A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF HOW HUMOR IN LITERATURE SERVES TO

ENGAGE CHILDREN IN THEIR READING

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

"Humor is the Rodney Dangerfield of literary forms: It gets no respect!" (Cart, 1995, p. 1) In an effort to explore the potential "respectability" of humor in children's literature, this study examined how humorous children's literature served to engage a limited sample of intermediate grade children in reading. Their teachers and three authors of humorous literature also contributed their perspectives.

The study was conducted in two multiage classrooms in a suburban school adjacent to a large Midwestern city. Eleven third graders, 21 fourth graders, and nine fifth graders completed humor surveys at the beginning of the research that assisted in author selections for the study. After authors and representative books were chosen, students in the third and fourth grade class selected a book to read, and then met in discussion groups to talk about the humor found in the stories. In this group, each student read three of the five books; in the other, each student read as many books as desired and discussed their choices with the researcher one on one. Children's responses from surveys, discussion groups, and written

responses were analyzed for patterns of reading engagement and preferences in humor.

The data showed that at least some children were highly engaged in reading when the material was a humorous children's book. They demonstrated several characteristics of active reading, including strong intrinsic motivation, social involvement, and the use of particular reading strategies. These included some strategies reported frequently, such as visualization and aspects of critical reading, as well as the tendency toward vocalization, or imagining distinctive voices for humorous characters. Children also described attributes of humor that appealed to them, including the unexpected and the use of language for humorous effect; they placed special emphasis on "cliffhangers," the mechanism that kept them in suspense, looking for the next funny event. Finally, children expressed an awareness of the emotional appeal of humor and its function of helping them cope. Statements from the author interviews showed many similarities to children's perspectives, especially with regard to the appeal of the unexpected and the motivating power of humor.

Implications for teachers center on selecting humorous books to increase motivation and to build bridges to other types of books. Teachers might use humorous materials to facilitate reading strategies such as visualization that promote engagement. A recommendation for further research is exploration of attitudes held by teachers about humorous literature.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my wife Julie, who has stood by me and helped me through the tough times, and who as always, helped me keep my humor. I love you very much and thank you for your support.

I also would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family for their support. I especially thank my parents who never doubted that this could be accomplished.

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OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

"You can always spot humor in books. I think people don't notice it, but a book wouldn't be a
book without some humor." Fifth Grader, Sigmund

Introductory Statement

"Humor is the Rodney Dangerfield of literary forms: It gets no respect!"

(1995, p. 1) writes noted young adult author and literature analyst Michael Cart.

Humorous literature truly is an ignored genre, yet given the importance humor

plays in people's lives, especially children's lives, Cart's assertion is even more

alarming. Humor is also a very complex idea. In his article about the research

done to find the world's funniest joke, *New Yorker* writer Tad Friend (2002)

states, "Humor is a thoroughly human activity, and very, very hard to explain" (p.

79). But humor is a human activity found very commonly among children.

Researcher Michele Landsberg (1992) describes: "Children, like all the

powerless, find their best release and choicest weapon in humor; they are always

ready to drop an armload of tension or anger to indulge in a liberating shout of

laughter. And, as teachers are well aware, laughter is the reward that lures the

most reluctant reader" (p.34). Humor and children seem to go hand in hand.

Statement of Need

Noted humor scholar Don Nilsen (1993) believes: "Humor is a very

important aspect of much of children's and adolescent literature" (p.262).

Humorous literature is able to reach many children, yet little research examines the impact it has on children as readers. If humor in literature does lure the reluctant reader (i.e. those who can read but choose not to) as Landsberg suggests, and if it is an important aspect of children's literature as Nilsen adds, then would it not engage *all* readers? While there has been research looking into children's engagement in reading, none has focused on humor specifically. There has also been research on children's reading preferences, but again, relatively little about how the specific genre of humor engages a reader.

Authors as well as scholars believe that humor can hook children into reading. Well known children's author Beverly Cleary writes, "…humor is a way of relieving anxiety; children enjoy feeling superior to their younger selves and are relieved to know they've grown" (p. 560-561). Paula Danziger (1999) adds, "It's because humor is touching. Because it gets close to feelings. Because it can make us feel better—almost like a caress or understanding…" (p. 29). This idea of how humor comforts us is not new. The age old adage, "Laughter is the best medicine" rings true in this argument. Cart (1995) also concurs with this: "Laughter is therapeutic. It is healing. As a tonic for what ails us…If we hurt, we laugh. And laughing, we heal" (p. 1-2). If humor is able to heal everyone, as Cart suggests, why not focus on children specifically? Are there particular reasons for the use of humor in children's literature? More specifically, do the readers and writers of this humorous literature believe there is an emotional appeal in the use of humor as Danziger and Cart suggested earlier?

Many years ago in his study of children's literature, scholar John Smith (1967) found, "...the fun of discovering incongruities *within* a character or strange contrasts *between* characters….there is something the child already finds funny and mature people find increasingly humorous" (p. 215: emphasis his). Perhaps it is this discovery of characters and the different forms of humor that Kappas (1967) discovered years ago that draws children into reading. Whatever the case, how children are engaged in reading through humor in literature deserves a deeper inquiry.

Purpose of this study

When discussing reading engagement, noted reading scholar Kathryn Au (1999) states, "Something magical happens when students become engaged in reading" (p. ix). This magical happening deserves a closer examination. Are there specific reasons why children become lost within a text? How do texts involve children in the reading process? The purpose of this study is to determine how children engage with humorous text and how this affects them as readers.

In recent years the magic of Harry Potter (Rowling, 1997) has engaged children in reading. However, when teachers, parents, or publishers examine why a specific book has this power the answer is hard to find. Children's author Gordon Korman believes the answer lies in the humor. "I believe that the true key to Harry Potter's popularity is not its fantasy, but its humor" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). Perhaps it *is* the humor that engages children within a text.

Au (1999) continues, "When we address engagement in reading, we recognize the importance of students' motivation for becoming literate and learning to read" (p. ix). Children will pick up a plethora of books during their years in elementary school. It's difficult to determine why they choose specific books. Examining their choices and trying to understand what motivates children to read and engages them in the reading process is a question that deserves to be addressed more thoroughly.

Reading Engagement

Guthrie and Anderson (1999) define reading engagement as, "the joint functioning of motivation, conceptual knowledge, strategies, and social interactions during literacy activities" (p. 20). Reading extensively for a variety of purposes is a major component of engaged children (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000, p. 1). Baker, et. al. also believe, "students are engaged readers when they read frequently for interest, enjoyment, and learning" (p. 2). There are many different ideas of how children demonstrate their engagement in reading. These include: watching other children read, discussing the book with their peers, writing down their response to the text, dramatizing their responses, and through other creative outlets as well. Engagement can also be seen when students are willing to stick with a book that might be too difficult for them, when they react to a text spontaneously, verbally or non-verbally, and in their motivation to read similar selections. What children do during and after reading plays a major role in revealing how they are engaged with a text.

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Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie (2000) believe reading engagement has three areas that are integrated together; cognition, motivation, and social interaction. These three categories of reading engagement are found consistently in the research. Allowing reading engagement as well as reading instruction to become a major component of a classroom, can aid teachers in helping students to become avid and lifelong readers. While reading widely and being motivated to read do play important roles in reading engagement, assessing this concept through research is almost as complex as humor itself.

Because there are multiple aspects of reading engagement this research needed to include a variety of data sources in the attempt to see all the components in action. This study used book discussion groups as well as reader response journals to find examples of reading engagement, thus including a social and written context for engagement. This study attempts to create a picture of an engaged reader with a humorous text.

While determining the exact moment when a child is engaged in a text may be difficult to do, many ideas have been proposed for assessing different forms of engagement. Afflerbach (1996), suggests that "checklists, observation forms, and questionnaires can provide useful information about the diverse aspects of student engagement as they occur in episodes of engaged reading" (p. 197). Some of these methods can be used at the beginning of a study to determine a child's interest in both reading *and* humor. However, these are not the only methods of assessment. Afflerbach (1996) notes that, "students may also use what they comprehend through engaged reading to solve problems, to create

artistically, and to reflect on the value of reading" (p. 193). While paper and pencil assessments are useful, allowing the student to engage creatively is also needed as Afflerbach suggests. Beyond the idea of written and creative responses to text it is also important to focus on the social interactions children have around a text.

The transaction between reader and text can be characterized as individualistic (Rosenblatt, 1978); however, the social aspect of reading must also be considered (Vygotsky, 1972). Children engage in classroom talk as they read or finish reading, (Hickman, 1984; Hepler & Hickman, 1982). This is an important aspect of engagement that must be addressed in research. McCarthey, Hoffman, & Galda (1999) describe how the "engagement perspective suggests that reading is not only a constructivist process, but a social process as well. That is, reading does not occur just within a child's head, but rather through interactions with particular texts and other people" (p. 60).

Children need opportunities to interact with their friends and classmates after reading a text. The social interactions within a classroom can provide examples of how students are engaged with the various texts they are reading. Students' willingness to share texts with each other provides intriguing information about their involvement with the book.

Guthrie & Anderson (1999) also agree with this idea of social interaction with the reading process. In comparison to adults' discussion of books, they find, "Children are equally social, reporting that they read to share or to keep pace with friends and peers" (p. 22). Discovering when, and with whom they share a book

can help show engagement with a text. How this comes into play with humorous texts would greatly extend this idea. Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi (2000) explain, "When students begin asking questions of interest to them, negotiating meaning with peers, and learning how to navigate within a social system, they *must* be more engaged. There is no room for passivity, for relying on others to answer questions, or for waiting for the teacher to call on you. Collaboration requires active social participation and active cognitive processing" (p. 135). By allowing a student to participate in book group discussions, a teacher or researcher provides the child with an outlet to interact with their classmates as well as a way into the reading. Interaction and collaboration allow the child the chance to explore and engage with particular aspects of the text that are meaningful to them. Providing social opportunities allows the child to engage with the text more deeply. Book discussion groups provide a non-threatening forum for all children to contribute their thoughts. Specifically, participating in a humorous book discussion group encourages all students to share their thoughts and feelings about the book and the humor found within the book.

While children's reading interests will vary as they grow, the best opportunity to examine engagement is after they have become proficient readers and before they may lose their motivation and interest in reading. Guthrie and Anderson (1999) found that children's positive attitudes about the importance and usefulness of reading lessens from third grade to fifth grade. McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth (1995) also saw this idea. They discovered that a positive attitude toward reading declined sharply from first through sixth grades. Addressing this

issue of motivational decline is also a key aspect that deserves closer attention.

Schallert & Reed (1997) believe that reading engagement can help children

rediscover the motivation for reading, "One consequence of deep involvement is

to motivate readers to want to read, to find reading a rewarding, sought-after

activity that can displace other reading activities" (p. 79). An examination of

ways in which humorous literature engages children in reading and motivates

them to read more may enable classroom teachers and others to help students

become lifelong readers.

Research Questions

Through direct observation, reader responses and self reports, as well as

the comments of teachers and authors, this study describes children's and adults'

(i.e. researcher's, teachers', and authors') perceptions of how humor engages

children in reading. For this study humor is defined as, "The ability to perceive,

enjoy, or express what is comical or funny" (American Heritage Dictionary,

1982).

The following research questions for this study were:

READER

    a) How does the reader describe the role of humor found in his/her own

        reading?

    b) How does the reader demonstrate engagement with the text?

    c) What is the nature of a student's motivation to read after completing a

        humorous text?

d) In what ways are specific attributes of humorous literature associated with children's attitudes towards reading?

AUTHOR

a) How do authors describe the role of humor in their writing?

b) What are the author's intentions when including humor in their writing?

c) Are there specific issues authors attempt to address through the use of humor?

d) How do authors characterize/envision their audience?

TEACHER

a) How do teachers describe how children select books, and does humor have a role in that selection?

b) How do teachers feel humorous literature engages children both during and after reading?

c) How do teachers feel children engage in a humorous text versus a different type of text?

CONNECTIONS

What are the similarities, differences, or patterns within these various perspectives on humorous literature?

Significance of the Study

This study has potential significance to the body of research on humorous children's literature as well as reading engagement. While previous studies

(Kappas, 1967; Shannon, 1999; Wendelin, 1980) have focused primarily on what types of humor children find funny, none have examined how specific types of humor or humorous literature in general have served to *engage* children with the text. The researcher believes that this study will allow teachers to better understand the significance and importance humorous literature can play in their classrooms. This knowledge may be of particular help to teachers as they select books for the reluctant or disinterested reader.

Scope and Limitations

This research has various limitations which are common in much qualitative research. In this study, the research allows a close examination of one particular school, two teachers, and two classrooms of students. Such small samples do not yield findings generalizable to other settings, although the amount of detail that can be provided helps readers judge what might be transferable.

It must be mentioned that children in this study are asked to respond to only one genre, humor, and not to other genres available such as poetry, fantasy, or realistic fiction; thus no substantiated comparisons across genres can be made. Also, these responses are limited to the classroom. When observing children it is quite apparent that they both read and laugh outside of the classroom as well, and the character of their responses and engagement in these other contexts might be quite different.

In addition, it must be mentioned that humor is subjective; what one person may find funny, others may not. Michael Cart (1995) addresses this issue, "…it is *very* dangerous to generalize about humor, for 'funny' is a relative, not an

absolute, term, and an individual's sense of humor is as individual, as idiosyncratic, as his or her fingerprints" (p. 4, emphasis his). This idea of subjectivity must be taken into account when examining anyone's analysis of humorous literature. As mentioned earlier in this study, humor is also a very difficult activity to explain. Writer Tad Friend (2002) adds, "Seeking a thoroughgoing explanation for humor is like seeking the Fountain of Youth…That idea, in this case, is to perfectly understand our illogical selves by understanding the most illogical thing we do…Theories and brain maps abound, but no one really understands why we laugh when we do" (p. 93). Both Friend's thoughts and those by Cart discuss the importance of taking care when making grand statements about humor. Humor can be a slippery slope, and researching it can be difficult.

Organization of the Study

The selection of the suburban school in this study was based on accessibility. There is an existing relationship between the researcher and the classroom teachers. The researcher has done previous studies in these teachers' classrooms. The suburban school is kindergarten through fifth grade and utilizes an open approach to education. The chosen classrooms are a third/fourth and fourth/fifth grade multiage classrooms. The philosophy amongst the faculty and staff is one that embraces literature as an integral part of the curriculum. The school has yearly author visits and uses literature in all subject areas.

The study ran for eleven weeks including initial time for the class to become comfortable with my presence as well as debriefing time at the end of the

study. The study began with children completing both a Reading Inventory

created by McKenna and Kear (1990) as well as a humor survey created and field

tested by the researcher (See Appendix A). The results from the humor survey

helped to select the authors used in this study. Jon Scieczka, Barbara Park, and

Louis Sachar were child selections while Sid Fleischman and Gordon Korman

were my choices based upon my experiences reading these books to the

elementary school classes I taught, as well as discussions with various librarians,

teachers, and editors.

The next step of the study was to read various humorous picture books to

the third and fourth grade class and to discuss each page of the books as to what

aspects of the pages they found humorous and why. This was conducted to help

set the tone for the book group discussions that would follow with the chapter

books.

I conducted book talks (i.e. summaries and descriptions about each book)

for the following books:

Chancy and the Grand Rascal, Sid Fleischman,

Radio Fifth Grade, Gordon Korman,

Sideways Stories From Wayside School, Louis Sachar,

Summer Reading Is Killing Me, Jon Scieszka,

Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus, Barbara Park (for 3/4 grade

class),

The Best School Year Ever, Barbara Robinson (for 4/5 grade class),

Afterwards, the students ranked their preferences from 1-5. Based on these rankings students were placed in book discussion groups. In the third and fourth grade classroom, both the teacher and I conducted two different book discussion groups. Because the teacher in the fourth and fifth grade classroom took maternity leave at the beginning of my time in the classrooms, I worked with those students who were interested in reading the books with me. The book discussion groups ran for approximately six weeks.

The children were able to read three of the five books before data saturation was apparent and the children were ready to self select their own books again. The teacher and I conducted daily book discussion groups and audiotapted these discussions for me to transcribe.

Summary

This chapter introduced the study and its importance. The following chapter reviews the literature that set the groundwork for this study. Chapter three gives a more extensive report of the methodology found within the study, while chapters four and five provide an analysis of the data collected from the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"…all books kind of have some humor, and if you don't, I'm not saying that you should put like all humor in the book, it's just if you don't it'll be kind of dull, and it won't…well, it'll be like the cake without the icing." Fifth Grader, Sigmund

Noted humor scholar Don Nilsen (1993) writes, "Humor is a very important aspect of much of children's and adolescent literature" (p.262). Unfortunately, not many scholars acknowledge Nilsen's thoughts. Examining the area of humor in children's literature reveals a limited amount of research.   This material can be divided into three different research categories: research in children's humor, humor found in children's literature, and children's response to humorous literature.

