach so you can be strong like Popeye and have muscles like mountains.' And then he said, 'I'd rather eat flowers than eat spinach.'" Similarly, Harry's costume in the second retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was also treated with humor. In Onessa's story, when Harry arrives at the party dressed in his pink tutu,

[his] best friend said, "Oh, look at that cute little girl wearing the pink tutu doing a dance across the floor." And his second best friend Lynus said, "Oh, I think I'll marry her she's so pretty." And they were really talking about Harry but they didn't recognize him 'cause he was wearing the ballerina suit his mamma bought at the store.

In summary, each incident in Onessa's retellings elaborated a new aspect of the situation, giving her stories a consistent forward movement with a climax at the end. Onessa began and ended her retellings with the action of the child protagonist which paralleled the original story line. The plot was compressed into summary statements in the middle of her retellings followed by elaboration and variation of selected events, character motivation, character attributes, and character dialogue. After her elaborations, Onessa would consistently bring the story back to the original plot.

Personal Evaluation

Onessa used critical facilities to evaluate characters and events after her storytelling. For example, after the first retelling of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa commented, "I can't believe somebody would be so stupid to not ask their mamma first what to get. He should know better."

Similarly, Onessa evaluated the things Harry ordered in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" when she stated, "Everything Harry ordered was so gross. Yuk! Like all that animal stuff. Yuk! Yuk! And at the department store his sister ordered something great, his brother ordered something great. But he didn't get anything great. He got something stupid."

Finally, after her first retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Onessa critically evaluated when she said, "Man, that's the wildest, craziest, funniest story in the whole world."

Filling in Gaps

Onessa was actively "filling in gaps" (Iser, 1978) left open by the writer. The gaps which she filled in included psychological causality, physical causality, characters participating in events, age of main character, and setting.

Psychological causality. Onessa supported psychological causality in instances where it was not made explicit in the stories. For example, in discussing why the waiter pointed Harry to the bathroom when he brought out the broccoli in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa said, "He pointed Harry to the bathroom because Harry said he was gonna vomit." Onessa added, "Harry don't want to move to Saudi Arabia at

the end 'cause of the surprise party." Finally, Onessa was asked why she thought Henry asked his mamma if they could have a party at the zoo in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" and she answered, "Henry thought it was exciting when the iguana caused trouble and he thought the iguana could be at the zoo just like the park and cause the same kind of trouble at his birthday."

Physical causality. Onessa filled in gaps of physical causality which I did not intentionally build into the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World." For example, in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa said the following:

Leroy brought the first thing and that made his mom send that thing back. Then he brought the second thing and that made his mamma send the second thing back. That made him go and get the next thing and it kept on goin' like that.

Onessa was the only participant to fill in the gap of physical causality which I did intentionally build into the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," and she attributed the reason to her being a "tomboy" who is attentive to physical actions.

Characters participating in event. Likewise, Onessa filled in gaps regarding the characters talking in the story. For example, when Onessa was asked who was talking in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa replied, "It was his friends, his mamma, and Leroy talking. He had about four friends there." Onessa continued to fill in gaps identifying the characters talking in

"The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" when she said, "The people talking were the mamma and the little boy."

Ages of the main characters. Similarly, during the reading of the stories, Onessa filled in gaps left open by the author concerning the characters' ages. She stated that Leroy in "Mom, Don't You Like It?" was five years old because "He nagged so much and a kid five years old will do that sort of thing." In addition, Harry, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," was seven years old because "All boys seven years old will act like that," she said. Finally, she described the birthday boy in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" as being six years old "'Cause," she stated, "six-year-old boys have their birthdays at the amusement park."

The setting. Regarding the setting of the story, Onessa filled in gaps about where the conversations took place. For example, in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa said that the conversation took place in the living room. In addition, she said the mamma and the boy in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" had their conversation in the yard.

It seems that Onessa's responses reflected some of the customs practiced at home. That is, on the occasions when I interviewed Onessa's grandmother, we sat in the living room. The kitchen was at the rear of the house and the grandmother told me, "The kitchen is only used for eating around here. We sit in the living room when we have company." However, when I brought Onessa home after the interview sessions, the grandmother and I visited sitting a bench

in the front yard. "When the weather's nice," she told me, "I like to sit out here."

Other Uses of Personal Experience and Interpretation

There were other times when Onessa drew from her daily life in order to interpret or explain. She interpreted the motivations of characters and animals in the stories in light of her own experience. An example is when Onessa interpreted the pigeons' actions in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" based upon observations she witnessed daily in the area where she lived. She stated,

Pigeons will use the bathroom on anything. That's why I know they used it on the birthday cake. They live right there under the interstate and I watch them. If you walk under the bridge they'll use it even in your hair. When you park your car under there, they'll use it on your car.

Furthermore, Onessa drew her interpretations of Harry in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" from her experiences with friends at school and in the neighborhood. Onessa commented,

Harry is like the boys in my room. He hates girls, I think. And he says gross things. All boys in my room are like that. Kevin, the boy down the street is like that, too. That's how I know so much about Harry.

Predicting

During the reading of the stories, Onessa interjected predictions of what would happen after the ending. For example, during the reading of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa guessed that Harry would

be given a surprise party at the story closing. After the scene at the doctor's office was read, Onessa said, "Harry doesn't know it, but he's got a surprise party coming." When the reading of the story was over, Onessa stated, "The reason I knew he was gonna have a surprise party was 'cause the first story had one. And it was his birthday and something good was bound to happen sooner or later."

Similarly, Onessa guessed that the iguana would be lost during the reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party." Halfway through the story Onessa interjected the remark, "He better hold onto his iguana better than that. He's gonna lose him any minute now. Just wait and see."

Characters

Authority figures. Onessa's pattern was to see the minor, authoritative characters in a more positive light than the younger, main character. For example, in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa described Leroy and the mamma in the following way:

He was uncaring, 'cause he didn't care anything about his mamma and what she said so he just kept on buying stuff she didn't like. And what he should have done is buy something she would like. The mamma was just trying to keep her house clean. She was right and Leroy was wrong.

Also, Onessa said the following about the birthday boy in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party":

He was wrong to bring his pet iguana to the birthday party. He should have thought more about his mamma. I mean, here was his poor

mamma trying to watch all those bad children at the party just 'cause he wanted to show off his iguana. I feel sorry for the mamma. That's a shame.

Identifying with characters' responses. Although Onessa found the child protagonists "uncaring" and "wrong," she did identify with certain of their responses. For example, she said she found herself "a lot like bad Harry" in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" when she stated the following:

Harry is an awful lot like me. I mean, because he is bad and I like to be bad sometimes. And we both like to order gross stuff. And another thing, he goes overboard with food and so do I. I mean, he orders too much food and so do I. There are a lot of girls I don't want to sit by, just like Harry didn't want to sit by a girl on the bus. And I'd rather play with boys. I'm a tomboy. I like to play kick ball and stuff. Yea, I'm a lot like bad Harry. Me and Harry act just alike.

Onessa later added the following about Harry in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World":

Harry was angry 'cause everything bad was happening to him, 'cause he thought it was everyone else's own fault. But really it was his own fault. I know I'm like that. I blame it on everybody else but myself when I'm mad, and it's really my own fault."

Similarly, Onessa compared her own response to that of the birthday boy in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" when she stated, "The

birthday boy feels disappointed because everybody is throwing ice at each other, and then the boy flies off the ferris wheel. When things go wrong it makes you be disappointed in yourself. That's the way I am."

Most important character. Both after reading each story and again a week later, Onessa was asked to name the most important character. With one exception, Onessa named the major character, or child protagonist. Furthermore, she consistently named the same character in the first and second interview sessions.

When I asked her why she chose the child protagonist for the most important person her usual response was "'cause without him there wouldn't be a story." For example, she said that Harry was the most important person in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" because "He's what the story's about." Also, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she chose the birthday boy as the most important person and replied, "I chose him because without him there wouldn't be a story." The one exception when she did not choose the child protagonist as the most important person was in "Mom, Don't You Like It?" when she chose the mother. Onessa said, "I chose the mother because she was the one making him take the stuff back and without her there wouldn't be a story." In this story, Onessa chose the adult character who was also a major character in the story.

Character you would most like most to be. Both after reading each story and again a week later, Onessa was asked to name the character she would most like to be. Onessa named the same character for the person she would

most like to be as she had for the most important person, with one exception. After Onessa named the character she wanted to be, I prompted her for a fuller response. Her reasons for wanting to be that character were related to her identifying with the characters' actions and reactions. In all instances, Onessa's answers were consistent between the first and second interview sessions.

For example, Onessa said she wanted to be the mamma in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" because she said, "I'd like to know what it's like to boss Leroy." Also, Onessa chose Harry in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" because she responded, "I'd like to know what it's like to be a birthday boy and order gross things." Finally, Onessa said she wanted to be the birthday boy in the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" and added, "I want to be the birthday boy 'cause I'd like know what it's like to have a birthday cake and have an ice fight." Onessa amended that statement, however, a week later when she said she would rather be the iguana. "I want to be the iguana," she said, "'cause I'd like to know what it's like to scare people."

Fact and Fiction

When asked if each of the three stories was real or make-believe, Onessa responded that one of the stories was make-believe and two of the stories were real. For example, after the reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Onessa answered, "It's made-up because real boys can't fly over a birthday cake." On the other hand, Onessa said that the story "Mom, Don't

"You Like It?" was real because she stated, "Real people can go to the store and buy something and their mom can say take it back." Similarly, she said "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was a real story because "Boys are like that so it must be true. They don't like girls and they say they'd rather have monkey spit and all that and they're real gross."

I then asked Onessa if each of the three stories could have really happened. She responded that parts in each of the stories could have occurred. For example, in the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Onessa replied that although the story was make-believe, parts of the story could have happened. She stated, "The part about the pigeons could have happened 'cause pigeons do fly over everything and use the bathroom on everything. Onessa went on to say that both "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" could have happened because "Real boys are really like that."

Humor

Onessa laughed often at the humor in the stories. In "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa laughed each time Leroy brought a gift home to his mother. At the end of the story, she said, "That was so funny. I can't believe Leroy. He's a kick, huh?"

Because of Onessa's hearty, loud laughter during the reading of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," it was necessary at two points to stop the reading. Onessa bounced out of the chair and started clapping when the story described Harry ordering the monkey spit and gorilla nails at the

restaurant, and when the children were picking out their costumes at the department store.

Furthermore, a great deal of the humor in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" has intended meaning, and Onessa appreciated this slightly more sophisticated humor as well. She said that Harry didn't really want to move to Saudi Arabia but that "He was just teasing and saying that 'cause he was mad."

Finally, Onessa's enjoyment of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was obvious as well. She laughed aloud after the reading of each episode and at the end commented, "That's the funniest, wildest story I ever heard. The funniest story is about Harry but this one is the wildest. I think I'll go home and write one just like it."

Response to Plot

What is remembered best. When Onessa was asked what she remembered best about each story, she gave literal, practical lessons which were directed toward behavior. She responded that what she remembered best about the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" was, "You should think before you buy something 'cause you may have to take it back." Similarly, the thing she remembered best about "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was, "Never say you want monkey spit or gorilla nails 'cause you may have to eat broccoli." Finally, after reading "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she replied, "Never throw peanuts on a railroad track 'cause there could be an accident. That's what I remember best."

What is most important. Immediately after reading each story and again a week later, Onessa was asked what she thought was most important about the story. Her answers were consistent in the first and second interview sessions. When I asked Onessa what was most important about the story, she summarized in a sentence the plot of the story. For example, in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa said the most important thing was "Leroy getting stuff at the store that his mamma didn't like and she made him take the stuff back." Also, she answered that the most important thing in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was "...Harry's birthday and a bunch of things happened to make him depressed." Finally, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Onessa stated, "The most important thing was the birthday boy brought his pet iguana to the amusement park and it got loose and caused all kinds of trouble."

Morals or Lessons of the Story

Onessa's answers to the question whether there was a lesson in the story reflected the "lessons" she said she remembered best about the stories. Furthermore, her answers were consistent between the first and second interview sessions.

For example, following the reading of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Onessa stated, "Never bring anything from the store you [sic] mom doesn't like." In addition, after reading "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Onessa replied, "Never embarrass your parents at the table or you may have to eat something you dislike." Finally, after reading "The Iguana Got

Loose at the Birthday Party," Onessa answered, "Never throw peanuts on a track or bring an iguana to a birthday party."

Case Study: Mary

Mary was seven years, four months old when the study began. She is tall and slim, with a dark brown skin color. Her mother is a school secretary, and her father a school custodian. Mary has two older siblings, sisters 16 and 17 years old.

Commenting upon Mary's relationship with her two sisters, Mary's mother revealed, "There's lots of sibling rivalry in the house. The two older girls argue with each other, and Mary argues with both of them." At the time this study took place, Mary's remarks about her relationships to other members of the family indicated that she was trying to work out her place among the family members. She interpreted the characters in light of her own sibling rivalry and at one point stated, "I'll be glad when my sisters move away and it leaves just me, Mom, and Dad around."

Mary's mother told me that she and Mary were very close, and later remarked, "I guess the reason we're close is 'cause Mary has no siblings around here to play with that are her own age." Although Mary is dependent upon her mother, she has always resisted taking direction from her concerning her homework. "She wants to appear as independent as her sisters on things concerning school. It's important to Mary for her sisters to recognize her as their equal," the mother told me. "I think that's why she learned to read so early."

The mother described the history of Mary's learning to read in the following way:

The first time Mary learned to read she was in kindergarten and she was about five years old. Every day since then she brings home a book to read to anyone who'll listen. She carries a book in her hand all the time. Not surprisingly, Mary's favorite subject in school is reading.

