

Literature is a way that children can be transported into another location. Books can take a child anywhere, at any time. Reading allows a child's imagination to run wild and conjure up whatever they want and can imagine. In the rest of this paper I will discuss nine children's books that exemplify this, and the many different reasons that it is so important to include literature in the lives of children.

Seeing other lives through other eyes: *Mountains of Tibet*

Mountains of Tibet, by Mordecai Gerstein, allows the reader to experience the universe through the eyes a little boy that lives in the mountains of Tibet. He describes his life as plain, simple, and longs for something more. As this boy grows old and eventually dies Gerstein explores the circular plot of this story. The old man who died has the opportunity to live another life, do so anywhere and as anything he wants, and ultimately decides on life as a little girl living exactly where he lived as a boy. As the old man is choosing his new life, Gerstein compels the reader to value all living things, see the beauty in all creatures and places, but at the same time remember the values of where you come from. As exciting, luring and tempting as all his options were it is important to note that the plot of this story came full circle and the woodcutter ultimately chooses a new life that puts him back in the same place he began. He longed to visit other places and people, but at the end of this story found himself back in the mountains of Tibet as another young child who loves to fly kites. Gerstein explores the theme of appreciating the cycle of life and while the old man died, he was able to begin life again as the little girl. The point Gerstein makes about death and life, and a part of someone being left in the universe even after death, is an important lesson that children can explore through this piece of literature.

Develops imagination: *Come Away from the Water Shirley*

Come away from the water, Shirley, by John Burningham, is a story that evokes imagination in children. As Shirley's parents are having a conversation with her, she is having her own adventure with pirates, danger and buried treasure. While the setting takes Shirley's family to the beach and lays out sand, cold water, sun, beach tar, and wild dogs, Shirley quickly changes that setting to one that consists of pirates, danger, and buried treasure as she escapes into her own made up world as her mother nags her. Shirley transformation of her setting through the use of her imagination was an integral part of the story that created a magical world in her head full of excitement and danger. The backdrop of the beach never changed as her parents sat in their lounge chairs, but through the use of her imagination Shirley was able to take the reader to a completely new place than the seaside. Burningham wrote in a simple style with minimal text about Shirley's imagined adventure, which required the reader to use their own imagination as she encountered pirates, walked planks, and dug for gold. This book offers a way for children to see how their own imaginations can take them to another place, allow them to escape from their surroundings, and have exciting adventures anytime they want.

Helps us solve problems: *The Kissing Hand*

The Kissing Hand, by Audrey Penn tells us the story of Chester raccoon who wants to stay at home from school because he does not want to leave his mother. The characters of Chester raccoon and his mother are portrayed as so sweet, soft and loving in this story. Chester is a round character who really develops in this story as he started as a scared little raccoon who was afraid to leave his mother, to a little raccoon that learned how to solve his problem of leaving home by the end of the story. Chester's mother helps develop his character as she helps him solve the problem of how to deal with separation from loved ones. The secret kiss on the palm is taught to Chester, which moves through his hand, arm, and settles in his heart where he

can always feel his mother's love, even when he is not with her. Kids can relate to this feeling of not wanting their lives to change as they go to school, move to a new location, or move away from friends or family. The idea of a kiss in your hand is so simple, but so meaningful and heartfelt and Penn provides this great book that can help children who have to leave loved ones. To complete the development of Chester's character he demonstrates that he understands how to solve the problem when he returns the secret kiss to his mother. This act shows the roundness of Chester's character as he shows empathy and that it is not only important to feel comforted, but also make his loved ones feel the same. .

Gives us a sense of history: *Martin's Big Words*

Martin's Big Words, by Doreen Rappaport, is a beautifully written and illustrated book for children that teaches such an important part of history, in a very simplistic style. The words of this story are presented in such a clear and compact way that allow children to understand the character of Martin Luther King, and what he stood for. The sentences are short and very straightforward. The style uses both the author's text as well as direct quotes from Martin Luther King that allows children to learn the story of King, while at the same time directly read quotes that this man stated, and that are a huge part of history. In addition to the simple text and use of quotes, the large, colorful illustrations help portray how large this man's life was, and how important his words were, and still are today. Rappaport used an episodic plot as he highlighted many climaxes throughout the book that were all equally important in the life of King. These climaxes included segregation, peace, Rosa Parks, riots, equal rights, love and assassination; all which are important aspects during this historical time period. The simple and powerful words Rappaport used allows children to get a strong overview of how important this man was and

what a historical period of time this book covers. It allows the reader to get a sense of who King was as a person, and also what he accomplished.

Transmits cultural literacy: *The Frog Prince Continued*

The Frog Prince Continued, by Jon Scieszka, helps children take a quick walk through many different fairytales. These fairy tales include *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella* and come from many different cultures. Many of the characters in this story are flat and not well developed, but Scieszka relies on the fact that many of the characters in this story have been passed down from generation to generation and the reader will already have a schema of who they are in their heads. There is a prince and a princess, numerous witches from the various fairy tales visited in this story, castles, poisonous apples, magical carriages, fairy godmothers and a happily-ever-after that occurs as the prince and princess both become frogs at the end of the story. All these flat characters and far away settings to this story help children to experience traditional literacy aspects from different cultures. These could be cultures completely new to a child, ones they are familiar with, or could also be a land far, far away they imagine in their head. This book immediately exposes a child to cultural literacy, and many classic traditional literature pieces that are referenced by Scieszka.