Research in Children's Humor

There are two predominant schools of thought regarding children's humor. The first is grounded in the area of psychoanalysis, with a strong Freudian influence. The seminal work was done by Martha Wolfenstein (1954) and reported in her book, *Children's Humor*. Wolfenstein believed that children's humor was grounded in their repressed sexual feelings and emotions. By trying to outlet these feelings, children were able to create humor through their physical play or even with their play of words. Wolfenstein has similar views of how

humor helps cope with the trials of daily life: "Joking is a gallant attempt to ward off the oppressive difficulties of life, a bit of humble heroism, which for the moment that it succeeds provides elation, but only for the moment" (p. 11). Wolfenstein's book describes how children attack authority with humor, as well as make fun of younger children who are learning new things the older ones have already mastered. I return to both of these ideas later in this chapter in the discussion of humor in children's literature.

Kuchner (1991) also agrees with Wolfenstein stating how "psychoanalytic interpretation recognizes humor as a vehicle for emotional expression. Through the medium of humor, unacceptable feelings, particularly those associated with sex and aggression, can be expressed, carefully disguised under a socially acceptable cover or façade" (p. 2). The façade that Kuchner makes reference to is actually the cover of joking that Freud (1960) believed was the third stage of joking development. Freud's three stages begin with the "play" stage. Up to the age of two, children create incongruous combinations of words or objects during the "play" stage. The second stage, "jesting", is where children play with different joke formats. The final stage is where children are able to mask their sexual or aggressive nature within a joke. These theories of humor development were the beginning of further research into the field of children's humor, and Freud's influence can be seen in the work of Wolfenstein and others. Freud's developmental "play" stages led other researchers to further examine humor development.

A considerable amount of research was done during the 1970s and 1980s taking a closer look at the cognitive view of humor. Paul McGhee's extensive studies of children's humor produced four stages somewhat similar to Freud's stages, but grounded in cognitive development. His main emphasis was that humor, and mainly children's humor, was grounded in incongruity. McGhee (1979) believes that children understand particular types of humor when they are able to grasp its cognitive incongruities. McGhee (1979) states, "prior cognitive mastery or a firmly established expectation of 'how things should be' is a basic prerequisite for humor" (p 38). McGhee strongly believes that incongruity and cognitive abilities are firmly grounded within each other.

The first stage McGhee (1979) noted was the physical stage. McGhee calls this stage, *"Incongruous Actions toward Objects."* This usually begins around the child's second year. Children begin to imagine that an actual object is a different thing, for example, calling a block a phone or a pencil a comb. Children become comfortable with their "fantasy" setting for their play, realize that it's pretend, and are able to laugh at combing their hair with a pencil. They are aware that this does not match with "reality," and therefore find it humorous.

As children enter the second stage of humor development, *"Incongruous Labeling of Objects and Events,"* children become more verbal. This stage usually begins around the end of a child's second year. During this time the young child will point to an object and call it something completely different. A child might point to a rock and call it a dog, or point to a cat and call it a pig. At this point in their development children are beginning to play with the language

they are beginning to acquire. Throughout this stage McGhee (1979) finds that children are looking for "play signals" from adults or other children so they know this type of play is acceptable. If an adult gives them a strange look after they have misnamed an object the child becomes aware the adult may not approve of this type of humor. Likewise, if an adult jokes with the child in a similar fashion, the child needs to see some form of "play signal" to be assured that the adult is joking. While later on in a child's life they will no longer need these play signals, in the early stages of humor development, McGhee believes these signals are necessary for the child.

At approximately three years of age children enter the third stage of development, *"Conceptual Incongruity"*. In this stage children create a larger class for specific objects. When they label an object a cat, they are more aware of the specific features of a cat (i.e.. head, tail, four legs, fur, whiskers, and the meow sounds cats make). Now when a child uses incongruity to mislabel a dog as a cat, they may also add a "moo" as a completely different sound for what a cat makes. At this stage in development children are extending beyond simply mislabeling objects found in earlier stages. Also at this stage their language develops further. Children now become curious about sounds of words, and how they rhyme. Children begin to repeat words they hear, and then create more words that rhyme with the initial word. For example, if a child hears the word "happy", they would repeat the word and add more words with a similar sound pattern to the initial word. Thus "happy" would lead to "happy, dappy, pappy, sappy, gappy."

By around the age of seven, children enter the fourth stage of development, *"Multiple Meanings, or the First Step Toward Adult Humor"*. At this point children understand language may have two meanings. According to McGhee (1979) "A child then understands that, although this second meaning does make sense in one respect, it nonetheless creates an incongruous set of circumstances—which of course, is exactly what makes it funny" (p. 76). At this stage children might begin to understand the classic joke:

> *"Order, order in the court!"*

> *"Ham and cheese on rye, your honor."*

While at stage three, children would still be confused by the double meaning found in the word "order". During stage four children begin to understand puns and other jokes based on a word's multiple meanings. This corresponds well with the cognitive abilities as described by Piaget's (1952) stage of concrete operational thinking. Concrete operational skills allow reversibility of thinking. Children are able to think back about previous details found in a joke while still grasping what is occurring at the same time the joke is being told. According to McGhee, more advanced cognitive ability helps them understand multiple meaning jokes.

From this point on children develop more into adolescent forms of humor. According to McGhee, stages can no longer be defined at this level. He notes, "After Stage four, then, individual differences in patterns of humor appreciation become more prominent than any changes related to the child's age or developmental level" (p. 79). Bariaud (1989) supports McGhee's claim that

adolescent humor is beyond humor stages found in childhood. "In adolescence this sense of social derision by humor will reach its full expression. But in studying the humor of adolescents, we enter the world of adult humor" (p. 42). Because children enter McGhee's fourth stage at age seven, there is a large span of years that lacks categorical definition in relation to McGhee's stages of humor development. While Bariaud may concur with McGhee in excluding these years, there are other researchers who do not.

Gesell, Ilg, and Ames (1956) studied the adolescent years from age ten through sixteen and established stages for each of those years. Beginning with age ten they found slapstick humor to be the main enjoyment. Some common themes they find through these years are the use of taboo subjects for humor as well as poking fun at authority. The researchers also found that as children aged they were subtler with their uses of humor. Finally, near the end of these stages, adolescents are able to poke fun at themselves and later are able to participate in "adult jokes". Times have changed. In the 1950s the term "adult jokes" would refer to jokes that were developmentally appropriate for the adult. While Gesell, Ilg, and Ames (1956) were well before McGhee's time, their work did establish the importance of paying attention to changes occurring over a child's complete span of development. This is one aspect of McGhee's work that merits further research.

Much research has also been done using McGhee's stages as a model. Jalongo (1985) in her analysis of humor in children's books had similar views in regards to McGhee's first two stages. Shaeffer and Hopkins (1988) concur with

all four of McGhee's stages, citing numerous children's books that follow along with the stages of humor development. Alice Honig (1988) also described stages that matched up with McGhee's work, but added a fifth stage found in infants. As a precursor to McGhee's first stage, Honig described a stage that dealt with laughs and body wiggles found in infants. McGhee believed this was due to the infant discovering and becoming familiar with adults, yet Honig used these bodily expressions as a new humor stage.

While McGhee's work has been very influential in the field of children's humor, there are theories outside the psychoanalytic and cognitive explanations that deserve recognition. One key outlying theory in children's humor development states that humor is simply a social skill. Kuchner (1991) believes this and also ties it in with McGhee's theory of children's play. Kuchner notes, "Humor evolves through a social experience. It emerges as a form of play: language play, play with and on ideas, and play with social rules and relationships" (p. 1). Keith-Spiegel (1972) also found this social theory to be apparent in her analysis of humor development in children. The fact that children are very social to begin with lends credence to this theory of humor being a social skill. This idea also ties in with Vygotsky's (1979) sociocultural theory. Kuchner and Keith-Spiegel describe how humor is a social component of childhood. Vygotsky believes that children learn through social interactions as well. Based on these ideas, further research would need to be conducted in order to establish developmental humor stages based on social interaction as McGhee has done with cognitive stages up until adolescence.

A final piece of research that is quite notable, is the work of Katherine Kappas (1967). While her work is dated, it is still influential in the field. Kappas not only described three stages of humor development, she also proposed ten different types of humor that appeal to children. While her first two stages correspond well with McGhee's stages, her third stage deals specifically with adolescence. Kappas's first stage is found in five year olds. During this stage she claims that children enjoy more physical or slapstick humor, and there is very little verbal humor found here. The second stage is found in nine year olds. At this point the humor is more cognitively developed and requires increased verbal skills. The topics of humor are more taboo as well. Her final stage is located in the adolescent time period around fourteen years. Here the humor is directed at adults or even upon the adolescent themselves. Kappas's work is not as extensive as McGhee's, yet presents some similarities. While her work does have many gaps in time between each stage, it does include the adolescent child.

Humor Found in Children's Literature

In her work with children and children's literature, Kappas (1967) established ten types of humor found within children's literature. These ten categories are also grounded in incongruity similar to McGhee's work. She writes, "Incongruity, then, is the basis of all forms of humor though it pervades each one with differing degrees of emphasis" (p. 69). The ten areas of humor found to be appealing to children are: exaggeration, incongruity, surprise, slapstick, the absurd, human predicaments, ridicule, defiance, violence, and verbal

humor. These categories are quite influential in a closer look at the types of

humor found in children's literature today.

 Using Kappas's (1967) work as well as many other researchers mentioned

later, one can synthesize five categories of humor frequently identified in

children's literature. These five include, *humorous characters, poking fun at*

authority, physical humor, nonsense, and humorous discourse.

The Humorous Character

 In her book *Laugh Lines: Exploring Humour in Children's Literature*,

Mallan (1993) notes the humorous character as a key aspect of humorous

children's literature. Many characters from literature fit this category well.

Memorable characters include Amelia Bedelia, Pippi Longstocking, Fudge, Lilly,

Milo, Tacky, Ramona, and many more. These characters are memorable because

of the many different situations they experience. Children enjoy finding the

incongruities within a character or the contrasts between characters (Smith,

1967). There are many different reasons children are able to relate well to

humorous characters. Monson (1978) describes why these characters appeal to

children, "It concerns the laughter that comes from a 'sudden glory' at

discovering we are better or smarter than others…character humor is often

directed toward a comic character who is so stupid or absent-minded as to be

ludicrous" (p. 5). This idea of superiority can be found throughout all of

children's literature. Children are happy to laugh at mistakes made by other

children, provided they no longer make the same mistakes. Renowned children's

author Beverly Cleary (1982) acknowledges this idea that humor can relieve

anxiety in children as well as make them feel superior to their younger selves, knowing they've grown. By overcoming obstacles in their lives children are able to laugh at those that now experience the same events that troubled them earlier. Laughing at what they experienced earlier in their lives allows them to release some tension that may have been created at that time.

Poking Fun at Authority

Numerous researchers have found how authority figures lay victim to humor in children's books (Mallan, 1993; Landsberg, 1992; Nilsen, 1982; Monson, 1978; Bateman, 1967; Wolfenstein, 1954). Mikhail Bakhtin described the importance of poking fun at authority in his discussion of Carnival. In their analysis of Bakhtin's work, Quantz & O'Connor (1988) explain, "Not only does laughter make no exception for the upper stratum, but indeed it is usually directed toward it. Furthermore, it is directed not at one part only, but at the whole" (p. 102). This attack upon authority can be directed at teachers, parents, even children's peers. Mallan (1993) contends, "Teachers are the obvious choice for exaggerated portraiture in children's books, for children are experts when it comes to telling tales about this group" (p. 9). Many books have the teacher bearing the brunt of the humor, yet they are simply one of many adults that hold this burden. Nilsen and Nilsen (1982) describe this idea with adolescents: "The teenager's need to achieve independence tempts writers to portray adults as coming out on the short end of their dealings with teenagers" (p. 62). In much humorous literature many adults are never able to match wits with a child. Children would also love to overcome the authority that holds them in check,

similar to the characters they meet through literature. Pippi Longstocking is a classic character who challenged authority. More recently the student and teacher battle found in Andrew Clements' book, *Frindle* (1996) is another example of a child overcoming a challenge with his teacher. The power struggle that occurs within these battles is described by Gail Munde (1997): "Many of the humorous fiction choices by children involved stories that either placed the main character in a position of power or allowed the main character to vent frustration at being powerless" (p. 222).

Much of this idea of poking fun at authority is found in Gordon Korman's work. In his series about MacDonald Hall, protagonists Boots and Bruno continually try the nerves of the school headmaster, Mr. Sturgeon, affectionately referred to by the boys as "The Fish." In one of his more recent books, *The Sixth Grade Nickname Game,(1998)* Korman uses two sixth grade boys' talents of nicknaming anyone and everyone. The boys refer to the principal as "Deer in headlights" and to their new teacher, Mr. Hughs as "Mr. Huge". According to Kappas (1967) this idea of the joking insult is representative of the adolescent years. In the examples found in Korman's work, it is one way for the characters to release a great deal of internal tension and angst. Children are able to relate to this idea of powerlessness.

Physical Humor

Physical humor is a category that is found quite frequently in children's literature. Smith (1967) made this point years ago: "Probably the most common of all sources of children's humor is the physical situation with its obvious

elements of contrast and surprise" (p.207). Bateman (1967) speculates that this idea of physical humor is one that appeals to children because it is easy for them to visualize what is happening in the story. By creating a visual picture of the character or situation, the children can better see the humor.

Physical humor also includes the visual appearance of a character, and extreme exaggeration is a writing strategy in describing characters. McGhee (1979) found this to be true in his studies with the early ages. Younger children may laugh at a person who looks much different than the norm, but as children progress through McGhee's stages to the final developmental stage they are more polite and wait until the person is gone before they laugh at the difference. This idea of physical humor also includes size differences and transformations. A classic example of this is Alice from her adventures in Wonderland. Alice not only meets many humorous characters, but she undergoes various transformations of size from large to small.

Gary Paulsen's (1993) *Harris and Me* is an example of physical humor, especially for older children. Two adolescent boys' summer adventures and practical jokes lead to many examples for this category. Whether it be urinating on electric fences (also an example of gross humor to be discussed later), wrestling pigs, or swinging from barn rafters on a rope, Harris and his cousin get into many humorous adventures where their bodies bear the brunt of their experiments. These are examples of physical humor and a more mature version of slapstick comedy. Kappas (1967) describes the slapstick type of humor as, "the form of humor that depends for its effect on fast, boisterous, and zany

physical activity and horseplay…" (p. 68). The adventures between the cousins in Paulsen's book are strong examples of both the zany and the horseplay Kappas describes as the boys try to one-up each other in adolescent bravado.

Grossness is mentioned by Mallan (1993) and Shannon (1999) in their studies citing the work of Roald Dahl as a prime example. Nilsen (1982) confirms the passion for the gross and disgusting found with physical humor for the older reader as well: "Teenagers abhor sweetness and adore grossness" (p. 60). This could be why Roald Dahl's work is so appealing to older readers. *The BFG* contains numerous instances of burping and farting. Dav Pilkey's current craze, Captain Underpants, is also appealing to children, especially the nickname chart found in some of the Captain Underpants books. Pilkey's work combines both nonsense and humor, and takes it to a new dimension. The name Captain Underpants by itself is enough to appeal to children. Whether for young children or teenagers it is quite apparent that physical and gross humor appeals to them all. Smith (1967) notes how this type of humor appeals to everyone: "Obviously, physical humor causes people of all ages to laugh—instinctively, unreasoningly, with unintellectual belly laughters" (p. 271). While some adults may not agree with this type of humor, and find it more offensive than funny, children do find physical humor funny.

Nonsense

Nonsense is a prime component of humor found in children's literature. and it comes with a vast list of examples. Kappas (1967) refers to it as absurd, Smith (1967) uses Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" as an example, and Mallan

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(1993) and Shannon (1999) cite Roald Dahl's books as examples that use

nonsense, as well as the gross. Children are drawn to the utter nonsense found in

humor. It begins early on as McGhee (1979) described in his third stage.