Mary's mother went on to describe her daughter's reading habits. "When Mary was small, I read to her nightly. I noticed that she had a memory like an elephant in recalling details. After I read her a story once, I couldn't leave out anything the next time." Mary's fine attention to detail regarding story events was indicated in her accurate and faithful retellings.

Mary further elaborated upon her reading habits and preferences. When she came home from school, Mary said that she preferred watching television, but usually read instead. "My sisters get home first," she said, "and they always watch their shows. I don't like the shows they watch so I go to my room and read." I then asked Mary what books she like to read, and she went to her room and brought out The Children's Bible and Cinderella. Mary proudly smiled as she stated, "These are my own books, and they're my favorites. I like to read all about the queens and princesses. I'm gonna marry a prince when I grow up." During the first sessions, Mary was reserved with me, but she became more relaxed as the sessions continued. Mary's mother commented, "Mary has been shy most of her life. But she seems to be coming out of it a bit lately."

There were two predominant characteristics of Mary's retellings: (a) an accurate memory in retelling the stories, and (b) a tendency to interpret elements in light of her own family relationships.

In examining Mary's responses to the stories, I will discuss her concept of story, examples of her filling in gaps, other uses of personal experience and interpretation, responses to the characters, distinguishing between fact and fiction, response to humor, response to plot, and her understanding the morals of stories.

Concept of Story

In using the six basic types of structures for analysis of narrative form developed by Applebee (1978), Mary's retellings indicated that she fit into the final, or "narrative" stage, of development. Characteristic of this stage, each incident she retold developed out of the previous one and elaborated a new aspect of the situation, giving her stories a consistent forward movement with a climax at the end.

Golden's (1984) criteria, which evaluates the narrative retellings of stories, was used to evaluate Mary's retellings. In examining her retellings, she did not open with dialogue between characters, but her tendency was to jump directly into the action of the child protagonist. For example, in the second retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary stated, "Willy had a birthday and he brought this iguana for everybody to see and feel and he let this boy hold it." She omitted the opening conversation when the mother asks the boy if he enjoyed the birthday party at the amusement park.

Similarly, in her first retelling of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary began with the statement, "Leroy got some money and then he went out to spend it." Again, she omitted the opening conversation when the mother tells Leroy that the uncle has given him birthday money to spend.

Unlike her beginnings, Mary ended her retellings with the closing dialogue of the characters. She ended her first retelling of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," in the following way:

...and after he brought everything back, he didn't get anything. And he said, "Mom, I didn't get anything with my money." And his mom said, "Well, I have something for you, Harry." Then all the kids and his Mamma said, "Surprise! Happy Birthday!"

Likewise, Mary closed the first retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" with the following dialogue:

So when they got to the house his daddy came to the door, and the lights flipped on and everybody said, "Surprise! Surprise! Happy Birthday, Harry!" And he said, "You just never know how birthdays are gonna turn out."

Furthermore, Mary gave one-sentence summaries of the plot, which were followed by her relating all the episodes of the original story. In "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Mary gave a plot summary when she stated, "It was Harry's birthday, and lots of bad luck kept happening to him until the end." Similarly, in the first retelling of "The Iguana Got Loose at the

Birthday Party," Mary stated, "There was this boy and he was having a birthday and he wanted everything to go right but everything went wrong."

Following her one-sentence summaries of the plot, Mary's retellings corresponded to the text, line by line. She recaptured all of the specific events of the original story, and added the details of actions in those events. For example, Mary recaptured the breakfast scene in the first retelling of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" with the following details:

Well, Harry went into the kitchen for breakfast. And everybody got cereal. He wanted pancakes with raspberry topping, but everybody got cereal. His sister got Sugar Crispies, and his brother got Frosted Flakes, but the only thing left was Bran Buds. So he got the Bran Buds.

Later, in the same retelling, Mary vividly recaptured the details of the doctor's scene with the following remarks:

...And they went to the doctor and the doctor said he needed a measles shot. And he said his sister and brother needed one, too. And the doctor said to him, "No, Harry. They've already completed their shots." And the doctor said, "Count from three to twenty." But he counted all the way backwards from twenty to three and the doctor stopped the shot. And he told the doctor that it still hurt anyway.

Not only did Mary relate all story episodes with their specific details, but she retold each of the story events in their proper sequences. When Mary retold the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the

History of the World," she followed the pattern of relating the events in proper sequences in both the first and second retellings.

When Mary retold the stories, she included reasons for the characters' actions, which were all stated in the original story. For example, in the first retelling of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary recalled each of the reasons given by the mother for Leroy returning the gifts. The following is an excerpt taken from that retelling:

And he got an army set and his mamma said, "You can't keep that because it clogs up the vacuum." And so he brought it back and got a basketball and his mamma said, "You can't keep that 'cause it bounces and you'll break something." And so he brought it back and got some paints and his mamma said, "You can't keep those 'cause they're too messy." And so he brought it back and got a watch and his mamma said, "You can't keep that 'cause it runs on batteries and batteries are too expensive." And so he brought it back and got an army rifle, and she said, "You can't keep that 'cause it makes too much noise. And then he got..."

There were instances when Mary supplied minor details that were different from those used in the original texts, such as when she substituted chicken thighs for drumsticks in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World." In addition, when I asked Mary the definition of Crackerjax in this story, she replied, "I've never heard of it. I think you mean Crackerbarrel, like the store. He got his stuff out of one of them machines there." The result was

that when Mary tried recalling the children's prizes in her retellings, she named things which a child could win from a machine rather than discover inside a Crackerjax box.

In summary, each incident in Mary's retellings elaborated a new aspect of the situation, giving her stories a consistent forward movement with a climax at the end. Mary's beginnings opened with the action of the child protagonist, and her endings closed with character dialogue. The middle of her retellings were marked with summary statements of the plot, followed by a recapturing of the specific events, the details of actions inside those events, and their sequences.

Filling in Gaps

Mary was actively "filling in gaps" (Iser, 1978) left open by the writer. The gaps which she filled in included psychological causality, characters participating in event, age of characters, and setting.

Psychological causality. According to McConaughy's (1982) definition of psychological causality, Mary filled in gaps by assigning psychological causality to the feelings or intentions of the characters which motivated their actions and reactions. For example, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Mary discussed why the waiter pointed Harry to the bathroom when he brought out the broccoli. She said, "Harry said he was gonna throw up and he needed the bathroom for that. Also, he wanted to throw away that broccoli casserole." Also, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary explained why Henry asked his mamma if he could have a party at the zoo.

She said, "Henry wanted his party at the zoo 'cause he could have fun like at the amusement park. There are lots of different animals at the zoo that could cause trouble."

Characters participating in event. Mary also filled in gaps by interpreting the events of the story characters in light of her own family experience and relationships with friends. I asked Mary who she thought said, "Surprise! Surprise! Happy Birthday Leroy!" in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" Mary answered, "The mamma, his two sisters, and his friends from down the street said that. He didn't want his two sisters there but they came anyway." Similarly, in the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary said, "The people talking were the mamma and the boy Willy. But his two sisters were listening to what they were saying. He didn't want them to be listening but they were."

Ages of characters. Mary filled in the ages of the characters based upon her own family experience and relationships. For example, I asked Mary the age of Leroy in the story, "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and she answered, "He was about five years old 'cause that's when you get a surprise party. I was five years old when my mamma gave me one." In "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Mary stated, "Harry was probably eight years old 'cause he acts just like my cousin Deon who's that age." Finally, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary responded, "Henry was five or six years old 'cause that's when my mamma took me to the amusement park. He's younger

than me 'cause when you're seven years old you know better than to do the stuff what he did."

The setting. Mary filled in the setting in light of her own family experience when I asked her where the conversation took place in the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party." After reading both of the stories, Mary replied that the conversations between the mother and child took place in the living room. After reading "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary made the following statement:

They have to talk in the living room 'cause there's always too many people in the kitchen. Your sisters get in there with their friends and you can't hear a thing. When you need to talk to your mom alone, you go to the living room."

When I visited in Mary's home, the mother and I sat in the living room where we overheard a loud conversation in the kitchen among family members and friends. The mother remarked, "The kitchen is always full of people, so for a private conversation we always go to the living room."

Other Uses of Personal Experience and Interpretation

There were other times Mary drew from her daily life in order to interpret or explain. For example, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary interpreted the pigeons' actions in light of her daily observations. Mary lived in close proximity to the interstate where pigeons nest. The following is an excerpt taken from Mary's interpretation:

I know that those pigeons used it in the cake and all over those kids' hair. That's why the kids got in that fight, to fight off the pigeons. See, we live right across from the interstate. And we play under that bridge every day after school. Man, those pigeons use it on anything that passes under them.

Later, in the same session, Mary drew from her daily life as she described the mother's emotional reaction to the train wreck:

I know that the mother was some mad and so she hurried those kids home 'cause of that train wreck. Kids ought to know better than to play around a track. My mamma would kill me if I caused a wreck like that. Stuff like that makes her mad.

Mary went on to interpret the characters and events in the story in terms of the sibling rivalry she was experiencing with her two sisters:

See, there's a train track right around the corner and she won't even let me walk close to it. My sisters get to walk and play around it just like the kids in the story 'cause they're older. They get to do more than I do. They don't even get fussed at. Neither do the kids in the story. I don't think it's fair.

Mary was the only participant in the study to infer that in "Mom Don't You Like It?" the mother and friends attempted to surprise Leroy by secretly purchasing all of the gifts which he had returned. She stated the following:

I know that the mamma and the friends went out in secret and bought Leroy all the stuff that his mamma had made him take back. They

wanted to surprise him. I know that 'cause my mom did that once to me. She made me take back this toy I bought then she gave it to me for Christmas. It was a baby doll.

Characters

Child protagonists. Mary saw the younger, main character in a more positive light than the minor, authoritative characters. In the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary described Leroy and his mamma by saying that "Leroy was a good boy with a choicemy mamma." When I asked Mary what choicemy meant, a word with which I was unfamiliar, she explained it in the following way:

Choicemy means that you can't decide on nothing you want. Like you think you want one thing but then, after you think about it, you want something else. The mamma's like that. She thinks he can't have a toy 'cause it will mess up her house. So she wants him to get something else. And when he gets something else, she also says it's bad. I liked Leroy, but I wouldn't want to mess with his mamma.

In "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Mary said the following:

Harry was funny and cute like my cousin Deon. I liked Harry. But his mamma was mean to not tell him "Happy Birthday" until the end. And his brother and sister were mean, too. They didn't share nothing with him. My sisters are mean just like that.

Here again Mary was articulating comments about herself in relation to other members of the family.

Identifying with characters' responses. Mary identified with certain of the characters' responses, even those seen in a less positive light. For example, when later reflecting on Leroy's "choicey" mother in "Mom Don't You Like It?," Mary made the following statements:

I guess she couldn't help but be choicey like that. When you're grown, sometimes you have to be choicey with your children or they mess up your house. I guess I can understand that. I guess she probably did the right thing.

Similarly, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary found herself identifying with the mother's worrying. She made the following comments:

I know that mamma was worried about all those children around that track, and flying in a balloon, and throwing ice and all the other stuff. I sometimes worry like that. I worry if I can't find the shirt I want to wear, or if I make a bad grade, or something like that. I know how she feels.

The most important character. Both after reading each story and also a week later, Mary was asked to name the most important character in the story. In each instance, Mary named the major character, or child protagonist. Furthermore, her answers were consistent in the first and second interview sessions.

When I asked her why the child protagonist was chosen for the most important person, her responses related to it being the character's birthday. For example, in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary said, "Leroy is important 'cause it's his birthday." Also, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she responded, "Well, what I think is Harry is important 'cause he's the one having the birthday." Finally, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she stated, "The boy that's having the birthday has got to be the most important."

The character you would most like to be. Mary was asked to name the character she would most like to be both after reading each story and again a week later. Mary again named the child protagonist, the same character she named for the most important person. Furthermore, she consistently named the same character in the first and second interview sessions.

When I asked her why she chose the child protagonist as the character she would most like to be, her reasons were related to the character's birthday party. For example, in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary answered, "I'd like to be Leroy 'cause it's his birthday and he gets a party." Similarly, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she said, "The one I'd like to be is Harry 'cause he gets to have a party at the end." Also, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," she responded, "I want to be the birthday boy 'cause I want my party at the amusement park."

Fact and Fiction

When Mary was asked if the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was real or make-believe, Mary stated,

It's make-believe because real boys don't fly around on balloons at amusement parks. And real boys don't bring iguanas to birthday parties. Some of it could have happened, like the train wreck and the pigeons, but the rest of it was made-up. Yea, it's a make-believe story all right.

Mary stated, however, that the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" were both real. I asked Mary why she thought "Mom, Don't You Like It?" was real and she answered, "'Cause real boys can get a rifle and they can get all those toys and they can have a surprise party at the end." Likewise, Mary said that "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was real. She stated the following:

It's real because boys can have a birthday party, they can go to a restaurant, their brother can order pepperoni pizza, they can go to school and get chicken to eat, they can go to a doctor and get a measles shot, and they could have gotten a red heart. But the part about ordering the gross things couldn't have happened. There's no way. Restaurants don't carry gross things. But it was still a real story. I'm sure of that.

Humor

Mary was shy and did not tend to laugh aloud during the reading of the stories. However, during the reading of "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," Mary chuckled in two places: during the childrens' selection of

costumes at the department store, and during Harry's food ordering at the restaurant.

Mary was not able to appreciate some of the hidden meaning in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World." I asked her if she thought Harry was still planning to move to Saudi Arabia at the end of the story and she stated, "Yea, 'cause he said so."

Plot

What is remembered best. When Mary was asked what she remembered best about each story, she consistently related the happy ending of each story. Mary answered that she remembered the surprise party best in both "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" and "Mom, Don't You Like It?" Also, in the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary said, "What I remembered best was when he found the monkey in the end."