Let's us experience the play of language: *Owl Moon*

Owl Moon, by Jane Yolen tells the wonderful story of a boy and his "Pa" that are on a snowy journey to find a Great Horned Owl. The words of the story were so beautifully written, so descriptive, and allow the reader to experience the mood of this journey and so many details of what this little boy experienced as he went owling with his "Pa". The little boy narrates this story, but Yolen never reveals his name, just his voice, as he takes us on his walk through the

woods with his “Pa” in search of the owl. The use of descriptive language helps children visualize what is taking place based on the words of this story, and conjure up their own images in their minds about this journey. While we never learn the name of “Pa” in this story, or hear his voice, he seems to be quite a round, well developed character. The little boy uses a very simple narrative to tell the story of his wise father, and explain to the reader what his father has taught him about owling. The little boy states many things his “Pa” has taught him about being quiet and not calling out when looking for owls. This story can be a powerful resource for children to learn how simple, and straight forward language can tell their story and experiences.

Let’s us experience the play on language: *Seven Silly Eaters*

Seven Silly Eaters, by Mary Ann Hoberman, is a funny story that lets children experience rhyming, and the creativity of language. The entire book is written in rhyme as it explains the picky eating habits of seven children, and how their mother deals with it. This book is chaotic, full of clutter and silly stuff, but at the same time allows children to have fun and experience language in a playful way. This book is great for children to experience how creative words can be when telling a story, and that a story can also be told in a humorous way. The illustrations are hilarious, and the words that make up the style and verses of the story are just as funny, which is the style Hoberman uses to generate interest and comprehension for the reader. The theme in this story also allows children to experience the chaos of this story in a happy way. Even with the humor, rhyming, funny pictures, mess and chaos, children are still able to relate this silly story to a happy home. Hoberman is able to send the message to children that no matter how crazy and chaotic a family can be, they can still be humorous and happy.

Teaches information: *Quest for the Tree Kangaroo*

Quest for the Tree Kangaroo, by Sy Montgomery and Nic Bishop, is a book that opens up a whole new world of information to children. The setting is an integral part of this story, and enables children to learn about the beautiful cloud forests of New Guinea, as Lisa takes her research team on an expedition in search of the elusive tree kangaroo. Montgomery knows that this book is a source of information for her young readers, and does a wonderful job of combining learning with reading. She explains the quest the research group partakes on as an adventure, and this adventure leads them through the beautiful rain forests that she relates to “walking into a living fairytale”. These descriptions of adventure and fairytale allow children to view this book as fun and enjoyable as they are reading it, and not view it as only a source of information and something they have to read in order to learn. While taking the reader on this adventure, one can’t help but fall in love and find a special place in their hearts for the elusive tree kangaroo. In addition to providing large amounts of information, and making this book a fun reading experience, Montgomery also drives home her point of view of how important it is to preserve these cultures and animals that many children will only be able to experience through the words and illustrations of this book.

Helps develop reading skills: *Z was Zapped*

Z was Zapped, by Chris Van Allsburg, was a different book that presented the alphabet in a completely different setting than most children are used to. Each letter had its own act and the book was presented as a play with 26 acts based on the letters of the alphabet. The dramatic, episodic plot of this book helps children develop different ways of reading as the various fates of each letter unfold before their eyes. Each letter was presented in an illustration and the text came on the following page to help explain what was taking place during this play. This story is fairly straightforward as each letter's fate is determined, but the illustrations allow the reader a more

descriptive idea of these fates. This style of presenting the alphabet is a great, fun way for children to try to guess what is taking place in the act, and what words will describe what they have just seen. It is a very simple style, with short sentences, and dark, graphic illustrations that Allsburg uses as he disguises the letters in his twisted story of the alphabet. Children can use this idea and style, make their own 26 act play version of the alphabet, and make new, descriptive fates for each of the letters.

Across all 9 of these books I have seen that each story evokes some sort of feeling, emotion, or lesson that children can learn or experience through reading these books. This may have to do with history, language, culture, problems, imagination or feelings but each one of these books creates something that a child can learn. These books open up new worlds to the children that are reading them and through the words on the pages, and illustrations they can learn something new; experience something new. Even if the story is familiar to them or the words and pictures are already close to heart, these books will still teach them or enhance thoughts and feelings they may already have.

I am fortunate to teach at a school that allows us to choose our own literature and books that we bring to the curriculum. The lessons that books teach are very important to include in literature for children. As important as the lessons are to teach to the children, I think the way children can relate to books and lessons are just as important. All nine of the books read for this assignment explored many different and unique reasons why they would be important to include in the lives of children. The vocabulary and reading purposes of these books from a curriculum standpoint is wonderful, but more importantly are the new worlds, feelings, imaginations and experiences these books can open up to the children reading them.