Children are willing to play with language and make up nonsense words simply

because they sound funny. Jalongo (1985) also concurs with the importance of

nonsense humor especially for the younger child: "The nonsensical, slapstick, and

comic mishap are all elements of children's books suitable for primary level

children" (p. 111). The nonsense and absurd characters that Dr. Seuss created are

in the hearts of both children and adults. Shaeffer & Hopkins (1988) attempt to

explain the reason for Seuss's success in saying, "One reason for the popularity of

the Dr. Seuss books is the abundance of nonsensical characters with their

extraordinary names, fantasy figures and ridiculous antics" (p.91). The crazy

antics found in Seuss books are a strong influence for other ridiculous characters

as well. Yet, not only are there characters that are absurd, but language can be

zany as well. Kappas (1967) believes nonsense humor contains the "nonsensical

use of logic and language…" (p. 68). One of the key ways language is used in

nonsense humor is with exaggeration of characters and tall tales. Yet, as

mentioned earlier, sometimes these categories will blend together as the case with

nonsense and language.

Humorous Discourse, or Language Play

Language play is a category of humor that has been identified by

researchers as well as critics (Mallan, 1993; Landsberg, 1992; Shaeffer &

Hopkins, 1988; Whitmer, 1986; Nilsen, 1982; Smith, 1967). Whether it is young

children just learning the language or a child in the adolescent years, word play appeals to them all. As mentioned earlier, McGhee (1979) found this in young children as they began to learn new words and master language. Landsberg (1992) describes how this fits with children's literature and the young child: "Linguistic invention is another form of humor that wears equally well. Indeed, the earliest forms of humor in children's literature are nursery rhymes, with their absurd juxtapositions and delight in patterns of rhythm, sound, and rhyme" (p. 37). Early on in their development children are drawn to the words. Children listen to words until they become cognitively ready to play with them. One aspect of children's early play with words is to create nonsense words that rhyme with known words (McGhee 1979). This type of language play creates an overlap between language play and the nonsense category.

The first type of word play they experiment with is the pun. Schwartz (1977) describes this appeal, "One finds punning in most of the joke forms to which children are attracted" (p. 263). Whether it's the "order in the court" joke mentioned earlier, or the numerous puns found in the books about Amelia Bedelia, (Parrish, 1963) children love the idea of word play.

The appeal of word play continues as children move beyond the primary years. Sid Fleischman is a master of words, finding not only funny metaphors, but humorous character names as well. In his book *Chancy and the Grand Rascal* (1966) we meet a character so thin "he could take a bath in a shotgun barrel" (p.34). Another character is "so thin she could fall through a stove pipe without getting sooty" (p. 126). With character names such as, "Hold Your Nose Billy",

"Jamoka Jack", "Pitch-Pine Billy Pierce", and "Mississippi MacFinn," children
are drawn into the more developed form of word play Fleischman has created.

Older readers are also drawn into more complex verbal play in Norton
Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth* (1961). Landsberg has high praise for this work,
calling it, "the purest verbal comedy for older children" (p. 38). Language play is
one category where the older reader is not left out. Nilsen (1982) finds it to be
true in his study of adolescent literature: "…look at the titles of some books
popular with young readers. The books are not necessarily humorous, but the
word play in titles has evidently interested teen readers" (p.63). He goes on to
list titles such as: *The Mysterious Disappearance of Leon (I mean Noel)* (1977)*,
Hook a Fish, Catch a Mountain* (1975)*,* and the infamous, *The Cat Ate My
Gymsuit* (1974)*.*   A recent book also matches well with Nilsen's claim; the title of
Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging (2000) is bound to attract adolescents
to the book. The examples of language play in children's literature are quite
widespread. This type of humor is not only funny, but often it is challenging for
children as well. In order to comprehend the word play, the students must be able
to cognitively understand the humor (Mallan, 1993; Shaeffer & Hopkins, 1988;
Whitmer, 1986).   Smith (1967) described this idea, "It is evident, from this brief
breakdown of language humor, that language play is a staple in children's fun but
also that children vary in their responses to it" (p. 214). How children respond to
humorous literature is an idea that deserves to be closely explored.

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Children's Response to Humorous Literature

Reader response theory as it applies to children is an area that has received much attention in the past two decades. However, reader response to humorous literature has received far less attention. Shannon (1999), in her study of children's response to humorous literature, found very little other research done in this topic. Over twenty years earlier Monson (1978) had also noted the lack of research in children's response to humorous literature. Both researchers discovered two areas of humorous literature that have been examined. Research either focused on a content analysis of humor in children's literature as Kappas (1967) did, or examined children's responses to literature (Beckman, 1984; Hawkins, 1977; Nelson, 1973; LeBouf-Foreman, 1981; Monson, 1978; Shannon, 1999). This limited research in the field of children's responses to humorous literature is quite troubling. What is lacking in the research is what impact it has upon their reading. Shannon and Monson agree on the need for more research to be done in this area.

Early in the study of humor and children, researchers limited themselves by using only jokes, cartoons, and quite rarely, an excerpt from a story. Monson (1978) reports this fact: "Most of the research reported by psychologists has been based on responses to cartoons and jokes and has not really dealt with literary responses" (p. 16). Cartoons and jokes provide researchers with a quick example of humor that may not challenge the child too much but still allows for testing a specific facet of humor. Even more troubling is research containing only excerpts from books for children's responses (Shannon, 1999). Beckman (1984) notes

how she only used excerpts of books: "Each selection was an entire episode, sometimes a portion of a chapter, sometimes an entire chapter" (p. 4). Using only an excerpt from a book distorts the picture of the child's response to an entire book. Because of the complexity of a text, limiting children's responses to an excerpt, does not allow a child to demonstrate a full range of responses. Only a few studies of response to humorous literature have examined children's transactions with entire books (Monson, 1978; Shannon, 1999; Wendelin, 1980).

Monson's 1978 work is simply a summary of a few studies that had been done previously. She describes a study that examined humor and a child's intelligence level from 1962, as well as studies from 1966 and 1972 in which the researchers simply describe what types of humor children enjoy. She also describes Bateman's (1967) work on children's responses to humorous literature based on selections read to them in class. Monson's work is helpful in examining previous research, and it reveals the limited number of studies available at that time.

Shannon's (1999) work builds upon previous studies. She examined how fourth and fifth graders responded to nine different humorous books. The children had the option to read any of the nine books she selected, or none at all. She found the children identified four different categories of humor they enjoyed, "(1) competence, superiority, or sense of accomplishment, (2) physical events and appearances, (3) the scatological and other words or incidents perceived as taboo or crude, and (4) language and wordplay" (p.129). These four categories she established from her research correspond with the five representative categories

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used earlier to discuss humor found within children's literature. While her work is a recent example of children's response to humorous literature, it also contains some problematic features.

One of the main difficulties with current studies, including Shannon's, is the book selection. While some studies use only excerpts from stories, those studies that do use actual books, often select titles that may not seem humorous to the intended audience. In Shannon's (1999) study, she chose to use books that met many different specific criteria. She selected books that were: "classified or described as 'humorous' or 'funny' by at least two of the following: *Elementary School Library Collection, Best Books for Children,* NCTE's *Adventuring with Books,* or the ALA "Notable Books for Children" lists" (p. 126). She also held the requirement that the books be "favorably reviewed by at least two recognized professional journals" (p. 126). While using quality books is important in any study, Shannon has taken out one key voice, the young reader, in her study. Children need to be allowed to select which titles and authors they find humorous. An even more problematic component of a study by Karla Wendelin (1980) is her inclusion of books, "chosen from a working list of titles compiled jointly by the NCTE and the Children's Book Council from publisher's suggestions regarding *what children might find humorous"* (p. 25, emphasis mine). This method of book selection, using publishers' opinions as opposed to children's preferences, is credible but does not seem to be optimal for research with children. Munde's (1997) work examining the differences in children's and adults' preferences of humorous books found in children's literature adds another layer to the discussion

of book selection for research. She noted that children and adults have a much different view of what is humorous in children's books, and their choices reflect this. Munde's findings show the vast difference adults and children have when selecting humorous texts. This difference is important because children will respond quite differently to a humorous text chosen solely by adults.

While all the organizations both Shannon (1999) and Wendelin (1980) used are well established, the groups don't necessarily take into account what books and authors *children prefer*. The main emphasis in their studies is *children's response*, yet these researchers take the child's preferences into consideration only after the book was read. Requiring a book to be recommended by different organizations as well as review journals assures it will be of high quality and amusing to adult sensibilities, but it does not guarantee that children are going to find it humorous.

When children find a humorous text they enjoy, they often respond with laughter. As Landsberg (1992) was quoted previously, "Laughter is the reward that lures the most reluctant reader" (p.34). Humorous literature can assist educators in bringing more children into literacy experiences. Educators need to be able to take advantage of a genre that will reach large numbers of children. Children's authors know the importance of humorous literature. As Alvin Schwartz (1977) wrote: "Children tend to be more playful than adults; as a result, they are inclined to laugh more readily and more frequently" (p. 282). Capitalizing on children's eagerness to laugh as described by Schwartz is crucial for classroom teachers. By creating more opportunities to read humorous

literature, teachers may be better able to reach more students and create a life-long desire to read.

Reading Engagement

Reading scholar Kathryn Au (1999) writes: "Engagement is at the very heart of what it means to be a reader" (xi). Reading engagement is a complex concept, but as Au argues, it is crucial to reading. Examining connections between reading engagement and reading humorous literature may shed light on ways that teachers can encourage children to become readers.

Definitions of the concept of reading engagement can be hard to come upon. One frequently used framework for a definition of reading engagement includes the idea of "will and skill" (Baker, Guthrie, &Anderson, 2000; Mosenthal, 1999). As definitions are continuously redesigned and reformed, other aspects are included beyond simply the motivation and skills to read. The idea of reading engagement itself, however, has much appeal to educators. Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie (2000) write, "The engagement perspective has appeal because it integrates the cognitive, motivational, and social dimensions of reading and reading instruction" (p. 2). This statement also serves as a definition. It goes beyond the idea of will and skill, and now includes social interaction. Guthrie & McCann (1997) also contend, "Besides being motivated and strategic, the engaged learner participates in various social patterns in the classroom" (p. 128). Current thinking, then, recognizes several common themes found in reading engagement. Motivation, cognition, and social interaction are common threads that, when woven together, constitute engagement. Guthrie and Anderson (1999)

state: "While all language processes are valuable tools, the full set of motivational, conceptual, strategic, and social operations are central to the engaged reader" (p. 19). These common themes that emerge from the previous statements warrant a closer examination.

Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation is an important aspect of the reading process. Ideally, teachers would love to have a classroom full of students motivated to read. Because this is rarely the case, it is important to discuss both types of motivation found with readers. Intrinsically motivated readers are motivated within themselves. For students who are not intrinsically motivated, teachers have created programs to extrinsically motivate them. In this case, there is a reward at the end of reading a book. This can be done within the classroom, or even at the national level. "Book It" and "Bucks For Books" (Wigfield, 2000) are examples of such programs. Extrinsic motivation is not just found in programs. Reading a certain book to gain status within a group would also be an example of extrinsic motivation. Motivation then is a complex picture to create, and when discussing reading engagement, intrinsic motivation is the focus.

In describing the importance of motivation Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie (2000) write, "Motivation that influences engaged reading is not based on temporary excitement or a passing whim. Intrinsic aspects of motivation such as curiosity, desire to be immersed in a narrative, and willingness to tackle challenging text are acquired slowly" (p. 10). Although intrinsic motivation may take a great deal of time to develop, it may be present by the time a child reaches

the intermediate grades of elementary school and it is important to capitalize on it

before a child loses interest in reading. It has been found that as a child continues

through elementary school, their motivation to read declines through the grades

(Baker, Dreher, Guthrie, 2000; Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999;

Wigfield, 1997; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). It is important then, to take

advantage of a reader's intrinsic motivation to promote life long reading.

Schallert & Reed (1997) note this importance:

> Over time, readers who have experienced the pleasure of becoming
> absorbed by a text will develop a sense of the types of texts or tasks that
> will successfully cause involvement and of the conditions that need to be
> in place for them to be able to re-create the joy of autotelic experiences.
> Thus, one consequence of deep involvement is to motivate readers to want
> to read, to find reading a rewarding, sought-after activity that can displace
> other recreational activities. (p. 79)

By being engaged readers children can begin to see that their intrinsic motivation

could lead to life long reading. Guthrie & Anderson (1999) posit, "Active reading

is grounded in intrinsic motivations…When an individual's reasons for reading

include curiosity, the desire for aesthetic involvement, or the disposition for social

interchange, that individual is likely to be an active reader" (p. 18). Guthrie &

Anderson cultivate the idea that there may be different motivators for reading, but

it is important that these motivators come from within. By taking advantage of

the intrinsic motivation children have to read, reading engagement can begin more

easily. Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie (2000) warn that while motivation is crucial, it

cannot be the only facet, "If motivation is treated as secondary to the acquisition

of basic reading skills, we risk creating classrooms filled with children who can

read but choose not to. On the other hand, if motivation is the only focus, we risk that children may love to read but cannot" (p. 1). It is important then to focus also on other aspects of reading engagement.

Reading Strategies

The second part of the early definitions of reading engagement, the "skill" of "will and skill", comprises many different ideas. In the case of reading engagement it is important to focus on the strategies children bring to reading. In turn the engaged reader will be using these strategies to develop their reading ability.

McCarthey, Hoffman, & Galda (1999) describe the engaged reader as, "...skilled: in the use of the alphabetic code system to support word recognition; in the use of strategies to represent text with understanding, interpretation, and expression; and, in adapting reading strategies to specific goals and text characteristics" (p. 47). This description uses a combination of both skill and strategies for what an engaged reader needs in order to be successful. There are many elements of story that are important to understand as well as many skills and strategies that help engaged readers (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999).

Two specific strategies Guthrie and Anderson (1999) describe as important for engaged readers are, raising questions and using imagery. They state, "Students want to raise questions about literature and life, and teachers who encourage these questions will improve students' reading. Strategies for imagery (making pictures in one's mind) increase comprehension and interest. Engaged readers use imagery spontaneously, but less engaged learners need direction" (p.

32). Both these strategies are important for engaged readers to successfully

comprehend the many elements found in stories. Other scholars also support the

idea of these strategies (Wilhelm, 2001, 1997; Yola, Freeman, Robertson, and

Outhred, 2000; Beck, et. al., 1997; Williamson, 1996; Langer, 1995; and Enciso,

1992). Using strategies while reading is a very important facet of reading

engagement. Alvermann (1999) concludes that, "Reading strategically is thought

to be a distinguishing mark of engaged learners" (p. 144).

Engagement research focusing on reading literature

Scholar Judith Langer (1995) describes envisionment as being one way to

engage with a text during reading. She writes, "Envisionments are text-worlds in

the mind, and they differ from individual to individual". (p. 9). They are obvious

similarities between Langer's idea of envisionment and the reading strategy of

visualization as mentioned above. Both concepts involve the reader using images

to enter into the text world.

Similar research had been done previous to Langer's book, by Pat Enciso

(1992). Enciso's work examined the "reader's story world" and how the reader

moved around within their own story world. Visualization again, was found in

this work. Children described where they saw themselves going, or where they

were with specific characters in the story.

Based upon Enciso's research, Jeffrey Wilhelm (1997) worked with

students and visualization. He was able to extend the Enciso's work in order for

the students to be able to "see the story" they were reading. He noticed students

had a hard time visualizing the story. Based upon her work, Wilhelm worked

with his students to draw, read pictures books, and think about creating pictures in their minds. It becomes apparent that visualization is a key reading strategy as Guthrie & Anderson (1999) described earlier.

Social Interaction

Social interaction is a third crucial component of reading engagement. In studies done in elementary school classrooms on a wide array of topics, social interaction is often an integral aspect of the research. Researchers focusing on children's responses to literature have considered the social context for at least two decades (McCarthey, Hoffman, & Galda, 1999; Hickman, 1984; Hepler & Hickman, 1982). McCarthey, Hoffman, & Galda (1999) confirm this, "Researchers interested in studying the nature of engaged reading and the instruction that supports it, must consider the social context as an integral resource system rather than as a confounding or extraneous variable in a traditional research design" (p. 47).

The combination of reader response and social interaction in learning combines both theories from Rosenblatt (1978) as well as Lev Vygotsky (1978). McCarthey, Galda, & Hoffman (1999) state that, "…adopting an engagement perspective suggests that reading is not only a constructive process, but a social process as well. That is, reading does not occur just within a child's head, but rather through interactions with particular texts and other people" (p. 60). This interaction is a key component of reader response theory created by Rosenblatt (1978). Rosenblatt's idea that reading is a transaction between reader and text supports the concept of reading being a constructive process as suggested by

McCarthey, Galda, & Hoffman. It is important, however, to also include the social component and Vygotsky's views of social learning. Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi (2000) describe how this social interaction combines both reading engagement and Vygotsky's (1978) ideas. "According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is the primary means by which children arrive at new understandings. It is through the exchange of ideas and subsequent agreements and disagreements that students challenge one another's ideas as well as their own" (p. 120). In elementary school classrooms the exchange of ideas is easy to find, since children often verbalize their intentions. Hepler & Hickman (1982) found many social influences in how children responded to reading, as well as how children chose books to read.