What is most important. In addition, both after reading each story and again a week later, I asked Mary to name the thing that was most important about each story. In both the first and second sessions, Mary consistently gave a moral lesson for the story. Her moral lessons were abstract, philosophical lessons which were directed more toward coping with the trouble, rather than alleviating the problem as in the other participants' responses. For example, after reading "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary said, "What's most important is if you're good and you wait for all the bad things to stop, something good will happen, like a surprise party." Similarly, in "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she stated, "Let the bad stuff pass and hang on and the good

stuff like a party will come. That's what's important." Finally, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary remarked, "That's easy. The most important thing is when something bad happens you get something good at the end. That's why he got the monkey."

Morals or Lessons of the Story

Mary's answers to whether there was a lesson in the story reflected the abstract, moral lessons she gave for the most important thing. Furthermore, her answers were consistent in content between the first and second interview sessions.

For example, following the reading of "Mom, Don't You Like It?," Mary answered, "The lesson is to always wait for something happy to happen after the bad things are over." Also, following "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," she remarked, "That lesson is about a happy ending like a party comin' when you've been through something real hard." Finally, after the reading of "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," Mary said, "After something awful happens, you get a surprise. And that's what the lesson is."

Summary of Case Studies

Although the participants were of the same ethnic background, age, gender, literary background, and had similar reading interests, there were some surprising differences in their retellings and responses. In using the six stages in concept development which provided a model for narrative form developed by Applebee (1978), it appeared that Gertrude's stories fit into the fifth stage which was the "focused chain"; Onessa and Mary's stories fit into the sixth, or final stage, which was the "narrative."

In retelling the stories, Gertrude painted the stories with broad brush strokes; Onessa dramatized them with great elaborations; and Mary retold them with detail and accuracy. According to criteria established by Golden (1984) which considers the plot structure, Gertrude used compression followed by deletion of most story episodes; Onessa used compressions followed by great elaborations after which she returned to the plot; Mary summarized the plot then related all of the specific story events and their details. Gertrude began and ended with initial character dialogue and action of the child protagonist; Onessa began and ended with the action of the child protagonist; Mary began with the action of the child protagonist and ended with character dialogue. Finally, Gertrude and Onessa supplied character motivation for action and reactions, whereas Mary retold only that motivation which was actually stated in the text.

Two of the participants' ambitions in life colored their responses to the stories. For example, Gertrude viewed the stories through the lens of a

teacher and she commented upon how easily the book could be used to teach a kindergartner how to read. Onessa remarked on whether or not the stories could be produced effectively as she viewed them through a writer and play producer. Finally, Mary, who was read to often by her mother, responded according to these detailed expectations of performance.

All three of the participants actively "filled in gaps" (Iser, 1978) left open by the writer, including psychological causality, characters participating in event, age of characters, and setting. Although in two of the stories, "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," I did not intentionally leave gaps of physical causality, Onessa filled in this gap as well. Also, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," where the events moved along by physical rather than psychological causality, Onessa was the only participant to fill in this gap. The one instance in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," where I purposely left a gap of psychological causality was filled in by all three of the participants.

In addition, there were times when the participants used personal experience to draw from their daily life in order to interpret or explain. Gertrude interpreted the motivations of the characters in light of her own experience with her mother and two cousins; Onessa interpreted motivations using her observations in the neighborhood and experiences at school; Mary interpreted character motivations in light of her play after school and the rivalry with her two sisters.

When the participants were asked to name the character who was most important and the character they would most like to be, their tendency was to name the same character in answer to both questions. Gertrude named minor characters who played authoritative roles in the story, whereas both Mary and Onessa named the child protagonist. Both Gertrude and Onessa described the minor, authoritative characters in a more positive light than the younger, main character. Mary, on the other hand, described the child protagonist as more positive than the other characters in the story. All three of the participants identified with certain of the characters' responses, even those seen in a less positive light.

In considering whether the stories were fact or fiction, the tendency of the participants was to regard the story as fact if they could relate it to their personal life. If, on the other hand, they could not relate it to their own world, or considered it an exaggeration of humorous events, Onessa and Mary viewed the stories as fantasy.

All three of the participants responded that they enjoyed the humor in the stories, but Mary, the shyest of the participants, did not tend to laugh aloud during the reading of the stories. Furthermore, Onessa purposely added humor in her retellings. The story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" stimulated laughter from all three participants in two places: (a) during the selection of costumes at the department store, and (b) during Harry's ordering food at the restaurant. Only Onessa caught the intended humor when Harry continuously threatened to move to Saudi Arabia.

All three of the participants tended to focus on the happy ending or a moral lesson directed toward behavior, when asked what they remembered best or what was most important about each story. The lessons given by Gertrude and Onessa were specific, practical, and directed toward behavior. In most instances, however, Onessa's lesson differed from Gertrude's in application. Mary's lesson, on the other hand, was more philosophical, abstract, and directed toward coping with the trouble. The participants pattern in giving moral lessons to the story was similar to Trousdale's (1987) pattern where two of the children found literal, practical, lessons while one child gave more abstract, philosophical lessons.

CHAPTER VI

Comparisons of Writer's Intent with Children's

Construction of Meaning

"Mom, Don't You Like It?"

In this section, I will compare my processes and intent in writing the stories with each child's response and construction of meaning. Each story will be discussed in sequence as it was presented to the participant during the interview session. First, I will discuss the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?"

Genre

Format. The genre that I selected for writing this story was that of a short work of fiction with a picture book format. For the purposes of this study, however, this narrative was used without the illustrations.

Fact or fiction. According to Applebee (1978), young children's understanding of fiction as a convention of storytelling develops over time. Young children tend to view stories historically as true; only gradually sometime between the ages of six and nine, do they come to understand that a realistic fictional story may not be actually true.

For children at the early stages of developing a concept of story, a story is untrue only if it inverts the normal order of events or presents events that are impossible or nonsensical. A story that presents events which the child perceives as possible is regarded as historically true. These children may develop two categories for stories; I use the terms real and make-believe to represent these categories. I considered whether to write a story presenting

events which the child perceives as possible or, at the other extreme, invert the normal order of events and present a story as impossible or nonsensical. I decided to write this particular story as one which was true-to-life and quite possible.

In responding to the stories, each of the participants related this story to their personal lives. When Gertrude was asked, for example, if the story was real or make-believe, she responded that she knew the story was real because a similar experience had happened to her cousin when she was continuously sent back to the store by her mother. She added, "That story could have definitely happened because I remember when it did happen." Gertrude went on to elaborate upon the fact that it was difficult to find a gift which has your mother's approval. Gertrude said, "I can't ever find anything my mamma likes. She always thinks it's too messy."

Onessa also said that the story was real because "Real people can go to the store and buy something and their mom can say take it back. So the story could really happen. It must be true." Onessa went on to draw from her daily life to explain how hard it is to please one's mother. She said, "Moms are real particular. Like their house has to be just so, your room has to be clean and all that stuff. My mom's like that. They all are."

Mary likewise stated that she thought the story was real and gave the following reason: "'Cause real boys can get a rifle and they can get all those toys and they can have a surprise party at the end." She later added, "My mom don't like no toys I like."

Deciding the Plot

General summary. One of the main purposes in writing this story was that I wanted all readers to be able to relate to the plot of the story. Because many children have experienced, or seen experienced, the returning of purchases to the store, and because many children are aware of how hard it is to buy a toy that is pleasing to a mother, I decided to build my plot around the gift-returning idea. Through reading the plot, I wanted the child to become aware that frustrating events are experienced at one time or another in all of our lives, just as they were in the life of Leroy, and that often, through patient waiting, frustrating events take a happy turn.

Outlining episodes. In selecting the proper items for Leroy to purchase in the story, my concerns were threefold: (a) I did not want any two of the items to be objectionable to the mother for the same reasons, (b) all the purchases needed to be within the same reasonable price range, and (c) each reader needed to be familiar enough with the toys purchased to understand their specific characteristics.

Another concern in writing the story was the ordering of the items purchased in proper sequences. I was aware that for the participants to recall the items purchased in their retelling, there needed to be some order and reason for the first toy purchased, then the second, then the third, etc. In other words, prior reasons given by the mother for the returning of gifts needed to be taken into consideration when Leroy made later purchases. For example, the mother's first excuse for Leroy not keeping the army set was that

it clogged up her vacuum. Therefore, none of the later toys Leroy purchased could come in such small pieces that they could cause a similar problem.

Each of the participants' responses indicated that they were all familiar with the toys I chose for Leroy's purchases, especially the fingerpaints, basketball, and kitten. Mary owned a kitten and she received a set of fingerpaints as a gift for Christmas; Gertrude played basketball after school with her two cousins; Onessa owned a basketball, fingerpaints, and a kitten. Therefore, it appeared that having all the gifts within a similar and reasonable price range in the story was a wise decision, as several of the toys were owned or used by the participants.

Even though the army set and army rifle are often considered toys made primarily for boys, the girl participants responded that they enjoyed them as well. For example, Mary stated, "I wish somebody would give me an army set and army rifle for my birthday. That's neat." Also, Onessa responded, "Leroy's toys were a lot more fun than girls' stuff." Finally, Gertrude said, "My cousins have lots of those same toys. We play with the basketball the most."

Beginning the story. After deciding upon a plot for the story, I brainstormed until I devised an appropriate lead which moved the reader quickly into the action of the child protagonist. In the dialogue of the two leading sentences, Leroy is told that his uncle has sent him some money for his birthday and he is to go to the store to purchase a gift with it. Because I was more interested in the repetitive language of the text than the detailed

development of the characters, I moved from these first two sentences quickly into the patterned dialogue in the body of the text.

In her retelling, Gertrude remembered the leading sentences and quoted them word for word, whereas both Mary and Onessa summarized them, then moved directly into the action of the child protagonist. When I asked Gertrude how she remembered the exact dialogue of the opening sentences, she said, "That's easy, 'cause it's just the way me and my mamma talk."

In addition, Onessa made the following comments:

I liked the way that story started with the mom and boy talking and they talked all the way through it. I can write one like that. That's cute.

Very cute. But I'm gonna start mine with "Once upon a time" and end them with "The end." How come you don't do that, Ms. Janie?

In retelling the story, Onessa did add the ritualistic beginnings and endings she recommended.

Ending the story. After deciding upon the leading sentences for this story, I began to think of possible endings. I first thought of ending the story by having Leroy bring home a friend that his mother allowed to stay and play. After reflecting upon the idea, however, I decided that this action was out of character for the mother, who was so overly concerned about keeping her house clean. So I later revised the ending -- the mother would make Leroy return the gifts because she had secretly purchased all the gifts which he had returned. I thought of two possible ways to achieve this ending: (a) the mother could surprise Leroy by presenting him with the same gifts that he had

previously returned, and (b) the mother could arrange a surprise party for Leroy with the friends presenting the returned gifts. In either case, the ending would have a surprise party theme. The result was a final ending to the story consisting of the following dialogue spoken by the mother: "Well, I know of something, Leroy. And here they are. Surprise! Surprise! Happy Birthday, Leroy!"

There were two primary reasons I wrote the above ending. First, by having the mother come up with the idea of giving Leroy a surprise, it made her seem less like a tyrant and more like a sympathetic mother concerned with surprising her son on his birthday; this changed the meaning of the story from one where the boy's gift is eventually acceptable to the mother, to a meaning whereby the Mom offers a gift to her son. Second, the research of Norvell (1958) claimed that children have a need for their stories to end happily, and I could think of no happier ending than Leroy having a surprise birthday party.

In interpreting the ending, Mary was the only participant in the study to infer that the mother and friends attempted to surprise Leroy by secretly purchasing all of the gifts which he had returned. Both Gertrude and Onessa, on the other hand, thought the mother had simply invited friends over for a surprise party at the story's closing.

This sympathetic action of the mother surprising Leroy seemed a wise decision as far as winning the approval of two of the participants was concerned. Gertrude said, "I liked the mother real good. She acted sweet when she gave him a party. My mamma is a lot like Leroy's mamma." Also,

Onessa remarked, "That mamma wasn't really mean, 'cause she did him right at the end." Mary, however, called the mother "choicey," and stated, "I'm glad she ain't my mamma."

All of the participants could relate to surprise parties in their personal lives. Mary had been given a surprise party, and Gertrude and Onessa had both attended one. Also, Gertrude and Mary consistently related the happy endings of each of the stories in naming the things they remembered best. In this particular story, Gertrude and Mary both said the thing they remembered best was the surprise birthday party. When asked what she considered most important about the story, Gertrude again answered that it was the surprise party.

Characters

Development of characters. In writing this story, I intended for the child protagonist to be the most important character in the story. Both Gertrude and Onessa, however, named the mother as the most important character and the character they would most like to be. Mary, however, did name Leroy for both the most important character and the character she would most like to be.

Number of characters. In this story, I used only two characters speaking because my primary focus was upon the repetitive conversation and actions of the characters. By limiting the number of characters speaking, I could create a narrative that the participants could read independently or along with an adult.

Onessa commented that she preferred retelling and acting out a story with only two characters. She stated, "This story is perfect for a one or two-man-show. See, I can do one voice on this side of the room and another voice on the other side of the room. So I just move around and it's funner."

Names of characters. I used the name Leroy for the child protagonist because it was a name common to both African-American and Caucasian cultures. The decision of naming the main character Leroy allowed the participants to easily connect the name to their friends and relatives. Because one of Gertrude's cousins was named Leroy, Gertrude was drawn into the story immediately. Gertrude commented, "One of the best things about this story was the boy's name. My cousin is named that." In addition, Mary said that there was a boy named Leroy in her room, and Onessa commented, "I once had a good friend named Leroy. When I grow up and get married and have a baby, that's what I'm gonna name him." Onessa added that the name Leroy seemed to fit the personality of the character. She remarked, "That boy acts like a Leroy, you know what I mean? Like Leroy's such a cute name, and like he's so cute and funny."

Tone

Both Gertrude and Onessa laughed often at the humor in the story each time Leroy brought a gift home to his mother. Gertrude remarked that the repetitive language of Leroy was the funniest part of the story. She said, "That story was funny 'cause everything Leroy says starts out alike." At the end of the story, Onessa said, "That was so funny. I can't believe Leroy. He's a kick,

huh?" Mary, on the other hand, was the shyest of the participants and because she was shy, did not tend to laugh aloud during the reading of the story.

Style

I wanted to use simple, repetitive language representing the voice of a child speaking so I cast the story in the form of a dialogue. The participants did tend to remember many of the episodes in the story. For example, Mary stated, "It was so easy to remember what Leroy said 'cause everything he said stated off the same way. He sounded like an old needle when he said, 'Mom, I bought this and Mom, I bought that.'" Also, the style that I used was effective in having the child read along with the adult in the following sentences: "Mom, I bought this...; Please, Mom, don't you like it?; I'm sorry, Leroy, but..."

In retelling the story, Gertrude quoted the repetitive dialogue on several occasions. Onessa, on the other hand, greatly elaborated the character dialogue as she inventively created her own. Finally, Mary retold the story using sentences which corresponded to the dialogue in the text, line by line.

Leaving Gaps in the Story

When composing the story, I purposely left gaps for the participant to fill in concerning psychological causality, setting, age of character, characters participating in event, and emotional reactions of characters. Although it was not my intention to leave gaps concerning physical causality, Onessa filled in this gap also.

Psychological causality. According to McConaughy (1982), psychological causality is a chain of internal states and dispositions such as traits, feelings, or intentions which motivate and precede the characters' actions. All three of the participants actively filled in these gaps as they assigned psychological causality to the mother's continuous action in sending Leroy to the store. Gertrude remarked, "The mamma kept sending him back 'cause she was so worried about keeping her house straight." Also, Onessa stated, "That mamma was very nervous about keeping things straight and neat and clean and that's why she sent Leroy back to the store." Mary, however, gave a different interpretation of the mother's motive when she said, "The mother wanted to surprise him with all the gifts at the party she was planning. So she kept sending him back. She couldn't have him buy 'em 'cause she won't have nothing to surprise him with."

Physical causality. McConaughy (1982) defines physical causality as the casual relationship in chains of actions and events. Onessa actively filled in gaps of physical causality in the retelling of this story when she said,

Leroy bought the first thing and that made his mom send that thing back. Then he bought the second thing and that made his mamma send the second thing back. That made him go and get the next thing. And it kept on goin' like that.

Setting. Each of the participants filled in the setting of the story in light of customs practiced at home. For example, Gertrude said the conversation between the mother and child took place in the living room. Gertrude's

mother told me, "The living room is where I like to entertain my guests. My sofa's new, and no one sees it if we sit in the kitchen."

Onessa, on the other hand, said the conversation took place in the yard. When I brought Onessa home after the interview session, the grandmother and I visited on a bench in the front yard. "When the weather's nice," she told me, "I like to sit out here."

Like Gertrude, Mary said that the conversation took place in the living room and added,

They have to talk in the living room 'cause there's always too many people in the kitchen. Your sisters gets in there with their friends and you can't hear a thing. When you need to talk to your mom alone, you go to the living room.

When I visited in Mary's home, the mother and I sat in the living room where we overheard a loud conversation in the kitchen among family members and friends. The mother remarked, "The kitchen is always full of people, so for a private conversation we always go to the living room."

Ages of main characters. The age of the child protagonist was also filled in by each of the participants in light of their experience. For example, Gertrude remarked, "Leroy was seven because he always got little children toys. My cousin is seven and he always lets me play with them 'cause I'm seven, too." Onessa said that Leroy was five years old because "He nagged so much and a kid five years old will do that sort of thing." Finally, when I asked Mary the age of Leroy she said, "He was about five years old 'cause that's

when you get a surprise party. I was five years old when my mamma gave me one."

Characters participating in events. The participants filled in gaps concerning the characters participating in the birthday party in light of family relationships and experiences. For example, when Gertrude was asked who the guests were at the party, she answered, "The mamma, the cousins, and the uncle were there." Also, Onessa filled in the characters participating by saying, "It was his friends, his mamma, and Leroy talking. He had four friends there." Finally, when asked who said "Happy Birthday, Leroy!" at the surprise birthday party Mary replied, "The mamma, his two sisters, and his friends from down the street said that. He didn't want his two sisters there but they came anyway."

Emotional reaction of characters. The participants interpreted the feelings of the characters according to the way they themselves felt. For example, Gertrude said that "Leroy had a surprise party and he was surprised 'cause he didn't know he was gonna have one. And neither did I." Also, Onessa responded, "The mamma was just trying to keep her house clean. I know when I clean up my room I don't like nobody to come messin' it up." Finally, Mary related to the mother's response when she remarked, "....When you're grown sometimes you have to be choicely with your children or they mess up your house. I guess I can understand that...."

In most cases, Gertrude identified with Leroy's emotions as she classified them in one of two categories, happy or sad. For example, Gertrude

remarked, "Leroy was sad because he was returning all those gifts, and I don't blame him." "But," she added, "Leroy was happy at the end 'cause we [sic] had a surprise party."

Lesson

As I began composing the story, I recorded a possible lesson in my personal journal, which read as follows: "Situations and people are not always what they appear to be. Through patient waiting, reasons for actions become evident."

The lessons given by Gertrude and Onessa were both more literal and practical than the lesson I intended for the story to have; however, they differed in application. Gertrude stated that the lesson of the story was, "First ask your mamma what to get before you buy it." Onessa stated the lesson as, "Never bring anything from the store you [sic] mom doesn't like."

Mary, however, gave a moral lesson which was more philosophical and abstract, and closer to what I intended. In addition, her lesson was aimed more toward coping with the trouble rather than alleviating the problem. Mary said, "The lesson is always wait for something happy to happen after the bad things are over."

A week after hearing the story, both Gertrude and Mary named the moral lesson as the most important thing about the story; Onessa named it as the thing she remembered best.

Title

I decided to use the title "Mom, Don't You Like It?" because it was part of the actual text yet did not give the plot away. When Gertrude was read the title she responded, "Oh, this is gonna be about my mamma. Goody." The other two participants made no comment after the title was read to them, but when later *retelling the story*, recalled the name of the title accurately.

"The Worst Birthday in the History of the World"

Genre

Format. The genre that I selected was that of a short work of fiction with a picture book format. For the purposes of this study, however, the format that was used had no illustrations. As I wrote, however, I used wording which was visually descriptive, and arranged the text as though illustrations were present.

Fact or fiction. I considered whether to write this story presenting events which the child would perceive as possible or, at the other extreme, invert the normal order of events and present a story as impossible or nonsensical. I decided to write this particular story as one which was true-to-life and quite possible.

Before asking the participants if the story was real or make-believe, I explained that a real story was one which was true, or that had actually happened; a make-believe story, on the other hand, was a product which I, as a writer, had created or made-up. When the participants were asked if the story was real or make-believe, all three of the participants responded that the story was real.

It seems that when Gertrude could relate the stories to her personal life she saw them as real. For example, she stated,

I know that story was real 'cause things like that happen all the time. I's [sic] sure it happened somewhere. Like part of it happened to me that

time on my birthday when I got punished. I know you wrote about a true story.

Also, Onessa stated the story was a real one when she remarked the following:

Boys are like that so it must be true. They don't like girls and they say they'd rather have monkey spit and all that and they're real gross. It could have really happened. And he's a real boy, all right.

Finally, Mary similarly responded that the story was real, but said that part of it couldn't have happened:

It's real because boys can have a birthday party, they can go to a restaurant, their brother can order pepperoni pizza, they can go to school and get chicken to eat, they can go to a doctor and get a measles shot, and they could have gotten a red heart. But the part about ordering the gross things couldn't have happened. There's no way. Restaurants don't carry gross things. But it was still a real story. I'm sure of that.

Plot

Developing the plot. Because children often experience traumatically trying days just as adults do, I wanted to write a story that, when read by a child, would have a therapeutic effect. This idea for a plot came about after my nephew, having experienced a frustrating day at school, asked me to read him Judith Viorst's book, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day (1977). My nephew found it easy to relate to the plot in this

book, as the child protagonist in the story, Alexander, experiences what is described as a "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day."

After the idea for my story was born, I considered ways in which the plot I created would differ from the plot in Viorst's book. The ways were as follows: (a) the narrative I would create would be built around the theme of a birthday, (b) I would invent different episodes from those of Viorst, as the events would all evolve around a birthday theme, and (c) I would end my story happily, with a surprise birthday party, thereby making this narrative similar to the story, "Mom, Don't You Like It?"

My purpose, therefore, for writing the plot in this story became fourfold: (a) I wanted the reader to be able to relate to the plot of a child protagonist who experiences a day full of catastrophes, (b) I wanted the reader to realize that a day full of disaster often ends happily, (c) I wanted the reader to realize that other children, for example the child protagonist, experience similar problems, and (d) I wanted the reader to find the episodes in the plot humorous when visualizing them happening to someone else.

The participants were successful in relating the plot of the story to their personal lives and family relationships. For example, Gertrude remarked, "You know, I've had days like that. Like once, on my birthday, I got punished for talking at school and had to stay in for recess. That's terrible, huh, what can happen on you birthday?"

Also, Onessa interpreted Harry's predicament in light of her own family relationships. Onessa said that she found it easy to understand what Harry, the child protagonist in the story, was experiencing. She stated,

Harry was having a hard time 'cause that's the way it is when you're growing up. Kids have an awful time, just like big people do. Once I read a story about a boy that ran away from home he was having such a hard time. I thought for awhile I'd try that, running away I mean. But I never did 'cause things worked out okay, just like they did for Harry.

Similarly, Mary interpreted Harry's situation in relation to the rivalry she was experiencing at home with her two sisters and at one point stated the following:

Yea, Harry was just like me 'cause he couldn't get along with his brother and sister just like me. My sisters always pick on me and stuff. And once I did have a surprise party. My mamma and daddy gave me one.

Summary. I recorded a short summary for the plot of this story in my personal journal, stating that the story would be about a boy who had one misfortune on top of another as he lived through a typical, weekday routine on his birthday, only to be entertained by a surprise party at the end. By writing a summary of the story, I could evaluate the interest level of the plot. This story would be of high interest to the reader because it would involve pain and conflict.

Conflict. In all of my stories, I aim toward the reader relating to the conflict I create in the life of the child protagonist. Onessa commented on the

trouble that the child protagonist experienced when she said, "I liked all that mess he went through. I liked it 'cause messy trouble like that happens to me all the time. Gertrude also responded, "Harry was always having trouble, huh? Poor Harry." Finally, Mary remarked, "I think this story is very good 'cause I don't get bored. When there's lots of mess going on then it's more better."

Outlining episodes. Once I selected the episodes, I wanted to order them logically, so I arranged the 11 episodes in the sequence and rhythm of a day in the life of the child protagonist. It was important that time allotment and chronological arrangement of events be such that all events flow quickly and smoothly into a daily routine. If I were to follow the sequence of a normal day in the life of a child, the sequence would start at home in the morning, move to school, travel on errands after school, and arrive home at night for a birthday party. I decided to classify possible episodes into the time of day in which they could most effectively be included in the narrative, that is, events in the morning, noon, afternoon, and night. The final episodes that were selected were partially chosen because of where they fit into these classifications, as I needed a balanced story with episodes selected from each of the four categories. Deciding upon which episodes to include was the result of days spent cutting, replacing, and refining story episodes and the catastrophes inside those episodes. In responding to the stories, the participants all related to the episodes I chose to include in the narrative. For example, Gertrude responded,

You know all that stuff that he went through, well, stuff like that has happened to me. Like, I really have heard boys order gross stuff and them being out of costumes at the store. Stores are always out of the stuff you want. And they always have the wrong sizes.

Onessa added that the story was easier to follow because the events in the story were sequenced according to the way she spends a day. She stated the following:

The way you wrote the stuff he did, it makes sense. That's sort of the way I spend my day. But I play outside after school, so I'm gonna put my guy in my story that I write playing after school. How come Harry didn't play after school?

Onessa went on to personally evaluate the events after her storytelling with the following statement:

Everything Harry ordered was so gross. Yuk! Like all that animal stuff. Yuk! Yuk! And at the department store his sister ordered something great, his brother ordered something great. But he didn't get anything great. He got something stupid.

Beginning the story. I began to brainstorm for a lead, in order to establish the voice, and set the pace and tone. Starting with the appropriate lead would give my story direction with a dominant point. I would announce right away that it was the child protagonist's birthday and set the tone for the reader's expectation of catastrophes to come. Because I was more interested in the development of the child protagonist's character than in using repetitive,

patterned dialogue as in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," I decided to begin the narrative with the child protagonist's actions and reactions to humorous episodes on the morning of his birthday.

In their retelling, all three of the participants captured the beginnings of the overall story structure by starting with the initial character action of the child protagonist. In addition, Onessa responded that the beginning of the story caught her attention. She stated the following:

From the minute this story started out, I knew it was gonna be funny. I started listening, and it was, all the way through. It isn't as easy to remember as the first one 'cause everything doesn't start out the same. But I like it better 'cause all the stuff that happens to him is funny, from when he wakes up till he goes to sleep at night. I could write something that starts when I wake up and ends when I go to bed and go to sleep....

Ending the story. I wanted the story to have a happy ending for the following two reasons: (a) ending the story with a surprise birthday party would allow a common thread to run throughout the two stories; both stories would involve the child protagonist going through traumatic experiences, which end in happy surprises, and (b) Norvell's (1958) research states that children have a need for their stories to end happily.