Hepler & Hickman (1982) describe how the recommendations of children's peers serves to motivate them to read. This social interaction serves as a motivator for reading, extrinsic motivation turns to intrinsic, and in turn, engages children in reading. Guthrie & Anderson (1999) support this idea: "Many adults recommend books to friends and enjoy discussing books. Children are equally social, reporting that they read to share or to keep up with friends and peers. In these cases the social interchange is the reason for reading, and the motivation for literate activities is social" (p. 22). Researching in a classroom setting is one way to work in a natural social setting. It is important to take advantage of a setting where reading and sharing books is a routine experience. Wigfield (2000) also discusses how social interaction can motivate reading. He believes that social motivation is crucial to reading. He finds that children

reading together in school and at home with their families are examples of social

motivation (p.142). While homes can provide sites for studying literate

experiences (Heath 1982), the school classroom is a natural environment in which

there are a greater number of children for social interaction. According to Guthrie

& Anderson (1999), "Within classrooms, engaged readers often interact socially

in their pursuit of understanding. Given the opportunity, students form

partnerships and small teams" (p. 35). It becomes clear that motivation is the

final component that must be included when discussing reading engagement.

Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi (2000) summarize:

> When students begin asking questions of interest to them, negotiating
> meaning with peers, and learning how to navigate within a social system,
> they *must* be more engaged. There is no room for passivity, for relying on
> others to answer questions, or for waiting on the teacher to call on you.
> Collaboration requires active social participation and active cognitive
> processing" (p. 135).

Thus, social interaction both during and after reading is an important facet of

reading engagement. The social component of reading engagement shows how

interacting with others provides the opportunity to use reading strategies for

comprehension as well as being a motivator for further reading.

Research in reading engagement since the early 1990s has focused on

motivation, skills and strategies, and social interaction, but not on engagement as

seen in specific genres. Studying engagement within genres may facilitate the

understanding of motivation. Wigfield (2000) believes that children can be

motivated by interesting texts and materials (p. 148). Earlier in this chapter, the

importance of humor and its role in a child's life was established. This study will

look at aspects of reading engagement as children respond to humorous books in

order to describe the nature of children's engagement with such texts.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"Because you're curious to find out what the author is going to do…and if he's going to put a lot of other funny jokes that weren't in the last one." Third Grader, Amanda

This is a qualitative study of how humorous children's literature serves to engage children in reading, with perspectives from children, teachers, and authors on the role of humor. Due to the nature of the questions and the inclusion of various perspectives, a qualitative approach seemed the only viable possibility. Even so, as Cart (1996) suggests, due to the subjective nature of humor, "it is *very* dangerous to generalize… for 'funny' is a relative, not an absolute term" (p. 4, emphasis his).

The eleven week study began with observation time in classrooms to build rapport with the children. There were two suburban classrooms involved in this study, a multiage third and fourth grade classroom with 22 students, and a fourth and fifth grade multiage classroom with 19 students. Children read and responded to humorous books chosen by the researcher and teachers. Data were collected from book discussion groups (focus groups) with the children as well as classroom observations. Written responses from their reading were analyzed, as well as humor surveys given at both the beginning and end of the study. Interviews with teachers and authors were conducted either face to face, or

through electronic mail. These perspectives were brought together to examine the role of humor and how it engages readers.

The study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, in which the researcher intends to understand different meanings behind how humor engages young readers. When discussing the interpretivist perspective, Schwandt (2000) argues, "it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of action, yet do so in an objective manner" (p. 193). Examining how children, authors, and teachers view humorous children's literature calls for the interpretivist perspective. Yet being objective with various perspectives is a difficult task as each perspective calls for a different interpretation. Each of these perspectives plays an important role in this research. How children respond to humorous literature has implications for how teachers, librarians, and parents make literature available to children. Finding out how the creators of the literature, the authors, use humor can also provide important insight. Rosenblatt (1978) describes the importance of the transaction between reader and text, and in this study the authors represent the voices of the text. Teachers, as well as the researcher, also have a valuable perspective on helping guide children to literature they will read with enjoyment.

Schwandt (2000) states, "…to understand a particular social action, the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action" (p. 191). This research takes three different lenses and uses them to examine humor and its role in engagement. By including all three of these perspectives I am better able to understand the different "meanings" that are included in selecting humorous

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books and presenting opportunities for young readers to engage with humorous texts.

Research Setting and Participants

Classrooms

The field study with children was set in a suburban, predominately white, high socioeconomic status community. It is a suburb of a large Midwestern city. The school is an elementary school serving kindergarten to fifth grade and is referred to here as Whynot Elementary. All names are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The school uses an "informal program" and includes multiage classrooms throughout the school. This alternative approach to learning has been in place in the school for over 30 years. The school places great importance on the value of literature in the curriculum. For instance, the school has yearly author visits to help promote literature. The school librarian, who also has a doctorate in children's literature, is very active in promoting literature to both the children and the teachers. Student-made artifacts responding to different children's books and authors adorn the walls in the halls of Whynot Elementary School. Because of the emphasis on literacy and the acceptance of children's literature as a curriculum resource, the school's program fit well with the research procedures. My presence and research plan caused minimal disruption to the classroom flow and environment.

The two classrooms involved in this study were a third and fourth grade multiage classroom taught by Ms. F., and a fourth and fifth grade multiage classroom taught by Mrs. K. Both teachers were ones that I had worked with on

various projects for two years prior to the study, and I had been in their classrooms often during that time. Both teachers have Masters degrees. Ms. F. has been teaching for eleven years, and Mrs. K. has been teaching for five years.

The third and fourth grade classroom had a total of twenty-two students. There were fourteen girls and eight boys in the class. The class was split in the middle between third and fourth graders with eleven in each grade.

The fourth and fifth grade classroom had a total of nineteen students. There were eight girls and eleven boys in the class. The class had nine fourth graders and ten fifth graders.   When the study began, the classroom teacher, Mrs. K. had left on maternity leave.   She was replaced by a long-term substitute who was familiar with both the school and the classroom. However, since changing the leadership can change the dynamic of a class, this needs to be taken into consideration in regards to work done within the fourth and fifth grade classroom.

Both classrooms were print-rich environments. Hundreds of books were found on bookshelves throughout the rooms. The high value teachers placed on reading and literacy was evident in the arrangement of their classrooms. There were numerous book displays about the current theme being studied in the class. Posters and bulletin boards promoted reading and displayed student work.

Authors

The authors whose voices are heard in this study help explain the role humor plays in their writing. The authors were identified for this study with the intention of including one of their books in the reading sample. The book selections reflected much of the authors' overall work. The selected book from

each author also contributed to the questions with the author interviews. The authors selected for use in this study include both picture and chapter book authors from a variety of genres. They are well established in the field of children's literature. Three of the authors, Barbara Park, Louis Sachar, and Jon Scieszka, were ones children felt were the funniest they knew based upon their responses to a preliminary humor survey. The other three authors, Sid Fleischman, Gordon Korman, and Barbara Robinson, were chosen from discussions with teachers, librarians and editors. All of the authors have numerous books published and have been in the field of children's literature for a number of years. The breakdown of authors and their genre of work include:

Sid Fleischman: Novels, historical fiction focus
Gordon Korman: Novels, realistic humor focus
Barbara Park: Transitional novels, realistic fiction
Barbara Robinson: Novels, realistic fiction
Louis Sachar: Novels, realistic fiction
Jon Scieszka: Picture books and short novels, humorous focus.

The purpose of including the authors was to gain their perspective of the role of humor and how they used humor in their writing. The method of data collection with these authors was through electronic mail interviews. Three authors responded to the interview questions: Sid Fleischman, Gordon Korman, and Jon Scieszka.

Procedures and Data Collection

Pilot Study

A humor survey was created as a pilot study one year before this study began. The pilot study took place in both classrooms as the humor survey was

field tested for the first time. Approximately forty children in third through fifth grade tested the survey. Some children from the current research had taken the pilot survey in the winter of 2001. The initial administration of the survey asked students to respond to a specific book that was read aloud to them. It also asked questions about what, in particular, makes a book funny. The final question asked students to list the funniest books or authors they knew. After the initial administration during the pilot study, the survey was scaled back to five questions probing students' thoughts on the book they have just read or was just read to them. The humor survey can be found in Appendix A. The data collected from the administration of the humor survey during the current study, was then triangulated with focus group interviews, written responses, and a follow up survey at the end of the data collection period.

Authors

Through previous conversations with Gordon Korman and Jon Scieszka I was able to obtain their agreement to participate in the study through electronic mail interviews. Sid Fleischman agreed to participate after his editor discussed the study with him. I made repeated attempts to obtain agreement with Louis Sachar, but was not able to obtain direct contact information. I did not have connections through publishers to ask Barbara Park or Barbara Robinson.

Interviewing through electronic mail is becoming a new technique in the field of qualitative research (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This method of interviewing does have drawbacks; namely it eliminates face-to-face interaction (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, it made interviews with authors who live across North

America much more efficient. With some rapport already established with the authors, the use of electronic mail helped establish a quick and easy way for the authors to dialogue with me.

Books

Six books were chosen for children to read in this study. One book from each of the six authors was chosen for inclusion in this study.   Books were chosen for a variety of reasons, and selected by the researcher after discussions with teachers, librarians, and editors.

Chancy and the Grand Rascal (Sid Fleischman, 1966): This historical fiction tale follows young Chancy as he sets out on foot from Ohio to Missouri to find his orphaned siblings. Meeting up with his Uncle Will, the pair find many adventures and laughs on the way to reuniting Chancy's brothers and sisters. *Chancy and the Grand Rascal* was chosen for many of its attributes. Because the book is set in the Midwest, I predicted the children would already have a basic schema for the setting. I had previously used a lot of Fleischman's books in my elementary school classrooms with great success.

Radio Fifth Grade (Gordon Korman, 1989): Fifth grader Benjy Driver loves to emulate his radio announcer idol, Eldridge Kestenbaum. He and two friends have their own weekly children's radio show entitled, Kidsview.   From dealing with a talking parrot that will not speak, to a school bully who writes stories about kittens named Fuzzy and Puffy, to creating a quiz show from their weekend homework assignments, Benjy and friends continue to find themselves in humorous situations while trying to maintain schoolwork and the radio show.

Radio Fifth Grade was chosen after an electronic mail dialogue between Gordon Korman and myself. We discussed various titles, and decided on this one. Because the title refers to a grade level above most of the students in the study, we felt it would be appealing to the third and fourth graders, as well as the fifth graders at that level.

       Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus (Barbara Park, 1992): In the first of the Junie B. Jones series, young Junie B. discovers that riding the bus to her first day of Kindergarten has many different challenges and finds that she doesn't like any of them. After her first day of school she decides to hide and not ride the "stupid smelly bus" home. Hiding in the school by herself, she has many fun adventures until she can't get to the bathroom because of all the locked doors. *Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus* was chosen because the student surveys felt this series of books contained some of the funniest books they knew. The first book in the series was chosen because the title itself was humorous, and on the assumption that being the first book, it might encourage further reading of the series.

       The ~~Worst~~ Best School Year Ever (Barbara Robinson, 1994): The infamous Herdmans are back again in a sequel to *The ~~Worst~~ Best Christmas Pageant Ever.* The Herdmans intimidate classmates and the townspeople as they live their daily lives. From their killer cat, to creating panic amongst the children riding the bus, the Herdmans provide many laughs for readers. *The ~~Worst~~ Best School Year Ever* was chosen based upon discussions with children's librarians. I had read the companion book, *The ~~Worst~~ Best Christmas Pageant Ever,* in my

elementary school classes and it was appealing to them. Again, I hoped this book might also encourage reading with the related title.

Sideways Stories from Wayside School (Louis Sachar, 1985): In the first of the series, Sachar introduces the school that was mistakenly built 30 stories high with one classroom on each floor, instead of one story with 30 classrooms. Each chapter describes a different teacher or student from the school and contains different examples of strange or weird humor, from a teacher that doesn't exist, to a class that has dead rats coming to school. This book is humorous and strange at the same time. *Sideways Stories From Wayside School* was chosen for similar reasons to other books in this study. It was the beginning of the series, and again, this was an author preferred by the students.

Summer Reading is Killing Me (Jon Scieszka, 1998): The Time Warp Trio is back as the summer reading list gets stuck in "The Book". The trio is whisked away into a world where all the evil characters from the books on their summer reading list plot a takeover of all the good characters.   The trio meets a variety of characters from children's literature as they try and find "The book" and escape back home. *Summer Reading is Killing Me* was chosen because it was a shorter chapter book that would be appealing to children. It was Ms. F's favorite book in the series and we both agreed we saw great value in the inclusion of numerous literary characters the students would be familiar with.

Teachers

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the teachers were selected because of the previous work the researcher had done in their classrooms. Data collection

was done with the teachers both formally and informally. The teachers and I had discussed approaches to the study well before I entered the classrooms. Upon entry into the classrooms we would talk daily before, during, and after my time in the classrooms. During this time we discussed how the study was progressing, and what we were seeing with different students. Throughout the study we also had electronic mail communication and informal interviews. At the end of the study, I had a formal interview with the third and fourth grade teacher, Ms. F.

Data Collection

The eleven week study began in Whynot Elementary School as I established a rapport with both classrooms during the first week of the study. It was important for them to become comfortable with my presence. Observation was the first procedure used in this study. Then, to establish rapport with the class, I switched my role to participant observer (Angrosino & Perez, 2000). While observing students' interaction with the literature provided by the teacher and myself, I also interacted with them to understand their responses to the literature. I spent one full week in the third and fourth grade classroom reading aloud humorous picture books I had chosen, and audiotaping class discussions about what they found funny in each picture book. These audiotaped discussions were immediately transcribed so any thoughts and ideas that were unclear could be addressed again the next day in the class discussion. The whole class discussions helped set the tone for the book group discussions that occurred a week later. The picture book discussions encouraged the children to think beyond the pictures in the story and more on the humor found in the story. While

previous studies (Shannon, 1999; Kappas, 1967) have focused on *what* makes a story funny, Ms. F. and I asked the children to think about *why* the story was funny. The teacher and I encouraged the students to talk about both themselves and the book. Also, Ms. F. and I were trying to have the students make a distinction between the pictures the students felt were humorous and specific elements of the text that were funny.

The first week in the fourth and fifth grade classroom was similar to the third and fourth grade classroom. I simply observed the class to allow them to be more comfortable with me. I interacted more with the students during the second week, but did not read picture books to them as I continued to develop a relationship with both the students and the long-term substitute.

The third week I had the students in both classrooms complete a reading attitude survey created by McKenna and Kear (1990) as well as the humor survey modified from the pilot study. The reading attitude surveys along with teacher interviews provided additional information about the students, such as which ones could be viewed as "reluctant readers", or children who can read but choose not to read. While reluctant readers were not the primary focus of this study, student attitude toward reading is important to examine, given the motivation component of reading engagement discussed in chapter two. The humor surveys also helped determine author selection for the study.

While some students were very willing to share their thoughts with their teacher or me individually, focus groups as described by Fontana and Frey (2000) were also used to help create a more comfortable atmosphere for the students.

Being with their peers created a more welcoming environment for sharing.

Madrez (2000) explains this interaction amongst peers. "Focus groups involve

not only 'vertical interaction,' or interaction between the moderator and the

interviewees, but also 'horizontal interaction' among the group participants"

(p.840). This interaction is a crucial benefit of focus groups. It allows students to

work with each other's responses in order to explain their own reasoning. Focus

groups also give power back to the interviewees instead of having the traditional

model of power being with the interviewer. This change in power dynamics

allows the focus group to take the conversation to topics they feel are relevant

(Madrez, 2000). Establishing this sense of control allowed children's honest

responses to come forth.

Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie (2000) state, "We can determine the extent of a

student's engaged reading through many avenues. In-depth interviews are a good

approach. In addition, diaries, classroom observations, parental reports, and

questionnaires have been used to indicate a student's level of engaged reading"

(p. 7). Based on the suggested methods by Baker, Dreher, and Guthrie (2000), it

was important that this research attempt to include as many of these approaches as

possible. Because of the complexity found within multiage classrooms and the

school setting, using a variety of data collection methods as described by Baker,

Dreher, & Guthrie seemed to be the best choice. This is why I included book

discussion groups, written responses, classroom observations, and the humor

survey in the data collection.