The happy ending was important to the participants. Gertrude and Mary related the happy ending of the story, the surprise party, for the thing they remembered best. Also, Gertrude named the surprise party for the most important thing immediately after reading the story.

After deciding that the story would end happily with a surprise party, I began to brainstorm possible ending sentences with the surprise party theme, thereby making it similar to the "Mom, Don't You Like It?" I always write my last line, my last paragraph, before I write the first draft, as it lets me know what I'm working toward. In addition, it gives me a sense of the story's shape, form, and destination. Because one of the story events was the child protagonist going to the department store to pick out a costume for Halloween, I decided it would be effective to have the children all wear their costumes to the surprise birthday party at the end of the story. I hoped that having the guests dressed in their Halloween costumes would spark the reader's interest at the end, and add variety that separated this ending from the ending of the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" A problem which confronted me was that I needed a character inside the home to arrange the surprise party, as the mother, sister, and brother were all away from the house taking the child protagonist on various errands. I decided to use the father as the one at home arranging to surprise Harry when he arrived at the house.

Having the father at home to greet Harry when he arrived was effective as far as gaining the approval of two of the participants was concerned. For example, Onessa stated, "It's great the way the father and kids did the party and stuff. My dad would do that for me." Also, Mary added, "The ending was neat 'cause my dad and mom did that for me. Dads always like parties." Gertrude, who lives in an extended family that includes an uncle but no father, thought an ending with an uncle standing at the door would have been more

appropriate. She said, "Ms. Janie, you should have put the uncle at the end. None of your stories ever have an uncle."

In addition, the ending sentences were a favorite part of the story for two of the participants, as Gertrude said, "The best part about that book is the last few lines, with everybody surprising Harry." Mary agreed when she stated, "Neat, man. The best thing is that at the end everybody jumps out in their costumes. It happened just like that at my party."

In their retellings, all three of the participants captured the story endings paralleling the final action and character dialogue of the original story line.

Characters

Developing characters. The second consideration was the degree of emphasis put on the development of each character. I decided to highlight only the child protagonist; all other characters would be minor as they briefly entered and exited their own specific episode. Because my purpose in writing this story was to develop the character of the child protagonist by showing his actions and reactions to events, limiting my focus to one character simplified my job as a writer.

Also, I considered the personality of the child protagonist I was about to develop. Before committing anything to paper, I mentally visualized the character's attributes and the character's age. My primary concern was that every reader be able to relate the child protagonist to persons they knew. I decided to invent a non-stereotyped character who would attract trouble, enjoy the pleasure of mischief, and entertain the boyish desires of an eight-year-old.

In addition, I wanted the child protagonist to evoke sympathy from the reader because he was undergoing some traumatic events on his birthday, but not because he was a sweet, innocent youth.

All three of the participants did relate the child protagonist to people they knew. For example, Gertrude said, "Harry is a lot like my cousin so I understand him." Similarly, Onessa remarked,

Harry is a lot like the boys in my room. He hates girls, I think. And he says gross things. All the boys in my room are like that. Kevin, the boy down the street, is like that, too. That's how I know so much about Harry.

Mary related Harry to both herself and her cousin when she stated, Harry was funny and cute like my cousin, Deon. I like Harry. But his mamma was mean not to tell him "Happy Birthday" until the end. And his brother and sister were mean, too. They didn't share nothing with him. My sisters are mean just like that.

When writing the story, I intended for the child protagonist to be the most important person in the story. In responding to the interview questions after hearing the story, both Onessa and Mary did name Harry as the most important character, but Gertrude stated that she found the teacher the most important character as well as the character she would most like to be. Gertrude's consuming ambition to be a teacher likely accounts for her focusing on that character.

Number of characters. I next considered the number of characters that I would invent for the narrative. The number of characters that I created in this story would be at least as many as, but probably more than, the number of story episodes. For example, if I used 11 events in the narrative, then the number of characters would be at least 11, as the child protagonist would encounter at least one person in each of the episodes.

Names of characters. One of the last changes which I made in revising the story was changing the names of the characters to those which are common in both Caucasian and African-American cultures. I selected the name Harry for the child protagonist, Derrick for the name of the brother, Samantha for the name of the sister, and Shirley for the name of girl on the bus.

The responses of the participants were favorable toward the names of the characters in the story. For example, Gertrude responded, "I knew two of these guys once. Harry was in my room and Derrick went to my church. They were both bad little children." Also, Onessa responded, "I just love the name Samantha. It's like a real good witch." Finally, Mary stated, "Harry is the best name for a boy. I had a boyfriend named that when I was little. He lived down the street."

Point of View

I decided to use the first person point of view and write the story from the perspective of the child protagonist as he saw disastrous events happening to him. Onessa was the only participant to comment on the point of view used in the story. She stated, "I see that when you write a story you always make

the kid do the telling. It's like he's telling the story to somebody. I get it. I'll write mine like that."

In their retellings, the participants all told the story using the third person. However, Onessa later showed me her own stories in which she did incorporate the first person point of view.

Tone

When relating to the humorous tone in the plot of the story, both Gertrude and Mary laughed aloud in several places during the reading of the story. The places were during the ordering of "monkey spit" and "gorilla nails," and when the only costume left at the department store was a ballerina suit. After the story's completion, Gertrude commented, "This was the funniest story in the whole world. I love it 'cause it was so funny." When asked to name some funny things that happened to Harry in the story, Gertrude stated, "He always got stuff that he didn't want." Likewise, Mary responded, "That story was a riot." Neither Gertrude nor Mary, however, caught the intended humor when Harry continuously threatened that he was moving to Saudi Arabia because the location of that country was unclear to them.

Onessa's hearty laughter during the reading of the story caused the session to be interrupted in two places. Those were during the ordering of "monkey spit" and "gorilla nails" at the restaurant, and when the children were picking out their costumes at the department store. Unlike the other two participants, Onessa appreciated the slightly more sophisticated humor in the

story when she responded that Harry didn't really want to move to Saudi Arabia but that "He was just teasing and saying that 'cause he was mad."

Style

The style I decided to use involved short sentences imitating those of a child speaking. I would write it as a narrative, with each page of text locating a different setting and describing different humorous episodes inside that setting. In commenting upon the style, Gertrude's responses reflected her driving ambition to be a kindergarten teacher. For example, she admitted she couldn't use "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" as easily as "Mom, Don't You Like It?" in her kindergarten classroom: "It's not as easy to read as "Mom, Don't You Like It?" 'cause it doesn't all start the same. I can't use this one in my class for kindergarten when I grow up. But it's better for my class now. I can read it real good."

Onessa agreed that it was more difficult to read and remember than "Mom, Don't You Like It?" She stated, "No way I can make this one into a play. It's got too much to remember. But I love it best just to read."

Finally, Mary remarked, "Did I do good remembering it? It's not as hard as some of the books we have to remember at school when we read books."

Leaving Gaps in the Story

When composing the story, I purposely left gaps for the participant to fill in concerning psychological causality, age of main character, and emotional reactions of characters. Although it was not my intention to leave gaps concerning physical causality, Onessa filled in this gap also.

Psychological causality. All three of the participants actively filled in gaps of psychological causality as they assigned internal states which motivated the characters' actions. For example, Gertrude and Mary described psychological causality when they described why the waiter pointed Harry to the bathroom. Gertrude stated, "The waiter pointed Harry to the bathroom 'cause Harry didn't want to eat the broccoli and throw up." Similarly, Mary responded, "Harry said he was gonna throw up and he needed a bathroom for that. Also, he wanted to throw away that broccoli casserole." Also, Onessa filled in the gaps when she discussed why Harry did not want to move to Saudi Arabia. She responded, "Harry don't want to move to Saudi Arabia at the end 'cause of the surprise party."

Physical causality. Onessa actively filled in gaps of physical causality as she showed causal relationships in the chain of actions. Onessa remarked,

And his mamma and brother and sister made him mad, which made him act bad to the girl on the bus, which made him act bad in class. And his mamma and brother and sister all started it 'cause they didn't say "Happy Birthday" to him.

Ages of main characters. In filling in the age of the age of the child protagonist, Gertrude assigned Harry's age in light of her own family relationships. For example, Gertrude responded that "Harry was seven because his brother calls him a crybaby and I call my cousin a crybaby and he's seven." Onessa likewise filled in the character's age when she said that Harry was seven years old because "All boys seven years old will act like that."

Finally, Mary responded, "Harry was probably eight years old 'cause he acts just like my cousin Deon who's that age."

Emotional reactions of characters. The participants filled in gaps concerning the characters' emotions according to the way the participants themselves felt. For example, Gertrude made the following comment:

Harry felt sad about his sister and brother 'cause they always got the best stuff that he wanted. And he felt sad about his mamma, too, because she didn't let him pick out his costume what he should have for Halloween. I would have been sad, too.

In most cases, Gertrude identified with character emotions as she classified them into one of two categories, happy or sad. For example, Gertrude said, "Harry was sad because he had a bad day on his birthday and I thought he was gonna have a good day, but we [sic] were happy when he got home 'cause he had a surprise party."

Like Gertrude, Onessa and Mary also related to the responses of Harry. Onessa stated,

Harry was angry 'cause everything bad was happening to him, 'cause he thought it was everyone else's own fault. But really it was his own fault. I know I'm like that. I blame it on everybody else but myself when I'm mad, and it's really my own fault.

Mary likewise responded, "Harry was picked on just like me. I know how Harry feels. I've felt like that lots of times."

Language Choices Resulting in Miscommunication

In writing the story, I used language to signify particular things. However, these signifiers weren't always clear to the participants when they were outside the participants' field of experience. Such instances were not examples of dialect differences as much as they were misunderstood referents, or objects signified.

There were some instances when Mary supplied minor details which were different from those used in the original text, such as when she substituted Crackerbarrel Store for Crackerjax. In this instance, because Mary was unfamiliar with what Crackerjax was, she did not understand the language I used in the text. Mary stated, "I think you mean Crackerbarrel, like the store. He got his stuff out of one of them machines there." The result was that when Mary tried recalling what the children's prizes were in her retelling, she named things that a child could win from a machine rather than discover inside a Crackerjax box.

Lessons of the Story

In my personal journal, I recorded what I considered a possible lesson for the story which was as follows: "Do not judge the worth of a day too quickly for often, through patient waiting, unhappy events take a happy turn."

In this story, as in the others, Gertrude and Onessa gave specific moral lessons whereas Mary gave a lesson which was more abstract. Gertrude said the lesson to the story was "We go to school to learn and not play." Onessa named the lesson as "Never embarrass your parents at the table or you may

have to eat something you dislike." Finally, Mary responded that the lesson was "Let the bad stuff pass and hang on and the good stuff like a party will come."

A week after hearing the story, both Gertrude and Mary named the moral lesson as the most important thing about the story; Onessa named the moral lesson for the thing she remembered best.

Title

The last step in composing the story was writing the title. I decided to use the title, "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" because it would attract the reader's interest without giving the plot away. Also, it was written in the language that a child of approximately seven or eight years old would use, which was the age I visualized for the child protagonist. When Onessa was read the title, she responded, "Oh, man, this is gonna be a neat one. I like it already." Gertrude smiled when the title was read to her, but made no comment. Mary glanced at the reader after the reading of the title and nodded, but she made no gesture or comment.

"The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party"

Genre

Format. I selected the same format for writing this story as for the other two stories, that is, that of a picture book without the illustrations.

Fact or fiction. One of my main purposes in writing this narrative was that I wanted all child to fantasize and enjoy imaginative story elements inside an amusement park setting. The participants all enjoyed the fantastic elements in the story. For example, Gertrude stated, "That's just a crazy story, I mean, you don't usually see crazy stuff like that at Fun Fair Park. I like it." Also, Onessa commented, "That's the funniest, wildest story I ever heard. The funniest story is about Harry but this one is the wildest. I think I'll go home and write one just like it." In addition, Mary remarked, "This story is stuff I like 'cause it's stuff like you dream about at night."

It was my intention in writing this story that the participants interpret it as impossible or nonsensical, a category represented to the participants as "make-believe." Two of the children interpreted this story as being make-believe. For example, Onessa stated, "It's made-up because real boys can't fly over a birthday cake. But the part about the pigeons could have happened 'cause pigeons do fly over everything and use the bathroom on everything." Also, Mary made the following remark:

It's make-believe because real boys don't fly around on balloons at amusement parks. And real boys don't bring iguanas to birthday parties.

Some of it could have happened, like the train wreck and the pigeons, but the rest of it was made-up. Yea, it's a make-believe story, all right.

Gertrude, on the other hand, was the only participant to believe that the story was real. Gertrude said that the story was real "Because a train can come off a track, and they can have a party at the amusement park." When asked if the story could have happened, Gertrude added, "If someone was on top of the ferris wheel, there would be more than just one person if it happened at Fun Fair Park. So it must have happened somewhere else. But I'm sure it could have happened."

Plot

General summary. Because my aim was for all three narratives to be written about birthdays, I decided that in this story I could incorporate the birthday party idea into the amusement park setting; therefore, this story would be about a birthday party at the amusement park. Like the other two stories, I would invent a surprise ending; unlike the other two stories, the ending would consist of a surprise other than a surprise party.

A short plot summary was recorded in my personal journal, stating that this birthday story would be a cause-effect narrative containing fantastic elements transpiring at an amusement park. The climatic ending would delightfully surprise the birthday child. Like the other two stories, the plot would be of high interest to the reader because it would involve lots of conflict for the child protagonist.

Outlining episodes. I first brainstormed all of the various events which invited a child's participation at the amusement park. To narrow this list down, I selected those events which attracted participants of all ages. Then, listing the selected events, I brainstormed possible catastrophes that could take place next to those events in the left-handed column.

I next listed on color-coded cards the main episodes of the story, and beneath them the actions inside those episodes. I shifted the cards around until I could see the pattern of the entire piece, until the writing lined up in a natural, easy-to-read, and purposeful order.

The participants all stated that this was a difficult story to remember and retell. Both Gertrude and Onessa had a critical eye toward the story as they appraised it. Gertrude approached the story in terms of her use in the kindergarten classroom and found it too confusing when she said, "I get all mixed up on what happened. I mean, I know what happened, but I really need pictures to remember it and tell it to my class real, real, good."

Onessa tried to imagine it as lending itself to producing a play and also found it too complex for her purposes as she remarked,

This one would never, ever work for a play. I'd need things flying in the air and things crawling on the ground. That's a bunch of stuff to think about. I like it to read, but not for a play. I think I could write it over again more better.

Finally, even though Mary faithfully and accurately retold all of the story events and their specific details, she admitted that it was a difficult story to

recall. She stated, "Whew, I almost didn't get it. I think this one is a little too much mess going on for kids to tell it right."

Uses of personal experience and interpretation. All three of the participants drew from their daily life to interpret or explain story events. For example, Gertrude based her reaction to one of the story events on a similar experience at her cousin's birthday party. Gertrude asked the following:

How come only one boy rode on the ferris wheel? For that story to really happen at Fun Fair Park there would have to be more people at the top of the ferris wheel riding it. There were more people than that at my cousin's party.

Also, two of the participants interpreted the pigeons' actions based upon observations they witnessed daily in the area where they lived. For example, Onessa stated the following:

Pigeons will use the bathroom on anything. That's why I know they used them on the birthday cake. They live right there under the interstate and I watch them. If you walk under the bridge, they'll use it even in you hair. When you park your car under there, they'll use in on your car.

Likewise, Mary interpreted the pigeons' actions when she made the following comment:

I know that those pigeons used it in the cake and all over those kids' hair. That's why the kids got in that fight, to fight off the pigeons. See, we play right under that bridge every day after school. Man, those pigeons use it on anything that passes under them.

Mary went on to interpret the story events in terms of the sibling rivalry she was experiencing with her two sisters. She said the following:

See, there's a train track right around the corner and she won't even let me walk close to it. My sisters get to walk and play around it just like the kids in the story 'cause they're older. They get to do more than I do.

Beginning the story. I began to brainstorm several leads in order to set the pace and tone. Because I wanted this story to consist entirely of dialogue between the mother and child, I decided to use the mother's questions to push the action forward, and the child's responses to describe the action of story events. Because my purpose was to describe the cause-effect sequence of events and not to elaborate upon character attributes, I was anxious for the first few lines of text to quickly immerse the reader into the action of the story. Therefore, the first sentence of text would be the mother asking a question to announce the birthday party and establish the setting. The second sentence, the child's response, would begin the narration of the action of the story.

In her retellings, Gertrude remembered the leading sentences and quoted them word for word, whereas both Mary and Onessa summarized them, then moved directly into the action of the child protagonist. Gertrude made the following comment about the opening:

You know how that story started, well, I remembered that easy 'cause the mamma just asks him something and he just answers it. That's a lot easier to remember than the stories in my reader at school.

Furthermore, Mary said that the first few lines were the easiest part of the story to remember. She remarked, "I remember stories real good. But this one is hard. Just the first lines of it are easy, that's all." Finally, Onessa remarked that the opening lines reminded her of the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" but that she would have preferred the story to have begun and ended ritualistically. She stated the following:

This one is a lot like the first one. Two people talk. That's all. When it started off with the mamma asking him something, and then him answering something, I knew the rest of it was all gonna be like that. It's like "Mom, Don't You Like It?" 'cept it don't have everything starting out the same. Mine is gonna start with "Once upon a time." That's the only thing I don't like about your stories, Ms. Janie. You don't know how to start 'em out right. All good stories should start out with "Once upon a time."

In retelling the story, Onessa did use the ritualistic openings and closings she recommended.

Ending the story. I brainstormed an ending to give me a sense of the story's shape, form, and destination. I knew that I wanted to make all three stories consistent with a surprise ending. I decided that since the events in this story were circular, if the birthday boy's iguana became lost, for the story to be balanced, the birthday boy would have to find an animal. Since the monkey was already cast in the story events, I decided to use the monkey as the animal found for a surprise ending. The monkey would be found by the birthday boy

as the characters returned home in the car. Also, because this was a circular story, it was important that the last few lines balance the first few. If the story began with the mother asking the child to tell her about the birthday party at the amusement park, the story should end with the child asking the mother to give him a similar party.

The surprise ending was important to the participants. Gertrude and Mary related the happy surprise ending, the boy finding the monkey in the car, for the thing they remembered best. Also, Gertrude named the surprise ending for the most important thing immediately after reading the story.

In her retellings, Gertrude ended this story as she began it, that is, by quoting the dialogue of the text, word for word. Onessa, on the other hand, summarized the ending, closing her retelling with the final action of the child protagonist finding the monkey in the car. Like Gertrude, Mary ended her retelling with the closing dialogue of the characters.

Characters

Developing characters. I decided that since my focus was primarily upon the cause-effect sequence of story events, developing characters and their attributes should be minimized. Therefore, the three primary characters I used in this story were not highly developed; that is, the boy and his mother were used to narrate the story, and the birthday boy was used to bring the iguana and receive the surprise at the end of the story. All other characters simply transacted story events.

Onessa commented that she didn't feel she "knew" any of the characters as well as she "knew" Harry, the child protagonist in the story "The Worst Day in the History of the World." Onessa remarked,

Well, you know like I knew Harry, well, I don't know these guys like that.

I mean, all I know is that this guy talks a lot to his mamma and his mamma is nosy about stuff. See, like Harry tells you everything he's thinking. Well, like this guy tells you what he saw at the party. But I don't know nothing else. I know Harry good 'cause he thinks like me.

When writing the story, I intended for the child narrator and birthday boy to be the most important characters in the story. In responding to the story, both Gertrude and Onessa named the mother as the most important character. Mary, on the other hand, did choose the birthday boy for the most important character as well as the character she would most like to be.

Names of characters. I selected names for the characters which were common in both Caucasian and African-American cultures because I wanted the readers, regardless of race, to associate the characters' names with persons of their own ethnic background. I selected the name Henry for the child narrator, and Willy for the birthday boy.

Gertrude remarked that associating the correct name with the proper character in the story was difficult. She stated, "I got everybody mixed up with everybody else's name. I can't remember which one was Willy, and which one was Henry. I think Henry was doing the talking, but I'm not sure."

Onessa and Mary, however, seemed to have no trouble in associating the character with his correct name. Onessa remarked that she particularly liked Henry because she identified the name with that of her father. She stated, "My dad's name is Henry. That's why I like that boy. Did you know that when you wrote this story?" Finally, Mary responded, "Know what? Willy is in my room. He's bad, just like that little boy. He'd bring an iguana to school if he had one."

Tone

My intention in writing this story was for the participants to find the imaginative story elements humorous and enjoyable. Gertrude laughed aloud during the child's ice fight and when the boy dropped into the birthday cake. She stated, "This story is different from the others. I mean, the other stories weren't so crazy funny as this. This one is real crazy funny, funny." Onessa's enjoyment was obvious as well, as she laughed aloud after the reading of each episode. Mary, on the other hand, did not laugh aloud during the reading of the story but did remark, "That iguana was funny, but he was messy. I'd never want to go to a wild party with messy animals there. They were funny, but too messy."

Style

Similar to the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?," I decided that this narrative would consist totally of dialogue between a child and his mother. But unlike "Mom, Don't You Like It?," the dialogue in this story would be unpredictable and unpatterned, as my purpose was to focus on the cause-effect

sequence of story events, not on the language of the text. I began to rehearse in my mind what I was going to say, creating the illusion of a small child speaking to his mother in as natural a voice as possible, as he related the events of the birthday party. I wanted my voice to sound like speech, and I wanted to hear in my voice innocence, youthfulness, and humor. As I rehearsed the voice in my mind, I could hear a voice inside myself laughing, in a child-like kind of laughter. Because there was so much action in the language of the text, I visualized no more than one or two short sentences to every page.

Onessa was the only participant to comment upon the story consisting entirely of dialogue when she remarked, "The boy is talking just like in "Mom, Don't You Like It?" He tells it like the way he saw it happen. The story is all talk."

In responding to the voice in the story, Gertrude said that it sounded authentic. She stated the following:

That little guy is talking to his mom just like I talk to mine. He sounds like a real little guy. See, when I come home from school, my mom asks me a lot of questions like that. My mom wants to know everything. And that's why she asks a lot of questions. If you don't answer her, she don't like it. So I answer her just like that little boy.

Also, in commenting upon the voice, Onessa remarked,

It's really neat how all your little guys talk in the stories. I mean, it's always the little guy telling the story. I think I've learned how to do that

now. It's easier to make the little guy talk than the big guy talk. You could have even made the iguana talk. That would be funny, huh?

Mary stated that because the story was packed with action, it was purposely constructed to be shorter than the others. She remarked, "Man, that story was short. But I know why. I mean, I know why that story was so short. 'Cause so much was going on all the time."

Leaving Gaps in the Story

When composing the story, I purposely left gaps for the participants to fill in concerning physical causality, setting, age of main character, characters participating in events, and emotional reactions of characters. This story differed from the others in that it moved along by physical causality rather than psychological causality. The one place where I left a gap of psychological causality was filled in by the participants also.

Physical causality. Although this story plot moved along because of physical causality rather than psychological causality, Onessa was the only participant to fill in this gap. Onessa admits that the reason may be attributed to the fact that she is a "tomboy." Onessa remarked, "When one thing happened that made the next thing happened. Like he lost the iguana, then that made the ice fight happen, then that made the man all scared." Onessa later added, "I notice lots of stuff going on like that 'cause I'm a tomboy and I like lots of stuff moving and junk."

Psychological causality. The participants assigned psychological causality, or imputed motivations to the character's actions, when they described Henry's

reasons for asking his mother if he could have a party at the zoo. Gertrude explained, "He wanted all the animals could [sic] get loose and jump in the cake, and he could have an exciting party just like Willy, and that's why he asked to have the party at the zoo." Onessa remarked, "Henry thought it was exciting when the iguana caused trouble and he thought the iguana could be at the zoo just like the park and cause the same kind of trouble at his birthday." Mary also assigned motivations to Henry's actions when she remarked, "Henry wanted his party at the zoo 'cause he could have fun like at the amusement park. There are lots of different animals at the zoo that could cause trouble."

Setting. In this story as in "Mom, Don't You Like It?," the participants filled in the setting in light of some customs practiced at home. For example, Gertrude answered that the conversation between the mother and child took place in the living room; Onessa named the yard as the place of the conversation; Mary, like Gertrude, responded that the conversation took place in the living room.

Ages of main characters. The participants all filled in the gap concerning the character's age. For example, Gertrude stated, "That boy with the birthday was nine because the amusement park is where my cousin who's nine had his birthday party. My cousin says you have to reach the top of the pelican before you can ride the bumper cars, and that usually happens when you're nine." Onessa described the birthday boy as being six years old "'Cause," she stated, "six-year-old boys have their birthdays at the amusement park." Finally, Mary

described the age of Henry, the birthday boy, when she responded, "Henry was five or six years old 'cause that's when my mamma took me to the amusement park. He's younger than me 'cause when you're seven years old you know better than to do the stuff what he did."

Characters participating in events. The three participants also filled in gaps regarding the characters talking in the story. For example, when describing who was talking, Gertrude responded, "The mamma and the son." Furthermore, Onessa said, "The people talking were the mamma and the little boy." Finally, Mary interpreted the story characters in light of her family experience when she answered, "The people talking were the mamma and the boy, Willy. But his two sisters were listening to what they were saying. He didn't want them to be listening but they were."

Emotional reactions of characters. The participants filled in gaps concerning the characters' emotions according to the way the participants themselves felt. For example, Gertrude stated, "The birthday boy shouldn't have brought his iguana but I brought my turtle to a party once. He was just proud of it and wanted to show everybody, that's all." Furthermore, Onessa compared her own response to that of the birthday boy when she stated, "The birthday boy feels disappointed because everybody is throwing ice at each other, and then the boy flies off the ferris wheel. When things go wrong it makes you be disappointed in yourself. That's the way I am." Finally, Mary found herself relating to the mother's worrying when she made the following remarks:

I know that mamma was worried about all those children around that track, and flying in a balloon, and throwing ice and all the other stuff. I sometimes worry like that. I worry if I can't find the shirt I want to wear, or if I make a bad grade, or something like that. I know how she feels.

Lessons of the Story

In my personal journal, I recorded a possible lesson for the story. The lesson read as follows: "Traumatic episodes often end in happy victories."

The lessons given by Gertrude and Onessa were specific, practical, and directed toward behavior. For example, Gertrude said the lesson of the story was, "Don't throw nuts near a track. That's a good lesson." This lesson seemed to reflect what Gertrude had been taught by her mother at home. Rather than giving one moral lesson as Gertrude did, Onessa named two moral lessons for the story when she stated the lesson as, "Never throw peanuts on a track or bring an iguana to a birthday party."

Mary's lesson, on the other hand, was more philosophical, abstract, and directed toward coping with the trouble. She said, "After something awful happens, you get a surprise. And that's what the lesson is."

A week after hearing the story, both Gertrude and Mary named the moral lesson as the most important thing about the story; Onessa named it as the thing she remembered best.

Title

Like the titles of the other two stories, this title was selected because I felt it would capture the interest of the reader without giving the story plot

away. Onessa was the only participant to comment on the title when she said, "That title was long. But it was good 'cause I knew this was about a birthday party with an iguana. We learned at school that when you make a title, it should tell you about the story." The other two participants made no comment about the title, but smiled when the title was read.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusions and Implications

Concept of Story

Although the participants owned only a few books, each of the children was exposed to bookreading in their homes. Each child owned and read The Children's Bible, and each checked books out of the library regularly. In the case of Onessa, stories were written and dramatized by the participant herself.