After I had moved to the participant observer role, defined as one who takes an active role in a setting, but is still observing within that setting, I gave book talks in both classrooms about the five books that were available for reading. In the third and fourth grade classroom the students then ranked their choices from 1-5 of which book they would like to read first. Book groups were then created from these preferences, and were changed after each group completed a book. Both Ms. F. and I conducted book group discussions, and these discussions were audiotaped and transcribed.

The second book group fell during the school's spring break, so Ms. F. and I had the students read their books during the break and come back to discuss them. The first day back we had them do a written response to the book they read. After the teacher and I both reviewed the responses we again led book discussion groups to clarify any thoughts and ideas as well as give the students another outlet to share their thoughts.

Due to the long-term substitute in the fourth and fifth grade classroom I changed the procedures for selecting books to read for that class. As mentioned earlier I did book talks with the class, but then asked any interested students to come see me about which book they would be interested in reading. This led to working with students both individually as well as in small groups. Book talks about all the books were given at two different times during the study. This led to different groups as well as individuals working with me. During this time I worked with a group of three girls, two fifth graders and a fourth grader. These girls chose to read two of the books, and we met daily to discuss their thoughts

about the books and the humor in the books. I also met with four other students

individually, who read various titles from the five books. All of these four were

boys, with an equal split of two fourth graders and two fifth graders. Because of

the more individualized responses and the beginning of a poetry study during

reader's workshop time, I chose not to have a debriefing session with the seven

students I worked with.

Data saturation was apparent during the third book group as the children in

the third and fourth grade classroom repeated the same answers, and no new ideas

or answers were emerging. The children recognized the familiar questions and

were responding, "but we already answered that", or with a shrug and, "I don't

know, it's just funny". At this point, I brought the main data collection phase to

an end. I adapted the humor survey I had created, to ask written questions about

the books they read during the study. I kept the final question from the initial

humor survey about the funniest books or authors they knew, to see if any

changes were found in their responses at the end of the study. For surveys or

sample transcriptions see Appendix A and B. The teacher and I conducted a final

class discussion (or debriefing) about humorous books and provided the students

an opportunity to share any final thoughts they might have about humor or funny

books.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of the data began with the coding of interview transcripts from

individual interviews as well as focus group interviews, and from the e-mail

correspondence with the authors. The coding used the constant comparative

method, and looked for similarities in reasons for use of humor in the authors'

writing as well as the children's responses to the humorous literature. Charmaz

(2000) describes the process of coding data, "We grounded theorists code our

emerging data as we collect it. Through coding, we start to define and categorize

our data. In grounded theory coding, we create codes as we study our data" (p.

515). Axial coding was used, which is "aimed at making connections between a

category and its subcategories" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 516).

Initial coding began as I read through transcripts after the tapes were

transcribed. Beginning categories included:

*Author connections

*Critical Thinking

*Story elements

*Language play

*Character Perspective.

As book groups began, and students responded more in depth to the questions, I

started to discover patterns found within their responses. At this time I found

categories that included:

*Motivation

*Story elements

*Social interaction

These three categories were guided by the reading done on reading engagement,

which was discussed in chapter two.

Through more analysis of the data, as well as further reading about engaged reading, I refined the categories in order to describe a picture of an engaged reader with a humorous text. The patterns that emerged in the codes found were:

*Motivation

*Reading strategies

*Social interaction

*Attributes of humorous literature

*The emotional appeal of humor

Initial categories from the first reading of the transcripts fell into these broader categories, and will be described in chapter four.

The coding was done with a peer debriefer, that is, I talked with trusted and knowledgeable colleagues, and used them as a sounding board for the different ideas I was seeing in the classrooms (Schwandt 1997). Guba & Lincoln (1985) suggest, "debriefing is a useful—if sobering—experience to which to subject oneself; its utility, when properly engaged, is unquestionable" (p. 309). This use of peer debriefing assisted me in keeping my researcher biases in check. My peer debriefers helped me focus on the categories that emerged from the data as opposed to the categories I wanted the data to create. It also provided me with an outsider's view of the data that were being coded.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is a continuous struggle. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The use of various methods helps to lend

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credibility and trustworthiness to a study. This study used prolonged engagement and persistent observation, peer review, triangulation, and member checks to help establish trustworthiness.

In terms of the limited questions in my research, 11 weeks was prolonged engagement for this study, as data saturation was reached by the third book group. Guba and Lincoln (1989) define prolonged engagement as, "substantial involvement at the site of the inquiry, in order to overcome the effects of misinformation, distortion, or presented 'fronts' to establish the rapport and build the trust necessary to uncover constructions, and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context's culture" (p.237). Spending 11 weeks in the field helped me to become an unofficial member of the classrooms. By overcoming the initial "front" described by Guba & Lincoln, the students saw that I was more than just a "tall novelty act" coming into their classroom, and they begin to see me as an unofficial member of the class, who shared books with them and helped lead discussions about various books they read. The rapport we were able to establish also helped create a comfort level in the focus groups.

By establishing prolonged engagement I was also able to complete persistent observation. Being present in the classrooms each day at a consistent time in the afternoon helped me to see all of the students in context. After seeing one student respond unexpectedly to a book, I was able to determine the reason for the unexpected response through discussion with the teacher about my observation. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation work hand in hand. By being present in a classroom for 11 weeks I was able to avoid much of

the "misinformation" that Guba & Lincoln described above. By consistently

being present in the classroom, I was able to establish a rapport and relationship

with the students and begin to understand their personalities and varied response

patterns. If I felt that students were out of sync with how I had worked with them

earlier, I would then ask the teacher if she saw those behaviors as well. This was

especially apparent during the tension-filled weeks when the students were taking

the fourth grade proficiency tests.

When defining peer review, Guba & Lincoln (1985) state that it is a

"process of engaging with a disinterested peer…" (p. 23).   I asked two female

doctoral students to be peer debriefers for my study. We met several times

throughout the spring and summer and analyzed data. We examined codes

established from the interview transcripts. Together we were able to flesh out

common themes found in the transcripts. We also analyzed patterns found with

the humor survey. We discussed the responses given to specific aspects of books,

as well as why authors used humor in their work. Working with peers who were

less familiar with these children helped ground me in reality with theories I

created based upon the data collected. Their input was invaluable in keeping me

grounded and holding my biases in check.

Drawing on multiple sources; children, teachers, authors, and the

researcher provided opportunity for triangulation. This triangulation of methods

is crucial in order to make the data credible. Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong (2000)

describe this notion: "Triangulation surfaces as a critical element in the practice of

social science: 'adding' one layer of data to another to build a confirmatory

edifice" (p. 118). The many layers of data I coded from the multiple perspectives

help build the layers of data Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong suggest. By including

more than one perspective, credibility is found with the data as common patterns

are derived from more than one source of data collection. While the perspectives

did not always align themselves perfectly, there were common threads that

emerged within patterns. These common themes will be discussed further in

chapter four.

Member checks, soliciting feedback from the participants about the

researcher's findings (Schwandt, 1997) are the most critical element of qualitative

research for establishing credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Working with the

authors, member checking took place through e-mail or personal correspondence

if I was confused or needed clarification of ideas they wrote about in the

interviews. Member checking with the teachers was ongoing throughout the

study with informal daily dialogue. The member checks with adults were easy;

however, member checking with children proved challenging.

Member checks with the children in this study were conducted in two

different ways. An immediate informal member check was done at the end of an

individual interview or focus group. Either the teacher or I summarized for the

students the main issues discussed during the interviews. If the students felt

something was lacking, they had the opportunity to fill it in, or if we had

misinterpreted something, they had the opportunity to correct us. Also, the book

group discussions (focus groups) were transcribed the same day they were taken,

so if there were any unclear areas, or ideas to follow up on, the teacher and I were able to dialogue with the students.

After the data were collected and coded, I went back to the students and presented my interpretations to them. Their response was quite positive and they took enjoyment in hearing my interpretations of their responses, and the value I placed upon them. During this time they did expand on a few of the categories I had created based upon the coding of the transcripts. This visit provided them the opportunity to see what I was doing with the data as well as a chance to add or subtract any themes that I had found from the data.

Limitations

As found in all qualitative research, there are a number of limitations in this study. The work is limited in scope to a suburban, high socioeconomic level, school. Class sizes were small; only 37 students were included in this study. Also within these two classrooms there was not much racial and cultural diversity. While the study did reach data saturation, it was limited to only 11 weeks in the field. One additional limitation to this limited amount of time is that I was not able to determine the prior knowledge and experiences the students had with books. There may have been discussions and books read that influenced the children's responses during the study. Again, this lack of background information limits transferability to other settings.

Since this is a qualitative study, there are other elements that can be viewed as limitations. Even with the use of peer debriefing, it is impossible to avoid researcher bias. Also, replicating this study would prove difficult in

locating classrooms that are identical to this study. Because qualitative research uses the unique qualities of classrooms it is important to understand that they provide settings that may not be replicated.

As the quotation from Michael Cart reminds us at the beginning of this chapter, humor is subjective. Because of this, the author and book selection can also be viewed as subjective. Because of the number of books many of these authors have published and the choice of only one for the study, generalizations again are limited.   One final limitation that must be included is that this study focuses on only one genre, humor. This study does not examine children's responses to other genres such as; poetry, fantasy or realistic fiction, and so does not provide a context for comparison amongst other genres.

Chapter four will analyze the data collection and chapter five will discuss implications for teachers.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

"It just kind of turns me into Curious George and I want to keep reading ahead…"
Fourth Grader, John

The purpose of this study is to examine how young readers engage with a humorous text. The study focuses on the young reader's perspective while including insights from authors and teachers. This study also attempts to determine any patterns that exist among the multiple perspectives. As discussed in previous chapters, humor is a difficult idea to study and can be quite subjective. Previous studies (Shannon, 1999; Wendelin, 1980) focused solely on what made books funny. This study hopes to more fully describe children's perspective on why the books are funny and if there are elements of the books teachers can concentrate on to engage children in reading. Although teachers and authors provided some data for this research, its primary focus was with the young readers. The following issues provided the framework for discussions with the children.

1) How the reader describes the role of humor in his/her own reading.

2) How readers engage with a humorous text.

3) A reader's motivation to read after completing a humorous text.

4) Specific attributes of humorous literature that are associated with children's responses.

Using the three different perspectives mentioned above, this chapter creates a picture of what a young reader with a humorous text looks like. This chapter uses all of the reader responses, both oral and written, and constructs categories and patterns found within these responses. The categories and patterns were changing as was discussed in chapter three. This chapter then examines the author and teacher viewpoints for similarities and differences between the perspectives.

What does an engaged reader look like

In conjunction with the research questions listed above, this section describes the behavior and responses of child readers engaged with humorous text. The idea of reader engagement for this study is defined as one who is intrinsically motivated to read, uses reading strategies, and interacts socially with others in order to discuss and share about a book. The picture of an engaged reader is informed by the children's perspective of what they are doing during and after reading. It also draws on observations and records of their reading behavior, responses from book group discussions, one on one interviews, written responses, and humor survey responses. Based upon the data, an engaged reader with a humorous text in this study was motivated to read, read strategically, interacted socially during and after reading, and understood the strong emotional appeal a humorous text holds.

To begin this, it is important to introduce the different children whose voices are represented in this study. Table 1 introduces the students from Ms. F's classroom, while Table 2 presents Mrs. K's class.

Mae Leslie Katie Mandy	This was a group of third grade girls that at times were shy. They were all engaged readers. Katie was a struggling reader, but was also engaged in the books she read.
Maria Abby Margo	Maria and Abby were extremely shy third grade girls who shared very little, and appeared to be engaged readers. Margo was a struggling reader, but was also engaged, and shared ideas often.
Alexa Elizabeth Candy Angel	These were the "leaders" of the class. This group of fourth grade girls were very engaged readers, and were very vocal in book discussion groups. Alexa did seem to be somewhat reluctant (resistant), at times picking an easy book. (*Junie B. Jones*)
John Donnie Ray Danielle	This was a group of fourth grade boys, and a third grade girl, who worked and hung out together. Donnie described himself as a reluctant reader, but was very engaged during the study. Danielle was reluctant to the genre of humor, but was very engaged in the book she read. John and Ray were very engaged readers. All four of these students shared a lot during book discussions.
Bob Joey Billy Bob	This group of third grade boys was very quiet and did not share a lot. Joey was a reluctant reader. Both Billy Bob and Bob were engaged readers, but not as willing to share.
	Table 1: Ms. F's Third and Fourth Grade Class

Sigmund Jerry	Fifth graders that were both very strong and engaged readers
Chip Nikolas	These were both fourth grade boys. Both boys were rather reluctant or resistant readers. Nikolas had many books started, but never seemed to finish any of the books I observed him reading during the course of the study.
Jane Jennifer Kerrie	Kerrie and Jane were fifth graders. Kerrie was a very strong and engaged reader while Jane was a more reluctant reader. Jennifer was an engaged reader. Kerrie was the leader of this group.
	Table 2: Mrs. K's Fourth and Fifth Grade Class

Tables three and four detail the numbers of comments by students included in particular categories of the analysis. In Table three, Ms. F's class, all data sources were inc luded, book discussion groups, written responses, and the final humor survey. Repeated references by the same child in a discussion were counted as a single response. Table four contains the responses from Mrs. K's room.

Characteristic from the study	Number of comments by students on separate occasions
Characters	6 students
Language	25 students
Cliffhangers	5 students
The unexpected	21 students
Emotion	10 students
Motivation ("finding the funny")	29 students
Deeper reading	16 students
Visualization	14 students
Vocalization	14 students
Sharing	23 students
Table 3: Ms. F's Class	

Characteristic from the study	Number of comments by students on separate occasions
Language	4 students
Emotion	1 student
Motivation ("finding the funny")	6 students
Deeper reading	1 student
Visualization	2 students
Vocalization	1 student
Sharing	2 students
Table 4: Mrs. K's Class	

The overall tone of the young readers in this study was both excitement and enjoyment. Early on in the study a few third and fourth graders, Mae, Lesley, and Katie, were very excited about which picture book I was going to read to them. They rushed to me when I walked in the room in hopes of getting a "sneak peek" at the book I was going to read. As the study continued on there was much laughter to be found in the book discussion groups. There was "reminder laughter" when someone would tell a scene from the book and someone would respond, "Oh yeah!" remembering that part and breaking out in laughter. Usually these moments would also be followed by reenacting the scene from the book. Voices would be used and laughter would follow. There were also "Ah ha!" moments. These moments occurred when students would figure out some of the humor based upon a classmate's retelling. One of the biggest "Ah ha!" moments was when one group discovered that Louis the yard teacher in *Sideways Stories From Wayside School* could also be Louis the author. This particular incident is described in greater detail later in the chapter. One of the most powerful moments came during the first book group meetings. I was working with *Radio Fifth Grade*, and the teacher had a group for *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*. One of my group members told a funny scene from the book and the rest of the group started howling in laughter as they remembered the scene. That prompted a member of the teacher's group to respond:

John: There you go.

Teacher: There you go what?

> **Danielle:** The laughing…it's just...

> **Teacher:** So you hear this other book group laughing. What does that do to you as someone who's not reading that book?

> **Danielle:** That's funny to them..it might be funny to me..

These behaviors and responses were carried out throughout the study and are found in the examples below. Students appeared to enjoy the books and discussing the humor found within the books. During discussions students would laugh with one another both in the group and privately about events that happened in the books. As the earlier example with John and Danielle indicates, students were motivated and excited to read the books that their classmates found humorous.

Motivation

In this study, engaged readers with a humorous text were motivated to read more. While reading a humorous text, they were drawn into the book and were searching for the next humorous event. Young readers in this study called this, "finding the funny". It was an idea that came up in both classrooms. It was first seen with Mae and Elizabeth introducing the idea in a book discussion group about *Radio Fifth Grade*, and was seen again with a fifth grader, Sigmund.

> **Z:** Why does it make you want to keep reading?

> **Mae:** Because there's probably going to be other funny stuff in the book and you want to see what will happen.

> **Elizabeth:** Because you just want to see if there's more funny things going to happen.

> **Z:** Why do you think you want to keep reading?

Sigmund: Because you want to find more funny stuff…

Both Mae and Elizabeth agree that they're searching for funnier things in the book. The first funny event hooks them into the book, and they are motivated to find another funny event. Mae introduces this with her statement about wanting to see what will happen. Elizabeth continues this idea with her description of how she wants to see if more funny things are going to happen.

Engaged readers in this study were on the lookout for finding humorous events in the book. The idea set up by Mae and Elizabeth was also found with two fifth grade students in separate interviews. Sigmund too was searching for the next funny thing that happens in the story. One of Sigmund's classmates, Jerry, also referred to his expectations for the next humorous event. However, in Jerry's case, he also mentioned that he understood the funny may not come.

Jerry provided an example of this when I asked him what funny parts he liked in *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*. He restated one funny part, and the discussion continued.

> **Z:** Okay, what have you thought about the book so far? Have you thought it was very funny?
>
> **Jerry:** Some parts.
>
> **Z:** Do you remember any of those parts? You told me a few of them.
>
> **Jerry:** It just makes you want to keep on reading more and see what laugh you'll get next, *or if you'll get one*. (Emphasis mine)

Jerry describes how the book provides him with motivation to keep reading. Like the other readers, he is on a search for the humor, but Jerry

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understands it may never come. He's willing to take the chance, however, and continue with the book. He is willing to accept the risk that there may not be any more humorous events in the story, but the early laughs Jerry experienced provide the motivation to continue reading in hopes that more humor will follow. This engaged reader was motivated to find the humor in the text even with the risk that it might not be found.

This idea of motivation to read more of a humorous text was found throughout this study. The young readers in this study provided repeated evidence of being drawn into the books and motivated to read more.   Donnie, a fourth grader in the third and fourth grade class provides another example. Donnie described himself as a reluctant reader. He can read, but as he admitted, "Reading isn't my favorite thing and I just want to get it over with." His teacher agreed with this appraisal and in an informal interview mentioned him as probably her number one reluctant reader in the class. Throughout this study Donnie was excited to read and even told me that when he had to choose his last book for book groups he had a hard time deciding between two titles. For a reluctant reader, he showed unusually strong motivation to read more. In a book discussion group of *Chancy and the Grand Rascal,* he explained why funny books provide this motivation to keep reading by saying, "They make you want to read more" and "…you get excited about them."

Katie, a third grader and a struggling/reluctant reader, also was motivated by the humor found in a book.   Early in the study I observed Katie reading series books like the *Bailey Street Kids* or *The Magic Tree House*. Therefore, *Radio*

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Fifth Grade was a big jump for her. In a written response, Katie describes the motivation to complete the book. "It took me a week to read the whole book because it was a chaling {sic}…It makes me feel like I don't want to put the book dowen {sic} because it's a rilly {sic} good book". Katie's thoughts show that even though the book was a challenge to her, she was motivated to complete the book. In the book discussion groups, when getting through a challenging book was raised to her again, she said that the humor in the book was what motivated her to finish it. It is interesting how even though a book may be difficult for a child, humorous content may make it worth the extra effort to finish the book.

Donnie's excitement for reading and Katie's motivation to complete a challenging text are examples of what engaged readers with a humorous text look like. They were motivated to keep reading. The humor provided the spark and excitement they needed for motivation. This excitement that Donnie described is what seemed to motivate many of the young readers in this study to read the humorous texts. Considering Donnie's reluctance to read, the desire both Donnie and Katie had for reading humorous texts in this study is encouraging.

A few readers in this study were able to express their attitude in a different light. They created a new image for this motivation, describing how reading a humorous text was like filling a laugh bubble, or laugh balloon.

> **Amanda:** It's kind of like a sweet tooth, you have a funny bubble, a laugh bubble…. Because, a funny bubble is like, if you like funny books, funny stuff, it's big….and.

> **Teacher:** And you do what? What do you do because you have a big funny bubble?

Amanda: You read lots….

Abby: It's kind of like what Amanda said, it's like a big bubble, but more like a balloon, and like if you read a lot of funny books and it fills up with air but if you don't then it deflates.

In this passage what is especially notable is how the girls constructed their own metaphors for the impact humor has upon them. Abby listened to her classmate's metaphor and built upon it to create a more meaningful one for herself. It is apparent that the humor they found in the books appeals to them and makes them want to read more.

Their new metaphors help to describe how they are intrinsically motivated to read more of a humorous text, and how they are drawn to the humor in order to fill their "laugh balloons, bubbles or sweet tooth". When reading humorous books these engaged readers were motivated to read more, and after completing a text, anxious to find other humorous books as well.

Reading Strategically

Studies of reading engagement show strategy use (McCarthey, Hoffman, & Galda, 1999; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Alvermann, 1999). An engaged reader with a humorous text also reads strategically, and the young readers in this study used a particular set of strategies: visualization, voice, and understanding the need to read critically in order to comprehend the story and enjoy the humor found within the text.

Visualization

Engaged readers in this study used the key reading strategy of visualization (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999) in order to assist in their

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comprehension of the text. The use of visualization was a pattern found repeatedly in the data. Both classrooms had readers who discussed the use of visualization.

Margo, a student who requires extra assistance in school, especially in reading, was one of the first to introduce this in the first book she read, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School.*

> **Z:** Okay, when you're reading a book and you find something funny in there what do you do when you're reading?
>
> **Margo:** I make a picture.
>
> **Z:** Oh you make a picture, where? In your mind or do you draw a picture?
>
> **Margo:** In my mind.

While Margo does struggle in school, she employs a key strategy found with engaged readers to assist in comprehension of the story. Her ability to identify this strategy so quickly indicates that visualization may be particularly useful to readers of humorous texts.

This pattern of visualization was also found in the fourth and fifth grade classroom. In the book group discussion of *The ~~Worst~~ Best School Year Ever,* Jane brings up the idea of imagining what the Herdmans' ferocious looking cat being walked on a leash looks like.

> **Z:** what makes them weird?
>
> **Kerrie:** They walk a cat. With a chain around its neck.
>
> **Z:** (laughs) And why do they do that? (laughing) That's a mean cat.

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> **Jane:** Just imagine it in your head, someone approaching you with that cat.

The laughter is indicative that the group and I loved the image of this cat approaching someone walking down the street. The Herdmans keep their cat on a leash when they walk it; imaging such a sight helps create the humorous image. A number of engaged readers in this study described how they were better able to depict the humor when they created a picture in their mind, as Margo discussed at the beginning of this section. Creating a mental image of absurd characters played an important role in engagement for the young readers in this study. The mean cat is an example of how an absurd character appeals to children as Kappas (1967) and Shaeffer & Hopkins (1988) have described. It is important to note that this idea of "making pictures" or "just imagining" came spontaneously from the students, and it carried over into other discussions as well.

A quiet fourth grader, Ray, mentioned the idea that humorous texts made it easier to form pictures in his mind. He discussed this when he talked about the Fuzzy and Puffy stories found in *Radio Fifth Grade*.

> **Ray:** Well, like the cats, Fuzzy and Puffy, cats can't hold other cats overand dunking them in a toilet without the other cat slipping through their hands and I mean it's just funny to picture that…. I think it's easier with funny books….

Ray's description of Fuzzy and Puffy, the cute little kittens in Korman's book *Radio Fifth Grade* and how they dunk each other in toilets, exemplify why it is easier for him to visualize the scene. The image is a comical one, not one you would expect from two cute little kittens. For some engaged readers in this study,

humorous situations made it easier to create mental images. The author's use of

humorous incidents through physical or slapstick humor is one aspect of

humorous literature that engaged readers often reported picturing in their minds.

Fifth grader Jerry also commented on ease of visualization. As I was

describing my favorite scene from *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*, Jerry

responded, "That definitely brought pictures in my head." Jerry immediately and

spontaneously brought up the idea of visualization and how that played a major

role in reading the story. Jerry was a very strong reader, described as such by

both his classroom teacher and the long-term substitute. His use of visualization

is important to note alongside Margo's similar statement of the idea at the

beginning of this section. Both strong readers and struggling readers from this

study expressed the importance of visualization of a humorous text.

The discussion of my favorite excerpt from *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*

sparked a discussion about visualization and whether or not Jerry did this a lot

with humorous books, or if other texts also required this strategy.

> **Z:** Do you think it happens more with funny books or does it happen with other fiction books?

> **Jerry:** More with funny books, I picture these cartoons in my head kind of.

Jerry's discussion of how he visualizes more with funny books now adds another

layer. As an engaged reader Jerry describes what the picture looks like in terms

of cartoons His ability to take a form that children pull much humor from,

cartoons, and incorporate it into his reading of the humorous text provides an

example of intertextuality. Ms. F's fourth grader, John also included

intertextuality, making reference to other books and television shows he had seen.

John, also claimed it was easier to use visualization with humorous books, and

extended the idea of intertextuality as well.

> **John:** I think it's easier in funny books too, because in T.V, on cartoon channel, there's many funny stuff and you've seen funny stuff that characters do and the author sometimes gets funny things from other people so sometimes you may already have a vision of what's going on in your head and like a thing from somewhere else.

In John's discussion of visualization, his example of the cartoon channel on

television extended Jerry's idea of how the picture he forms in his head is a

cartoon. Again intertextuality comes into play in the use of visualization with a

humorous text.   It is interesting that two students in separate classes described

these two reading strategies in tandem, both using intertextual connections to aid

their visualization.   It is also interesting that Jerry finds he uses visualization

more in humorous texts than in other genres he reads. Interestingly, John also

makes reference to the *author's* perspective. He seems to understand that both

reader and author draw on other texts.   As discussed in the reading engagement

section found in chapter two, John is using a variety of reading strategies that

Baker, Dreher, and Guthrie, (2000); Mosenthal, (1999); Guthrie and Anderson,

(1999); and Guthrie & Wigfield, (1997) discuss as being essential to reading

engagement.   In the present study a few of the engaged readers with a humorous

text, appeared to understand the importance of using visualization as a reading

strategy.

Reading critically is another characteristic of an engaged reader that was observed in this study. In two examples, this was also tied in with visualization. A pattern emerged from a third and a fourth grader in their critical comparison of the image in their mind with the illustration found in the text. Two different ideas emerged from their thoughts. The third grader found the difference interesting and discussed how it affected her interpretation of the story, while the fourth grade reader felt the text illustration destroyed his unique interpretation of the image.

Danielle showed this in her discussion of *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*, her first book group.

> 55   **Danielle:** Ahhh here it is. "he wore a leather eye patch cast over
> 56   his eye," And then I had a totally different thing here. It gave me a
> 57   better picture that I thought was funny…. Because it, you have a
> 58   picture in your head and then you turn the page and it's kind of
> 59   surprising. Because you have the picture in your head and then
> 60   you see the real picture and you think it's   funny because the one
> 61   you had in your head wasn't right.

In reading a part of the text, Danielle is able to describe the section of the text that helped her create the picture in her head. Later, in lines 57-61 she describes her disappointment that the picture in her head wasn't right with the picture found in the book. Her view is that the text holds the correct image and her visualization, since it is different from the book's illustration, affected her interpretation of the text. Her classmate Donnie also employed this strategy of comparing images, but his resulted in the opposite effect.

> **Donnie:** Well, like…in different chapters…I didn't like   looking at
> the pictures with the people because they gave me a different picture of

the person than I thought. So, I didn't like doing it, but for the first one when I saw [Mrs. Gorf] that's not how I thought she looked so I didn't want to look at them anymore.

Donnie's opinion differs greatly from Danielle's. He values his visualization more then the illustration from the text. He is not willing to adapt his version to fit the text. He finds his interpretation more important than the illustration provided in the text.   Donnie would rather keep his unique image and use it as his interpretation of the humor in the story. This was also found in their use of interpretive voice when reading the humorous texts.

Vocalization

Another reading strategy for engaged readers in this study was the use of vocalization, which appears to be an extension beyond visualization. This idea was brought up very early in the study when I was reading picture books to the third and fourth grade class. In the discussion following a reading of *Tacky the Penguin,* fourth grader John made reference to a guest speaker who had come to discuss music composition with the entire school.

75   **John:** I just want to add a little.

76   **Teacher:** Okay, go for it.

77   **John:** Um, when Victor came to talk to us about music and he had
78   that one clip that seemed really scary and made it really funny.
80   Um it's kind of like how music makes everything in a movie and
81   the voice makes everything in the book.

82   **Teacher:** The voices set the stage for whether it's funny or not.
83   We're going to try something like that on Monday.

85   **Z:** Talk a little more about that when you say the voice makes a
86   book. What do you mean by that?

79

87   **John:** Well, I mean the author writes the words down and
88   um..most likely had an idea on his, his or her of how he or she
89   wanted the book to go like what voice each character had, but if
90   you hadn't met the author you most likely will make a voice of
91   your own for the character that you think fits a character.

John provides intriguing thoughts on the importance of vocalization when

reading a book, explaining how a reader creates their own voices for the

characters in a book. The creation of character voices by young readers occurred

frequently throughout this study. His idea that "voice makes everything in a

book" may have been what set the tone for the other students to discuss this idea.

John's thoughts may have also been the catalyst for the social construction of

meaning as Vygotsky (1978) described. John's early thoughts may have helped

children think about the use of voice as they read the books in this study. The

social construction of meaning was also seen in the group discussions. As

children introduced a voice of a character, for example, the parrot Winston

Churchill, they would keep adding their own voices to the characters. The

children fed off of one another to construct the humor found within certain scenes

in the different books. The book discussions provided an outlet for the students to

construct the humor together. However, even students in the other class who had

not heard John's comment had a tendency to use different voices when describing

specific characters from the books.

John's thoughts expressed in lines 87-91 show the importance he places

on the author's perspective. John's comments help make connections about the

interaction between reader and text. He is aware that the author may have

specific ideas that he/she wants the reader to see. Yet John also sees that each individual reader plays an important role in the interpretation of the text. John was one student in this study who often described the idea that the reader brings much to the text they read. What is notable about his descriptions is that he also appeared to understand that both the reader and the author bring experiences to the text. The readers understood the importance of the use of voice, and as John said very early in the study, "... you most likely will make a voice of your own for the character…." This was the case for many students as they discussed the different books.

Many times children would break into different voices when describing different events from the stories.   The parrot, Winston Churchill, in Korman's *Radio Fifth Grade* received a lot of this attention. Readers often restated Winston's statements in a parrot voice. Fifth grader Kerrie was willing to try on a parrot voice in her description of Winston's "This parrot is a rip-off" statement. Third grader Bobby, too, was willing to break into a parrot voice to make a similar statement. The young readers came back to group discussions remembering these funny voices they were introduced to in that day's reading. This idea was taken even further with Danielle in her discussion of *Radio Fifth Grade.*

> 10   **Danielle:** Well, the parrot put the voice in my head, and so did the
> 11   Fuzzy and Puffy voices, because in this one show, in the
> 12   Emperor's New Groove this evil witch turns into a kitten and it's a
> 13   very squeaky voice for her so I was thinking of Puffy having the
> 14   squeaky voice and Fuzzy having like a deeper voice. And with the
> 15   parrot I was like.…If you have voices it sort of makes...It sort of

16 feels like you're in the book. You're the character because you
17 made your own voice.

Danielle describes how she was able to create voices for the characters from the book. However, like John in an earlier example, she also uses the concept of intertextuality. She explains how she used a movie, *The Emperor's New Groove,* to find the voice for one of the kittens. She also explains *why* she used the voices. In lines 15 through 17 she says, "If you have voices it sort of makes…it sort of feels like you're in the book...you're the character because you made your own voice." Here her engagement with the book becomes apparent. She describes how she begins to feel a part of the story. Again, we see the transaction between reader and text. The use of both visualization and vocalization provides further evidence that engaged readers use particular reading strategies with humorous literature. Engaged readers in this study used visualization and vocalization as primary reading strategies. The use of these strategies may allow the reader to take more ownership in the text, as both John and Danielle describe.

Deeper Reading

A final common reading strategy that was discussed often in this study was reading deeper, or critical reading. There was much discussion about reading deeper to "find the funny" in *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*. In the story Uncle Will told a lot of "whoppers" (i.e. lies or exaggerations) and there was much trickery in his stories that made them funny. In order to understand this trickery, the students described how they had to read deeper. This is related to the idea of deeper reading, or critical reading as discussed by Shaeffer and Hopkins, (1988);

Whitmer, (1986); and Nilsen and Nilsen, (1982). They believe there is more

behind the humor than the laughing, and comprehending the humor is more

complex than critics believe. Whitmer (1986) discusses the idea of critical

reading stating: "...the key word in critical reading is evaluation. This is a

categorization skill, involving comparisons as readers discriminate real from

unreal and fact from fantasy, recognize assumptions, and pass judgment upon the

validity and reliability of the text" (p.533). In the present study, examples of this

are best found with *Chancy and the Grand Rascal* book groups. Some young

readers described how they needed to evaluate much of what Uncle Will was

saying to determine the truth or lies.