In addressing the question of describing the children's concept of stories, I was surprised to find that there were great differences among the participants in their storytelling styles and concept of stories. Although the participants were purposely chosen to be of the same ethnic background, age, gender, literary background, and had similar reading interests, they were different in their retellings and responses. In using Applebee's (1978) model for narrative form, Gertrude's stories fit into the fifth stage which was the "focused chain," whereas Onessa and Mary's stories fit into the final, or sixth stage, which was the "narrative." Gertrude's stories were marked by the main character going through a series of events linked to one another, with each event developing of the previous one. Onessa and Mary's stories were marked not only with each incident developing out of the previous one, but at the same time, with each incident elaborating a new aspect of the situation. Also, Onessa's and Mary's stories had a consistent forward movement with a climax at the end.

Each of the participants was also unique in the way she retold the stories. Gertrude painted the stories with broad brush stokes; Mary retold them with

detail and accuracy in much the same way that they were read to her; and Onessa dramatized them with great elaborations. According to Applebee's model, Onessa's and Mary's stories revealed a higher stage of narrative form than the stories of Gertrude. Onessa's stories contained "story markers" as they opened and closed with formal openings and closings such as "Once upon a time," and "The end." Onessa admitted that she was trying to imitate the fairy tales that she had read so often at home.

In addressing the question of whether or not the children's concept of stories changed over a one-week period following the initial reading of the story, the most significant change was in Onessa's retellings. That is, Onessa's stories became even more marked with high elaborations during the second retelling. Even then, however, Onessa consistently and faithfully returned her stories to the text of the original plot. The storytellings of the other two participants, on the other hand, showed similar patterns between the first and second retellings, with some instances of the second retelling being slightly shorter in length than the first.

Active Makers of Meaning

The data analysis supports Rosenblatt's (1978) and Iser's (1978) views of literary response as an active and selective process where readers are active in selecting and organizing elements of the text according to their already acquired habits, assumptions, and expectations for reading. In addition, the readers were constantly self-correcting, or modifying, their expectations in

projecting what the text was offering. Each of the participants brought her own experiences to the text which shaped her responses and retellings.

Influence of daily life. In addressing the question of what meaning the children derived from the stories, I found that the story meaning for the participants was affected by the knowledge and experience that the children brought to the stories. All three of the children drew from their individual, personal lives and experiences to interpret the stories. Gertrude interpreted the motivations of the characters in light of her own experience with her mother and two cousins; Onessa interpreted motivations using her observations in the neighborhood and experiences at school; Mary interpreted motivations in light of her play after school and the rivalry with her two sisters.

When the participants could relate the story to their personal life, they considered the story true. But when Onessa and Mary could not relate the story to their own world, or considered it an exaggeration of humorous events, they viewed the story as make-believe. All three of the children said that the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" were true. Gertrude also said that the story "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was true, and she related some of the episodes in the story to a similar experience she witnessed at her cousin's party. Onessa and Mary, on the other hand, both said that "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was make-believe.

Viewing the stories through critical lenses. Another noticeable difference in the participants' responses to the stories was the fact that Gertrude and

Onessa viewed the stories through a particular critical lens. Gertrude, who wants to be a teacher when she grows up, viewed the stories according to whether or not they could be used in her future kindergarten classroom. Onessa, who wants one day to become a writer and play producer, viewed the stories according to whether or not they were adequate for play production. Mary seemed to respond according to her mother's expectations of performance but did not have a critical lens through which she saw the stories.

Filling in gaps. All three of the participants actively filled in gaps (Iser, 1978) which I purposely left during the composing process. These gaps included psychological causality, characters participating in events, age of characters, and setting. In her retellings, Onessa supplied additional information concerning physical causality which I did not intentionally leave as gaps in the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World." Also, in "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party," where the events moved along by physical rather than psychological causality, Onessa was the only participant to fill in this gap of physical causality. Onessa went even farther than the other participants, filling in both gaps I intentionally left in the stories and some I did not intentionally leave, supplying information she apparently thought was important.

Moral Lessons

All three of the participants found the moral lessons very important in the stories. For Gertrude and Onessa, the lessons were specific, practical, and directed toward behavior, suggesting a possible connection between correct

behavior and happy outcomes. Mary's lessons, on the other hand, were more philosophical and abstract, and came closer to what I, the writer, had intended. When I asked what they remembered best or what was most important about each story, the participants' responses focused on either a happy ending or a moral lesson, again suggesting a connection between proper behavior and a happy ending.

Characters

The two participants, Gertrude and Onessa, who were the only children living in single parent homes, both described the minor, adult characters in a more positive light than they described the younger, main character. Mary, on the other hand, whose family unit was intact with a mother, father, and two sisters, did not hesitate to critically evaluate the adult, authoritative characters in the story.

Gertrude, whose mother commented upon how closely attached she and Gertrude were, named the adult characters when asked to name the most important character and the character she would most like to be. Mary and Onessa, on the other hand, whose parents remarked how independent they both were, most often named the child protagonist as the most important character and the character they would most like to be.

More than any of the participants, Onessa used the greatest insight when interpreting the emotional reaction of the characters in each of the stories. Onessa was often able to articulate the motivations and insights of the characters, whereas Gertrude and Mary sometimes could not.

Humor

Judging from the laughter and comments of the participants, it seems that the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was the most enjoyed of any of the stories read to the participants. Similar across cases were the two places in the text which generated the greatest laughter. These were during the selection of costumes at the department store and during the child protagonist's food ordering at the restaurant. In the first instance, the text reads that the child protagonist attempts to purchase a scary Halloween costume. However, much to his dissatisfaction, the only costume left in his size is a ballerina suit. Because the participants laughed loudly when read this part of the text, it seems they found humor in the idea of wearing clothing that was inappropriate.

In the second instance, the text reads that the child protagonist orders food at the restaurant which is not edible, such as roach eggs and monkey spit. When this part of the text was read, two of the participants laughed so loudly that the adult reader stopped the bookreading for several seconds. It seems, therefore, that the children enjoyed hearing deviations from the norm.

Second to the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," the children said they most enjoyed "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party." Their retellings and responses indicated that the participants had no trouble following the complicated cause-effect sequencing of story events.

The participants laughed the least often in the story "Mom, Don't You Like It?" Judging from their comments, it seems that this story was too true-

to-life to be funny. However, due to the patterned dialogue and repetition of story events, when this story was retold by the participants, it represented the closest approximation to the original text.

Relationship Between Writer's Intentions and Children's Responses

In comparing the children's responses to the meaning I expected them to find, there were some surprising findings which added to my knowledge as a writer and teacher. I will discuss these finding below under the categories of broad range of meaning, filling in gaps, real or make-believe, language choices resulting in miscommunication, and valid interpretations.

Broad range of meaning. There was only one story, "Mom, Don't You Like It?," which I left open-ended for a broad range of possible meaning. In the original ending to this story, the boy brings home friends which the mother allows to stay and play. In the revised story ending, which was read to the participants, the mother gives her son a surprise, and it is up to the reader to fill in the gap concerning what that surprise was. For example, the reader may think the mother is surprising Henry by giving him a surprise birthday party with friends, or the reader may think that the mother is surprising Henry with those same gifts which she demanded he return earlier in the story, which was my intention in leaving the gap. This was the only one of the three stories I composed in which I changed the ending in the composing process, making a broad range of meaning possible for the reader's interpretation.

Mary was the only participant to infer the ending I intended, citing a similar experience that had occurred in her own life. Mary was once given a

surprise birthday party in which her mother presented Mary with many of the gifts she had requested. Therefore, Mary's meaning for this story ending was the result of an experience which Mary brought to the story. Gertrude and Onessa, on the other hand, thought that the surprise at the end of the story was a surprise birthday party with friends.

Filling in gaps. The gaps which I intentionally left in all of the stories were filled in by the participants. These gaps included psychological causality, characters participating in events, age of characters, and setting. In only one of the stories, I left gaps of physical causality. Onessa went farther than the other two participants in filling in both gaps which I intentionally left, and those which I did not intentionally leave, supplying information she apparently thought was important.

Real or make-believe. My intention when composing the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was to make them true-to-life. My intention, however, in writing "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was to make it nonsensical or make-believe. Gertrude said that all three of the stories were true; Onessa and Mary said that "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" were true and that "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was make-believe. Therefore, when asked if the stories were real or make-believe, the responses of Onessa and Mary came closer to what I intended when writing the stories.

Language choices resulting in miscommunication. There were some instances when language differences with respect to word meanings resulted in interpretations different from those I intended. Such instances tended to arise from misunderstood referents, or objects signified. In writing the stories, I used language to signify particular things. However, these signifiers were unclear to the participants when outside the participants' field of experience.

In one such instance, Mary substituted a similar known feature, Crackerbarrel Store, for the unfamiliar one, Crackerjax, which was used in the original text. Mary stated, "I think you mean Crackerbarrel, like the store. He got his stuff out of one of them machines there." The result was that when Mary tried recalling what the children's prizes were in her retelling, she named things that a child could win from a machine rather than discover inside a Crackerjax box.

Rather than revealing an error in Mary's miscommunication, Mary's response indicates a very active mind at work, as she transforms the elements in the story in order to make sense in her world. This reveals a higher and more complex thought process than the mere accurate retelling of the text as it was given to her, which was Mary's usual pattern in her retellings.

One of the surprises of this study was the fact that Onessa was the only participant to catch the intended humor in the story "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World," when the child protagonist continuously threatens to move to Saudi Arabia. This may be attributed to the fact that Onessa alone understood the location of Saudi Arabia. Gertrude and Mary, on the other

hand, did not know where Saudi Arabia was, and thus the humor I intended was lost to them.

Valid interpretations. In addressing the question of whether or not children arrived at interpretations that did not seem valid to the writer, I used Rosenblatt's (1978) criteria for validity. Rosenblatt stated that there were two standards for valid interpretations: (a) the reader should not contradict something in the text, and (b) the reader should not infer something that has no verbal basis in the text. In addressing the question of validity, I will focus on the responses of the participants to the moral lessons of the stories, the participants' focus on story characters, and whether the participants thought the stories were real or make-believe.

All three participants found the moral lessons very important in the stories. Gertrude and Onessa gave specific, practical lessons which were directed toward behavior. Mary's lessons, on the other hand, were more philosophical and abstract and came closer to what I intended in writing the stories, my intended lesson being that although bad things happen, good will eventually follow. Although Gertrude and Onessa focused on things different from that which I expected them to focus, their lessons were, nonetheless, as valid as the lessons given by Mary. That is, in using Rosenblatt's criteria (1978) for validity, Gertrude's and Onessa's lessons both had a verbal basis, and their lessons did not contradict something stated in the text. Therefore, I conclude that all three of the participants' responses to moral lessons were valid according to Rosenblatt's (1978) criteria.

In focusing upon the characters in the stories, my intention as the writer was for the reader to identify with, and view the younger, main characters in the stories, the child protagonists, in a more positive light than the adult, authoritative figures in the stories. Mary was the only participant to view the child protagonists in a positive light; the other two participants saw the adult, authoritative figures in a more positive light. Although Gertrude and Onessa viewed characters differently from what I intended when composing the stories, the meaning Gertrude and Onessa brought to the stories made them focus on the characters which they viewed positively. Nevertheless, because all the characters focused upon by the three participants did not contradict something in the text, and because the characters focused upon had a verbal basis in the text, I conclude that each of the participants' views and focus upon characters were valid according to Rosenblatt's (1978) criteria.

I also intended that the most important character, and the character the reader would most like to be, would be the child protagonist in each of the stories. In both cases, Onessa and Mary named the child protagonists, whereas Gertrude named the adult characters. Again, because the participants' responses did not contradict something in the text, and because all of the characters named in the participants' responses had a verbal basis in the text, I conclude that the participants' responses to the most important character and the character they would most like to be were valid according to Rosenblatt's (1978) criteria.

My intention when composing the stories "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" was to make them true-to-life; my intention in writing "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was to make it make-believe. Gertrude said that all three of the stories were true; Mary and Onessa responded that "Mom, Don't You Like It?" and "The Worst Birthday in the History of the World" were true, and that "The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party" was make-believe. Although Gertrude's responses were different from what I intended, her responses, along with the other two participants' responses, were valid according to Rosenblatt's (1978) criteria. That is, the participants' responses to real and make-believe did not contradict something in the text and had a verbal basis in the text as well.

Implications for Teaching

One implication for teachers is that the older, more mature reader should not impose his or her own meanings of stories upon children. The young reader does not necessarily derive the same interpretation of the texts as the teacher, author, or an adult attributes to the tales. Rather, children often gain an interpretation of the text that is affected by their experiences and needs. Also, a child's mishearing parts of a story may not indicate a mistake so much as his/her mind actively at work in order to have the story make sense to him/her. Because multiple meanings derived from a text are quite probable, teachers might be ready to observe and understand a child's responses rather than quick to correct or disallow unexpected responses.

This study suggests that open-ended questions about plot, characters, story lessons, gaps left for the reader to fill left intentionally by the author, and whether the story is real or make-believe, help the adult to determine the child's concept of stories.

Finally, this study indicates that when children are exposed to narratives which have personal meaning to the reader, the result is an enjoyable, positive experience.

Implications for Writers

Before beginning composing any type of story for children, it is helpful for an author to gain an understanding of the general interests of their readers. A knowledge of the general trends, as indicated by research findings, helps the author to anticipate the interests and preferences of their reading audience. For example, children seven years old enjoy stories with strong and interesting characters close to their own age, who are involved in dramatic, adventurous, or humorous action. Also, they enjoy stories about holidays that end happily (Norvell, 1958).