> **Teacher:** What about this book was different? Or what made you do something different?
>
> **Ray:** I read more harder. Not harder, but clearly to know what was coming next.
>
> **Teacher:** You mean you read more clearly, you,
>
> **Ray:** I mean I was paying more attention than reading it through….
>
> **Donnie:** Because of all the trickery in it kind of makes you lose your place a lot.

The two boys discuss how they read more closely to understand the humor found

in the book. Keeping up with the trickery proved challenging if they did not read

closely. They also imply how they may have to reread in order to understand

parts that may be confusing. This indicates they were monitoring their own

reading to verify they comprehended what they read. Self-monitoring while

reading is one of the reading strategies used by engaged readers according to Guthrie & Anderson (1999).

Reading carefully was also discussed in an individual interview with fifth grader Jerry. Jerry was able to analyze what he needs to do as a reader to find the funny parts.

> **Jerry:** It makes you think a lot about how this person might trick them. Because you pretty much know I think that he's going to be tricked.
>
> **Z:** So you have to think very carefully then when you read the book?
>
> **Jerry:** Yeah.
>
> **Z:** Ok, what are you looking for when you're reading?
>
> **Jerry:** Well, I look at parts a lot. I'm looking for rambling and rambling, the shiftiest people lie.

Jerry is able to identify that he too needs to read more deeply in *Chancy and the Grand Rascal.* His description of "thinking of how this person might trick them" is an example of critical reading. He is also able to identify *what* he looks for while he's reading and to provide an explanation of his thinking. He tells himself to look for a character that is rambling. In the book under discussion, a character's rambling will lead to the "whopper" and in turn, the humor. Jerry knows that the rambling is a technique the author may be applying to "trick" the reader. Jerry's ability to read critically is crucial if he is to "stay on top" of the story, and not be tricked by the author. Three of the readers in this study, Ray, Donnie, and Jerry, appeared to be well aware that understanding the humor in some books takes more critical reading than other texts may require.

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The need for reading more deeply was not limited to *Chancy and the Grand Rascal.* It was also noted in the second book discussion group of *Radio Fifth Grade* as John mentions in this example.

> **Z:** John, one of the things you talked about when you wrote about it was that you were always on the alert looking for laughing. What did you mean by that? What do you mean by you're always on the alert for laughing when you read this book?

> **John:** Well, ummm cause after I read the first few chapters I knew that it was probably going to be real laugh out loud funny and stuff and ummmm sometimes when I read I just kind of get the words and they go past me so I'm just reading words and I don't get the point of the story so I was kind of reading more in depth of the story umm looking for what might be the funny part.

> **Z:** Okay, but you say you were reading more in depth throughout the whole book or just (John finishes for me)

> **John:** Ummmmm, mainly the whole book, I mean maybe the first chapter I wasn't because that was just introducing everybody but after that I started reading more in depth.

John confirms what other readers in this study have introduced. In order to "find the funny" in the story, he needs to be reading closely. He also admits that with other texts he may skip over words and let them "go past me." With humorous books, however, he was often on the watch for funny parts so he needed to pay close attention to his reading, and self monitor. He provides further support that engaged readers use the strategy of critical reading and monitoring to comprehend humorous texts. Within both classrooms, the idea of reading strategically was an important aspect found with engaged readers reading humorous texts. Readers in this study described how and why they read strategically and the importance this played in finding and understanding the humor.

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Tending to specific attributes

Readers in this study were also able to describe key attributes of humorous literature that were important to them. Many attributes have been reported to attract readers to humorous literature. In previous research Shannon, (1999); Mallan, (1993); and Kappas, (1967) found specific attributes of humorous literature that appealed to children. Some of those elements-- for example, the unexpected, characters and language--were confirmed in this study. Throughout this work, the presence of a different attribute "cliffhangers," emerged as an important element in children's comments about the source of their pleasure.

The Unexpected

Seeing the unexpected occur in a humorous book is another attribute that appealed to children in this study, supporting what Shannon (1999) and Mallan (1993) found in their earlier studies. This idea was well summed up by different children's responses in the final humor survey.

> **Elizabeth:** How the books made you laugh when something not expected came.
>
> **Abby:** It was funny how some things tricked you.
>
> **Amanda:** I thought it was funny when Chancy took what he thought were three-yolked eggs to the store and they just started hatching. I thought this was funny because instead of having three yolks they had a chick.
>
> **Donnie:** I liked the book because it wasn't like any other school. It wasn't like other schools because of the way it was built. And because the children fall out of windows and want to sell their toes.

All of these responses are examples of how the unexpected appealed to these readers. Their expectations were set up for something in particular, but then when

something completely different happened, catching them off guard, they clearly

took pleasure in the unexpected twist.

Perhaps the best example of unexpected humor occurs with *Sideways Stories From Wayside School.* When the final group reading the book learned from me that Louis the yard teacher could be Louis Sachar the author, they were overwhelmed.

> **Z:** Why? How does it make you feel when you figure it all out that Louis is the author and he's in the story and he wrote all the stories?
>
> **Elizabeth:** Well, it just puts a different perspective.
>
> **John:** Ummmmm it kind of does put a different way, a different way you look at the book. I think the author did do it on purpose because ummmm he felt like putting himself in the story or putting a twist at the end of the story. And ummmm I'm just kind of shocked Louis, the author and Louis are the same people.

This new idea had truly stumped the group. It left John, a very verbal child, almost speechless. Elizabeth started off the discussion with her statement of how it puts a different perspective on the entire idea. John, after regaining some speech, but clearly still overwhelmed, attempted to explain why the author may have chosen this approach. This new twist John describes is the unexpected turn that has left him speechless. Clearly, this narrative device that Sachar used, had made an impression upon the readers. Catching them off guard is one aspect of this. Now, it forces the young readers to go back and think of all the chapters where Louis the yard teacher was a character. As both Elizabeth and John say, it puts a different perspective or twist in the story. The use of the unexpected is a strategy for humor that authors employ, making the reader have to read more

deeply. Young readers in this study enjoyed the unexpected events found in the books they discussed. They also enjoyed many of the different characters found within the books they read in this study.

Characters

Humorous characters are an integral part of children's literature. How readers respond to humorous characters is an important aspect of response (Cleary, 1982; Monson, 1978). In this study, the importance of characters was especially apparent in the final humor survey where some students discussed various attributes of the books they found funny. Some discussed characters alone, while others combined characters with other attributes discussed.

Billy Bob enjoyed both the characters and the language:

" The funny thing about the three books was the way the characters talk to each other".

Again, the idea of dialogue, or voices, comes into play, but the characters also play a role in that attribute.

John enjoyed how the author was able to start the story, and how the characters took over from there:

"The way the author set up the book and how the characters kept the book going"

Throughout this research John frequently discussed the author's craft. Here he seems to be aware of how the author creates the story and then allows the characters to take it over.

Danielle wrote that the characters in all three of her books were funny. At times she pulled specific characters to mention:

"Characters in *Summer Reading is Killing Me*. Fuzzy and Puffy in *Radio Fifth Grade*. Characters in *Chancy*".

This idea is important because Danielle had mentioned in a few discussions how she did not prefer humorous books. She described herself as a fan of fantasy. However, in all three of these humorous books, she indicated the characters in them as a source of enjoyment. The characters she met helped keep her engaged in a genre she originally believed she didn't prefer. The numerous characters created by these different authors were a feature of the books that appealed to many readers in this study.

Language

The use of language described at the beginning of this section was another attribute readers in this study found particularly humorous. Language, also referred to as word play by Shannon, (1999) and Kappas, (1967) was also cited for its appeal in this research. The language children preferred in this study was a bit different. The two main language attributes preferred in this study were the flow of language and the use of language as opposed to verbal play (i.e. puns, riddles, verbal tricks) found in books such as *The Phantom Tollbooth* (Juster, 1961). Jane brought up language as a favorite feature in the fourth and fifth grade group reading *Radio Fifth Grade*. She repeatedly commented how she enjoyed the language the characters used, especially the names they called each other in the book. When she compared *Radio Fifth Grade* to *The ~~Worst~~ Best School Year*

Ever, she stated: "Well, in that book it was sort of funny because how they communicated what they said. Just the whole idea of what's going on is funny in this book." Initially I was confused by what she meant, yet each time I brought the idea up Jane stated how she enjoyed the way the characters called each other names, how they communicated with each other, and the dialogue between characters. She was able to recognize an attribute of humorous books that appealed to her. She noted the difference between *Radio Fifth Grade* and *The ~~Worst~~ Best School Year Ever,* by how Korman's use of language was powerful, but that the description in *The ~~Worst~~ Best School Year Ever* made the scenes more vivid, and in turn more humorous. This reinforced what Billy Bob described about how characters talked with each other.

Some focus on language also appeared in final humor surveys. Mae described why she would read other books by these authors:

"Yes, I would read another by the author Gordon Korman because of how the author played with the words and also little stories he put in."

Mae enjoyed Korman's use of language just as Jane did. The use of the names or the dialogue between the characters appealed to both of these girls. Their enjoyment of the dialogue however, varies compared to previous studies' discovery of "word play."

Alexa describes a specific element of language she enjoyed in *Junie B. Jones and the Stupid Smelly Bus.* She wrote: "What I think I thought was funny was how Junie. B. kept on using words over and over again. For example a lot of

things she said pretty much ended with the words 'I think' and 'my most favoritest thing in the whole world'."

Alexa enjoyed the simple made up language that Junie B. used. This supports the superiority theory described by Cleary (1982) and Monson (1978). Children enjoy reading about other children learning something they have already mastered (Cleary 1982). In further discussions with Alexa, she described how she used to talk like Junie B. Jones does. It could be that Cleary is correct in her idea and that Alexa does feel relieved to know she has grown up and her speech has developed well beyond that of Junie B. Jones.

Cliffhangers

The emphasis or preference for cliffhangers in humorous books was a unique finding in this research. This creates a new category beyond the attributes of: humorous characters, poking fun at authority, physical humor, nonsense, and humorous discourse (see Chapter 2). This new pattern is important to examine. Children were drawn into the text by wanting to find the next funny event in the story, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The idea of a cliffhanger was mentioned early in the data collection by John, in his first book discussion group with *Chancy and the Grand Rascal*.

> **John:** Usually funny books have, funny books or exciting books, they have cliffhangers in them that you want to find out what's going to happen next, and since it's a good book you know, you know something good is going to happen, especially since it's a cliffhanger.
>
> **Teacher:** So what does that do to you then?
>
> **John:** It just kind of, It just kind of turns me into Curious George and I want to keep reading ahead…

John describes how the cliffhanger is what motivated him to keep reading. His analogy of being turned into Curious George is a powerful one. He understands the impact the cliffhanger has on him. It makes him more involved in the book, and more motivated to keep reading it.

John was one of several children to address the issue of cliffhangers. In the *Sideways Stories From Wayside School* second group, Donnie made a similar point. While he was not willing to go as far as John in saying that there were cliffhangers, he described the same impact-- it kept him wanting to read.

> **Donnie:** It's like, kind of a cliffhanger, so you want to keep wanting to find out, what happens next. Because you think the next chapter might be real funny…. They don't usually have very many cliffhangers, it's just you want to keep reading because, it's funny, so it's not, it's kind of like a cliffhanger that you want to see what happens to the next person.

Donnie also sees the value the cliffhanger has in humorous literature. It motivates the reader to want to read more. Instead of simply focusing on what happens next, however, Donnie states that the reader is motivated to read the chapter because it might be really funny. Meeting the new characters and seeing if they're even funnier is the type of "cliffhanger" that keeps Donnie, a self-pronounced reluctant reader, reading. Both John and Donnie talk about the impact the cliffhanger has upon them. The anticipation of humor acts as a cliffhanger that keeps them turning the pages. A few other students in this class also described how the cliffhanger was an element of the text that motivated them to keep reading.

Social Interaction

Young readers in this study also showed patterns demonstrating the strong social appeal humor has in the context of humorous texts. The children in this study described and demonstrated numerous examples of social interaction during and after reading the books.

Some children described how they shared with others while they were reading, as well as after they had finished reading a section from the book. Still others described how they shared with people outside of the classroom. In this category there were examples of interaction that also lead to social motivation. The social interaction the readers in this study experienced provided them opportunities to both share the book with others, and motivate them to read other humorous texts. A clear example of social interaction with the third and fourth graders was a desire to share their book with others.

After reading a humorous book, children appeared to feel the need to get the book out to others. Their motivation went beyond simply wanting to read more books. Katie stated this best:

> **Teacher:** Ok…what about…Have you ever shared something that's funny with a mom or dad? When you're reading? Why do you do that?
>
> **Katie:** Because you read it, because you feel you need to get it out to someone.

Katie understands this need for sharing. The book was so much fun that the reader needs to share it with whomever they can. The teacher, Ms. F. mentioned this as well in her interview.

Z: …How do you feel children engage in humorous text after their reading?

Teacher: I think they'll share it with a friend. They'll want to share it to the class. They'll bring it to me and say, hey would you read this to the whole class? They'll seek out more similar books by that author.

Here, the teacher supports the idea of sharing with others. She describes how her students will share a book with a friend. She also describes how sometimes this is not good enough, and a wider audience must be reached. In that case they make their plea to their teacher, in hopes that she would read it to the entire class, thus reaching even more of their friends and classmates.

In book discussion groups the teacher and I found the students had a strong urge to share their books with others. I found an example of this with Mae. Mae shared *Radio Fifth Grade* with everyone she knew. During book discussion groups and conversations with students in the class outside of book groups, I was told that she talked about the book constantly, even telling people on her bus about it. This was supported by an incident in the fourth and fifth grade class. One day I was observing in the fourth and fifth grade classroom and had all five of the books on a desk. One student, Chip, saw the books, paged through them, and flippantly told me that he would read only two, pointing to *Sideways Stories From Wayside School* and *Radio Fifth Grade*. I asked him why those two. He informed me he had already read *Sideways Stories*, and that he had heard funny things about *Radio Fifth Grade*. Knowing that Gordon Korman was not a well-known author with children in this school, I asked how he knew about the book. He informed me that "some kid" on his bus had told him about it. I was later able

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to determine that "kid" was Mae. However, Mae was not willing to tell me that she shared it with so many people, just that she discussed the book with others. Seeing how impassioned Mae was about it, I asked her why she felt the need to share the book in her second book group.

> **Mae:** Well, I think it's funny and I think other people would like it.
>
> **Z:** So you want to share it…What are you hoping to do when you share it with somebody?
>
> **Mae:** Hoping to kind of make them laugh and want to read the book.

As mentioned in chapter two, earlier studies (Hickman, 1984; Hepler & Hickman, 1982) described the role of social interaction during and after reading. Children in this study also nudged each other and pointed to share the "good part" of a humorous text, as Hickman (1984) reported in her research. Social interaction played a major role with the young readers in this study, especially with the need to share the books. Children even described how sharing a humorous book could lead to a new friendship. One book discussion group discussed this idea of how a humorous book could cultivate a friendship.

> 124 **Katie:** Because it just feels good to make someone laugh. I mean
> 125 because you're that funny person that they're laughing at so you
> 126 want to keep on making them laugh…. Because it makes you feel
> 127 good like if you make that other person laugh and they giggle and
> 128 stuff and they just like to remember that the whole time. Then it
> 129 just makes you feel good like you're a good friend because they'll
> 130 always remember you and that funny thing you said…. Like I said
> 131 before. It feels good to let, have someone always remember you so
> 132 it feels good to have them read a funny book because you like the
> 133 funniness, you feel like you're that person making someone else
> 134 laugh. So it makes you feel like you have a new friend. That you're
> 135 making someone laugh. So it just feels good….

136   **Lesley:** Because you, like when they're done they can come up to
137   you and say like, ohhh I think this book was funny, and then you
138   can start a conversation. And then that conversation can grow into
139   friendship, because, because you can keep on talking about the
140   book!

This is an example that encompasses many facets of friendship and social

interaction. The children's description of social interaction from this example are

intriguing. These two girls feel that sharing a funny book is an introduction to

meeting and creating a new friendship. The friendship begins with a book, which

is the common bond the two friends would share while their friendship grows and

flourishes. The children feel strongly that the friendship is based on that funny

book they both read, as Lesley suggests in lines 137-140, "ohhh I think this book

was funny, and then you can start a conversation. And then that conversation can

grow into friendship, because, because you can keep on talking about the book!"