A journal is extremely helpful for generating ideas and recording thoughts and feelings. Journals allow writers to record thoughts "on the spot" which help develop story ideas, thoughts which can be forgotten if not recorded immediately. All forms of written expression and types of writing are welcomed in journals, from summaries, to themes, to doodles, to thoughts for beginnings and endings of stories.

Writing evolves through steps and stages which are recursive. Although a writer plans what he/she wants to say before beginning, the act of writing generates new ideas and shapes new plans. The writing process is very slow at the beginning. That is, ideas need time to incubate, and more time is spent developing a work in the pre-writing stage than is actually spent drafting or revising the text. Pre-writing activities save the author revision time because he/she works out problems before they develop; such strategies include brainstorming lists of events, drawing diagrams to visualize the layout of characters and events, mapping the flow of traffic to see connections between events and characters, and shifting events for the most natural, easy-to read, and purposeful sequence. Also, before beginning to write the first draft, it is helpful for the composer to decide upon the genre, point of view, and style to be used in the work. Often "living" with a story idea, and reflecting upon it from time to time before committing anything to paper, allows for fuller plot and character development.

Ways to improve a work often arise spontaneously during these times of reflection, for example, ways to broaden the range of story meaning, so that different readers can take away different interpretations of a text. Receiving feedback from audiences of different ages and cultures can improve the quality of the literary work by helping the writer to "take another look" at his/her text.

Implications for Research

This study was limited to responses of three girls, seven years old, from the lower S.E.S., African-American culture. Possibilities for further research

include examining the responses of males and whether or not they focus on different story elements, or interpret the stories differently, than do females. The responses of participants from an older age bracket would shed light on the differences in meaning derived from the stories of different age groups. Also, further investigation including responses of participants from a different socio-economic background, as well as responses of those from a different culture, would provide information on whether the meanings vary from group to group.

The present study examined responses of participants to three short works of fiction presented without the illustrations. Further investigation could include having the children respond to the same texts with illustrations to examine how pictures might affect the meaning that is made of the stories.

Two of the participants of this study were from single parent homes. There was indication that responses from these children differed from the responses of the participant where both parents resided. Further investigation into children from single parent homes would provide information as to how, or whether, these home conditions might affect childrens' responses to characters, situations, and perceived lessons to be learned from stories.

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APPENDIX A
NARRATIVES USED IN INTERVIEW SESSIONS

"Mom, Don't You Like It?"

"Leroy, Uncle Frederick sent you this money for your birthday. Why don't you go out and buy something?"

"Mom, I bought this army set with my birthday money. Don't you like it?"

"I'm sorry, Leroy, but I'm afraid you can't keep it. That army set has too many little pieces, and they slide under the furniture. When I clean, they clog up my vacuum cleaner. Take them back to the store and get something larger."

"Mom, I got this basketball in place of the army set for my birthday. It won't clog up your vacuum cleaner. Don't you like it?"

"I'm sorry, Leroy, but I'm afraid you can't keep it. That basketball will knock something over and cause it to break. Take it back and get something that doesn't bounce in the house."

"Mom, I bought these paints and brushes in place of the basketball for my birthday. They won't clog up your vacuum cleaner or bounce in the house. Don't you like them?"

"I'm sorry, Leroy, but I'm afraid you can't keep them. Paints leave colored prints all over the furniture and walls. Take them back and get something that's not so messy for your birthday."

"Mom, I bought this watch in place of the paints and brushes for my birthday. It won't clog up your vacuum cleaner, or bounce in the house, and it's not messy. Don't you like it?"

"I'm sorry, Leroy, but I'm afraid you can't keep it. That watch runs on batteries, and batteries are expensive to replace. Take it back and get something that's more economical."

"Mom, I bought this army rifle in place of the watch for my birthday. It won't clog up your vacuum cleaner, or bounce in the house, it's not messy, and it doesn't run on batteries. Don't you like it?"

"I'm sorry, Leroy, but an army rifle makes too much noise. Take it back and get something quieter."

"Mom, I bought this kitten for my birthday. It won't clog up your vacuum cleaner, it doesn't bounce in the house, it isn't messy, it doesn't run on batteries, and it doesn't make a lot of noise. Don't you like it?"

"I'm sorry, Leroy, but cats climb up furniture and scratch the upholstery. Take it back and get something without claws."

"Mom, I didn't spend my money for my birthday. I can't find anything that won't clog up your vacuum cleaner, that won't bounce in the house, that isn't messy, that doesn't run on batteries, that doesn't make a lot of noise, and that doesn't have claws."

"Well, I know of something, Leroy. And here they are!"

"Surprise! Surprise! Happy birthday, Leroy!"

"The Worst Birthday in the History of the World"

Last night I went to bed knowing that when I woke up this morning it was going to be my special day. But when mom came to wake me up this morning, instead of singing me the "Happy Birthday" song, she told me to hurry and get dressed 'cause the alarm went off 30 minutes late. I found my blue sock but it didn't match my red one, and the zipper on my bluejeans got stuck on the way up. My shirt that said "Champ" was in the dirty clothes, so I had to wear my brother's shirt that said "Derrick" instead. My hair stuck up on top like two porcupine quills, and when I tried to fix it, I dropped my brush in the toilet by mistake. My pet turtle climbed out from his box and slid so far under the bed that I couldn't reach him.

That's when I decided this was gonna be the worst birthday in the history of the world.

At breakfast, I thought Mom would have pancakes with raspberry syrup and a candle on top, but we had cereal boxes instead. Derrick got the box of Frosted Flakes, and Samantha got the Sugar Crisp. I got the Bran Flakes. Great, I thought. That's just great. A Bran Flakes birthday.

On the school bus, I wanted to sit by Henry, but the only seat left was by Shirley. I said I didn't want to talk, but Shirley talked anyway. I said it was my birthday and she should let me sit by the window, but she tuba-voiced the birthday song instead.

I'm moving to Saudi Arabia where they ride one-humped camels to school.

I told my teacher it was my birthday, and I was getting a new 10-speed bike, but she told me her records showed next month. I told her my mom was going to bake me a chocolate cake with strawberry filling and whipped cream and cherries on top, but she told me to write about my creative thoughts for homework. When the teacher asked me to read the daily news from the chalkboard, I screamed out, "The daily news is...IT'S MY BIRTHDAY!" So Henry got to be leader and Ashley got a smelly sticker for making a 100 on a spelling test. I would have gotten a smelly sticker, but I left out a "p" on hippopotamus. Who cares how to spell hippopotamus when it's your birthday?

I raced for the swing with the shortest chain, but Shirley got there first. Henry and I played "jump the mud puddle," but I missed. I wanted to get picked for the orange soccer team, but I got picked for the gray one instead. I tried to show how far I could kick the ball and I did--right into the street. The bus didn't see it coming. I wonder if I'll get a new ball for my birthday.

On Friday's everyone gets fried chicken and chocolate milk. All the a's, b's, c's, d's, e's, f's, g's, h's, i's, j's, k's, l's, m's, n's, o's, p's, q's, r's, s's, t's, u's v's, w's, x's, and y's got drumsticks. But I'm a Zurick, with a Z, so I got a wing. Because I'm allergic to chocolate milk, the cafeteria lady gave me white. But it was sour.

I'm not having a birthday next year. I'm erasing it from my birthday certificate.

Mom picked us up after school in the car. I told Derrick that it was my turn to ride up front and work the radio. He said that I had my turn last

week. Derrick called me a crybaby, and I told him I hoped his pants split the next time he slid into base. Mom fussed at us for not acting more grown-up. How can I act grown-up when I can't even have a birthday?

Mom drove us all to the doctor and the doctor said that I needed a measles shot. I told him that Derrick and Samantha needed one, too, but he said they were all caught up on their shots. I told him I'd already had the measles, but he said that I'd had the chicken pox. He said to count to 3 and the shot would all be over, but I counted backwards from 20 and I could still feel it.

At the department store, Derrick got a batman costume in a large size, Samantha got a black cat in a medium, but the only costume left in a small was a ballerina. I told Mom I'd go as Godzilla or I'd go as nothing. Mom said I'd have to wait a week.

I can't wait, a week, I said. Next week I'll be in Saudi Arabia.

Mom said we could each get a Crackerjax. Derrick's Crackerjax had a mini-marker, and Samantha's had a ninja turtle pin. In my Crackerjax there was a barrette with red hearts. I asked Samantha to trade with me and I'd be her best friend forever. She told me she liked pins better than barrettes any day.

For a dime, Derrick got 2 reds and 2 greens, and Samantha got 3 orange's, but I only got 1 and it was purple. I told Samantha if she'd trade gums with me, I'd spend my whole year's allowance on her Christmas present. She told me she liked orange better than purple anyday. For her next

birthday, I'll mail her purple gum with a matching purple barrette from Saudi Arabia.

Mom said we could order anything at the restaurant, just so we ate it. Derrick and Samantha ordered pepperoni pizza. I told the waiter I wanted rotten camel teeth, stuffed roach eggs, boiled snake brains, dried gorilla nails, and monkey spit to drink. Mom said that kind of talk was totally uncalled for, and that she'd give me some of her broccoli casserole. I informed everyone that I would rather die than eat broccoli casserole, and that if I even smelled it I would vomit. The waitress pointed me to the bathroom when she brought out the broccoli.

When we got home, it was all dark in the house. Suddenly, the door opened, and the lights popped on. All my friends, dressed in their Halloween costumes, jumped out from behind the furniture. "Surprise! Surprise! Happy Birthday, Harry!"

You just never know how birthdays are gonna turn out. I'll bet they don't even have surprise parties in Saudi Arabia.

"The Iguana Got Loose at the Birthday Party"

"Henry, how was the birthday party at the amusement park?"

"Boring until the boy jumped into the birthday cake."

"A boy jumped into the birthday cake?"

"Yea, you see the balloon he was flying on got pecked by a pigeon."

"But a boy just doesn't fly around on a balloon."

"He does if he needs to get off at the top of a ferris wheel."

"But why didn't he just wait until his cart at the top of the ferris wheel reached the bottom?"

"Cause the operator of the ferris wheel ran off."

"An operator wouldn't just run off leaving a child stranded at the top."

"He would if he was being chased by an iguana."

"Oh, come on. There are no iguanas at the amusement park."

"Willy brought his pet iguana for everyone to see, and he gave it to Charlie, who wanted to pet it, and it got loose."

"And I guess as soon as the iguana got loose it ran toward the ferris wheel operator, who got scared and ran away, leaving the boy stranded at the top, and the boy saw a balloon floating by and grabbed it. The balloon carried the boy away until it was pecked by a pigeon over the birthday cake."

"Wrong. The iguana first wandered toward the pigeons. The pigeons got excited and flew over the birthday cake. That's when Willy threw the ice to chase away the pigeons. But the ice missed the pigeons and landed on Louise, and it melted all down her hair."

"What did Louise do?"

"She got mad. 'Cause she thought Willy threw the ice at her. So she threw it back."

"And the ice hit Willy?"

"No, Louise missed him, and it hit Charlie. The next thing that happened was everyone was throwing ice at Charlie, who ran toward the choo-choo train. And when we used up all the ice we started throwing peanuts."

"Who finally stopped it?"

"The music man, he started screaming."

"He was screaming 'cause you were throwing peanuts?"

"Wrong. He was screaming 'cause his balloon got loose when his monkey ran away."

"But why would the music man's monkey run away?"

"The monkey ran after the peanuts that landed on the choo-choo track."

"Gosh, that was dangerous. A monkey on a train track?"

"No one got hurt in the accident."

"There was an accident?"

"Yea, the train ran off the track when it tried to stop for the monkey."

"I get it. The man was screaming 'cause he lost his balloons and monkey. The monkey that ran to the railroad track for the peanuts, the peanuts you threw at the pigeons after you ran out of ice, the pigeons that tried to escape from the iguana by flying over the birthday cake, the iguana that later

wandered toward the ferris wheel operator, the operator that ran off leaving the boy stranded at the top."

"Exactly."

"Did Willy ever find his iguana?"

"No, but guess where the monkey ran off to after the train crash."

"I haven't the vaguest idea."

"To our car. Willy's mom rushed us off in such a hurry that we didn't even notice the monkey until we got almost home. Willy lost the iguana, but he gained a monkey."

"Well, it sure sounds like Willy had an exciting birthday party."

"Yea, and I was just wondering, Mom...for my next birthday, can we have a party at the zoo?"

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Questions Used for
"The Worst Birthday in the History of the World"

Characters

1. Who do you think was the most important person in the story?
2. Is there anyone in the story you'd like to be?
3. Tell me about Harry, the birthday boy.
4. How old do you suppose Harry, the birthday boy, is?
5. How do you suppose Harry felt when bad things kept happening to him during the story? How do you suppose Harry felt at the end when he arrived home and his Dad greeted him?
6. Would you have liked being Harry in the story? Why or why not?
7. How do you suppose Harry really felt about his sister and brother? His mother? His father?

Events/Plot

8. What do you think was the most important thing that happened in the story?
9. What were some funny things that happened to Harry, the birthday boy?
10. Does the ending surprise you? Why or why not?

Filling In Gaps

11. Why do you suppose the waiter pointed Harry to the bathroom when she brought out the broccoli?
12. Do you suppose that Harry still wants to move to Saudi Arabia at the end of the story?

Lesson

13. Do you think there is a lesson to be learned from this story?
What do you think it is?

Real/Make-Believe

14. Do you think this story was real or make-believe? Do you think
these things could really have happened? How do you know?

VITA

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DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: MARY S. EVERETT

Major Field: EDUCATION

Title of Dissertation: THE MAKING OF MEANING: THREE CHILDREN'S
RESPONSES TO THREE RESEARCHER-COMPOSED
NARRATIVES

Approved:

Carl M. Jordan
Major Professor and Chairman

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