Lesley believes that humor can be the common bond both friends have, and in this

example it is a funny book. Katie is consistent throughout all the book groups

that it is important to share humorous books with friends. She values the giggles

that are shared among friends, as well as the attention the person who initiates the

giggles receives. She also addressed the appeal of laughing in her final humor

survey. She wrote:

"I would read books by this author because they write funny books and it

feels good to laugh." Katie consistently sees the value of laughter and its

importance in both reading and life. For a third grader, she is very aware of

laughter and the role it can play in friendship. Again, this is confirmation of how the role of humor is important in the lives of children.

Lesley supports the idea repeated again and again by Katie. Friendship can be developed by a humorous book, as a common bond shared among friends.

The third and fourth graders also expanded their idea of sharing. Many told how they recommended parts to family members. Two examples in particular stand out. Ray talks about how he recommended books to his mother after he read them.

> **Teacher:** Why did you want to tell your mom that?
>
> **Ray:** Well, she doesn't read that much books, because she's usually working, and she might be interested to just stop and when I'm finished reading she could read some of it.
>
> **Teacher:** Has she ever done that when you've read a book before?
>
> **Ray:** *Radio Fifth Grade.*
>
> **Teacher:** She read it after you read it?
>
> **Ray:** Ahhh yeah.
>
> **Teacher:** Why did she do that?
>
> **Ray:** Because I told her some of the funny parts and she thought it was really funny so she wanted to read some of it.
>
> **Teacher:** Yeah. What did she think of it? Did you talk to her about it at all?
>
> **Ray:** Yeah, she really liked the book.
>
> **Teacher:** Yeah?
>
> **Ray:** Uh huh.

In this example Ray is quite interested in helping encourage his mother to read more. He understands that his mother is busy, but believes that the humorous book is the type that will motivate her to want to read. What's even more interesting is that this was not the only time he recommended a humorous book to his mother. *Chancy and the Grand Rascal* was the second book he recommended, after she completed and enjoyed *Radio Fifth Grade*. This idea of recommending humorous books to family members in hopes that they read more was also described by Joey, a quiet third grader.

> **Joey:** …but I would tell my brother because he never reads.
>
> **Teacher:** Really? So why would you give your brother, who never reads, a funny book?
>
> **Joey:** Well, because maybe that will give him interest to start reading books.
>
> **Teacher:** Why do you think the funny book will get your brother interested in reading books?
>
> **Joey:** Because it would make him laugh really hard and it would get him into, it would try and make him laugh..and try and get him into other funny books and he'll start reading.
>
> **Teacher:** Do you think it's important for your brother to read more?
>
> **Joey:** Yeah.
>
> **Teacher:** Why?
>
> **Joey:** Well, because..so he can be smarter…

Here Joey too describes recommending a book to a family member. His hope is that the humor is what will hook his brother into reading. The third and fourth

graders provided many examples of sharing with friends inside and outside of the classroom, as well as with siblings and parents.

It is necessary to note, however, that very little sharing took place in the fourth and fifth grade classroom. I consistently asked all the participants if they had shared their book with anyone, and the answer was always the same, no. From my discussions with them, it appeared that the students did not have unsolicited discussions of the books as the third and fourth graders did. Once the group of girls that read *Radio Fifth Grade* said they had begun to discuss it with each other at lunch, but when I pursued this idea they backed off and said the lunch bell rang, so they had to move on to other things. I did catch Sigmund sharing a funny part of *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* with his friend Jerry. However, Sigmund was not very interested in explaining why he wanted to share, instead telling me exactly what he shared with Jerry, not why he decided to share with him. It is not clear whether this phenomenon found in the fourth and fifth grade group is typical or not. Considering that children's interest and attitude about reading may wane in the late elementary school years (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995) it is possible that this includes their interest and attitude toward sharing a book with others. However, there could be other explanations as well. The classroom community may not have been a welcoming environment for spontaneous sharing since the long-term substitute was new variable in that classroom.

The young readers' motivation to read after finishing a humorous book provided more emerging patterns. While Katie, Mae, and Lesley felt humorous

books can lead to friendship, many more readers felt that a humorous text led to a

social motivation for reading. As the third and fourth grade teacher said earlier in

this chapter, the students form a connection with the text and author, then try to

locate as many similar books by the same or different authors they can find. This

pattern was identified by the young readers as well.

After reading and sharing the books with others, the social interaction

provided motivation for them to read more humorous books by the same or

different authors. Children became curious about a book when they heard others

talking and laughing about it. This curiosity provided the motivation for them to

pick up a book and read it. However, social interaction leading to motivation was

only observed in the third and fourth grade class. Angel's comments exemplify

this idea of social motivation quite well.

> **Z:** Now, some people described that they heard two people laughing in the corner and they wanted to know what was so funny. Why is it you want to find out something that's funny? Why do you want to get in on the joke, or get in on the book? What is it about that? Angel what do you think? If you have Candy and Lesley laughing, do you want to find out what they're laughing about?
>
> **Angel:** They might not tell the whole story because maybe Candy's telling a Fuzzy and Puffy story to Lesley and she's not telling the whole story of the book to Lesley and I've heard the book and she doesn't want to tell the whole story so Lesley will read it. And then…I hear them laughing so I go over there and see what it's about and I want them to tell me. So I'm like what's so good about it? and she's like I don't really want to tell you, you're going to have to read it.

Angel's comments are insightful for two reasons. The first aspect is her

description of how in humorous books people will tell selected stories from the

text. In follow up discussions to this, Angel discussed how in other books you

may just give a general overview of the story, but in humorous books readers will tell specific parts of the book. The second idea found in her thoughts reinforces the idea of social dynamics coming into play with humorous books, exemplified in her desire to know what her friends are laughing about. Another interesting aspect of Angel's thoughts is how she included her actual friends sharing books with each other. This idea of using real friends as examples of people talking about books that make them want to read more was a pattern found throughout the study.

> Danielle adopted this approach in the *Radio Fifth Grade* discussion group.
>
> **Danielle:** It's sort of like, I came in when Mae was talking to Lesley, because I heard Lesley laughing, since I like to read funny books. I was thinking that if I heard Lesley laugh I would probably laugh and if I heard them laugh I had the idea that it would be a really funny book and……
>
> **Ray:** Well when I was reading my book I heard a lot of people laugh and Donnie was telling me some funny things about it, but I wanted to know what those funny things were, the ones they were telling me, so…

Again, the children express how their curiosity is piqued by the laughter and discussion of funny parts from their classmates. They use their friends as examples of who helps create their interest in wanting to read a book. Danielle uses Lesley as an example, and Ray refers to his conversation with Donnie as to why he wanted to read *Radio Fifth Grade*.

What begins to emerge here, is the children's description of how being an outsider of a book discussion, and hearing other children talk about a particular book makes them want to know more about it and be able to be "in on" the discussion. This was apparent when children heard others laughing about a book.

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The young readers in this study did not enjoy being left out of a joke, and wanted to read the book in order to share in the laughter. In the first example Angel described this idea with her friend Candy talking about a book. Danielle also described her friends Mae and Lesley talking about a book. It's important to remember that Danielle originally said humor was not her first choice of books to read, but that hearing her friends talk and laugh about these books motivates her to read the book. The discussion and laughter may have provided the motivation for readers in this study to select a specific book for their next choice for book discussion groups.

Emotional Appeal

While children were motivated by others to read books in this study, they also discussed the importance of humor and humorous books to life in general. The role humor plays can also have an emotional impact. In her written response after reading *Radio Fifth Grade*, Danielle writes:

"I felt happy with the book because it made me feel very good. With all the funny stuff in it. Like when I'm sad and don't want to read, it turned me around".

Here Danielle describes how the humor has the ability to change her feelings. It is able to cheer her up when she is feeling down. She continued this idea in the book discussion group as well. She mentioned how before she goes to the orthodontist, she prefers to read a funny book, because it puts her in the right mindset before she has to go through that experience. In the first *Chancy and the Grand Rascal* group she made the following comments,

Danielle: Because, say you're about to get your braces on, which I don't want to do again. Because I'm going to the orthodontist Thursday after school, and I don't want to go. And if I read a funny book I'm going to think I'm happy now. And when I get out I'm going to be in an okay but mad mood. But it's good to think that when you came in you were happy and when you come out you'll be happier then when you would have if you had never read a happy book.

Here Danielle captures the power of humor and applies it to her life. She feels the humorous book will stay with her and help her to cope with an unpleasant situation. She has even labeled a funny book a happy book. She understands the book can have an impact on her emotions. Humorous books have an ability to help deal with difficult situations and help to change emotions.

A classmate of Danielle's also referred to emotions in her written response to *Radio Fifth Grade*. Lesley wrote:

I think I laughed a lot more, it made me feel happy inside. I laughed so much Angie yelled at me. I felt good when I finished it.

Lesley takes Danielle's idea even further. She enjoyed reading the book, and as Danielle said, it made her feel happy too. Lesley was even happy about her family's response to her reading. She described how her older sister, Angie, yelled at her because she was laughing and keeping her awake at night. After completing the book she felt satisfied with herself and the book, as well as the experience of being able to torment her older sister through laughter.

The idea of the emotional appeal of humor is enhanced by a fifth grader in his discussion of *Sideways Stories From Wayside School*. Sigmund describes how the role of humor is important in books as well as its importance in life. He

describes how he doesn't think you can go through a day of your life without

humor.

> **Z:** You said you don't think you'd go a day in life without humor.

> **Sigmund:** Yeah, I think that's true, it wouldn't be, I don't think that you
> would go through a day without probably very pronounced humor. But,
> it's going to be there somewhere. So maybe someone will mess up doing
> something and it will be funny or something. I think that you probably
> would not go through a day without humor.

> Later on he discusses how humor can help a person cope with a bad day.

> **Sigmund:** Yeah, because if you have say a really bad day, sometimes it's
> hard but, humor will make it easier.

Both of these statements by Sigmund help exemplify his understanding of an idea

expressed by both authors and scholars (see Chapter 1): humor is a key aspect of

life that can help one cope with life's experiences. Sigmund's ideas support what

Danielle described earlier about how humor can change emotions. In his

estimation humor can make a bad day easier. In later discussions he refers to

books without humor as "cake without the icing." Answering a question about

the importance of having humor in a sad book, Sigmund stated:

> **Sigmund:** Yeah, because, well, I think books, kind of show real life. I
> mean, books are kind of like the mirror of life and if you read them, it
> would kind of be the same thing, you probably wouldn't go through a
> book or a chapter or something whatever, without humor.

He reinforces his belief that humor is a significant part of human life. Sigmund

begins to make a connection between books and real life, and how humor plays an

important role in both. The authors in this study also concurred with this view.

Author's Perspective:

When examining my interviews with the authors, I found some significant overlap with the young readers' perspectives. The interviews with the authors were conducted separately from the readers, and were not influenced by the book discussion groups. Like the young readers, authors in this study also indicated that humor motivates children to read, that the unexpected is an attribute that appeals to children, and that humor has emotional appeal.

In regards to how humor motivates children to read, the authors expressed thoughts very similar to the children. They too want the children to be motivated to read more, and Jon Scieszka describes this best. Scieszka writes, "The main role of humor in my stories is to motivate readers (who might not otherwise be too keen on reading) to want to read" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). Reluctant readers are the ones Scieszka is hoping to motivate through the humor in his work.

Gordon Korman continues this theme of motivation, with a more detailed examination. His thoughts reflect what the children felt as well, in the search for more funny events in the books. He stated, "What's in it for the reader? And my answer is always that the payoff is the next laugh" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). Korman too indicates the reader will be searching for the next funny event. Both Scieszka and Korman understand that humor is the motivating factor in the reader's motivation to read.

The authors also described specific attributes of humor in their work. Sid Fleischman pointed out: "I depend a great deal on surprise for my humor. The

unexpected can make us laugh" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). These are

thoughts also expressed by both Elizabeth and Abby among the young readers.

The unexpected is what makes them laugh. Leading the reader to one conclusion,

then presenting a completely unexpected turn is an element of appeal in humor.

This is the idea of incongruity that McGhee (1970) found in his research

described in chapter two. Kappas (1967) described this as surprise.

Scieszka also refers to this idea of the unexpected. In his work he likes to

twist the stories and make his readers think. He wrote, "I more often like to let

the humor come out of the story situation, the characters, or by messing with the

readers' knowledge or expectations" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). This

example also shows how authors like to use the unexpected to catch the reader off

guard. By surprising the readers, the authors understand they can make them

laugh.

In regards to the emotional appeal humor holds, both Korman and

Fleischman agree with fifth grader Sigmund's statement earlier about the

importance of humor in life and in books. Korman writes: "I do believe that the

experience of childhood, school, family, etc is essentially a funny one, and indeed

that one can actually train oneself to view life in an absurd and humorous context.

For many kids, this can take some of the teeth out of a mystifying and often

malevolent world" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002).

Here Korman continues with the theme begun in chapter one, of how

humor can help children cope with their lives. His hope is to help children

understand that life can be viewed as humorous, and the events that unfold before

them at home, or in school, can and deserve to be laughed at. Sid Fleischman

takes this idea further. "I believe in seeking happy endings in real life as well as

in my fiction. Childhood, particularly, cannot be survived without humor"

(Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). Again the notion of using humor to survive,

or cope with situations is important. Both authors describe the value of this for

children. However, Fleischman, in his continuous wit, also states, "Keep in mind

that humor is tragedy, but (as I have written somewhere) tragedy wearing slap

shoes and a putty nose" (Electronic Mail Interview, 2002). Fleischman's early

job as a vaudeville magician comes forth in this statement, understanding that the

role humor plays in his writing, and in life in general is a large one. Humor has

great value in our daily lives, but especially the lives of children. Both readers

and authors articulate this importance of humor in our lives. It confirms what was

discussed by authors and scholars in chapter one about the impact humor has

upon children.

Teacher's Perspective:

Based upon the ideas expressed by engaged readers in this study, as well

as the authors interviewed for this study, there was some overlap with the

teacher's perspective as well. The teacher also recognized the need for engaged

readers to share a text, that there are specific attributes of humorous literature that

appeal to children, and that there has an emotional appeal for children as well.

Earlier in the chapter I have reported the teacher's description of how she

felt her students would share books with other classmates, or come to her to read

the book to the entire class. Her views show how social interaction with

humorous literature works in a classroom setting. Students want to share with

others, and reach as large an audience as possible.   The teacher also indicated that

if a student enjoys a specifically funny book, they will attempt to find other books

by that author in the hopes that the new books will also be funny.   Sometimes

these searches will begin through talking with classmates, or teachers.

The teacher also discussed two specific attributes that coincided with what

engaged readers in this study described. The first was that of language play. The

teacher mentioned that "when there is a play on words" children need to think

more critically. Reading closer in order to understand the double meaning of

words is one example of a reading strategy that was found with engaged readers

in this study.

The unexpected, which was discussed by both readers and authors, was

also described by the teacher. She believed unexpected twists were attributes

found in many of the books her class had read throughout the year. She states:

> **Teacher:** I think they start to predict you know if they're reading a book
> that's funny, very, very, funny that something not so funny is going to
> happen. So you know they become better readers because of reading
> funny books and sad books and you know talking about how one book
> was different from another...or similar to another.

Here the teacher takes a somewhat different twist on the idea of the unexpected.

She feels the author is using humor to set her students up for something

completely different. In class discussions she talked with her students about some

of the tragedy found in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (Curtis, 1995). The class

discussed how there were many humorous parts to the book, yet there were many

sad parts as well. Just as Fleischman, Scieszka, Elizabeth, and Abby pointed out

earlier, the unexpected is one humorous element that appeals to children.

Finally, the teacher also concurs with the readers and the authors that

humor has an emotional appeal as well. Following the line of thought described

by Sigmund, that humor can help cope with a bad day, the teacher also described

this happening in humorous literature.

> **Teacher:** But the more you look at books, especially books that are sad or
> take place during depressing times, they have an element of humor in it
> that is sort of a coping mechanism of how to deal with the bad that is out
> there.

Again, it is apparent that humor plays a larger role than simply for laughter. The

teacher reinforces what the authors and readers also discussed. Humor is an

important element of life. It is a coping mechanism that can help children through

the rough times of childhood.

The teacher however was not convinced that humorous literature is as

great as her students and the authors have made it out to be.

> **Teacher:** I think that they don't read [humorous books] as closely.
> Because they're not trying to solve a problem or some hidden message, or
> they're not necessarily trying to see growth in a character. I mean they're
> reading them purely just to relax and read and laugh out loud.

At an earlier point the teacher had described how children had to read and predict

that a funny part will lead to something unexpected happening, or even read more

deeply to understand the word play. While her students are engaged in reading

humorous books, and provide numerous examples of how they feel they have to

read more deeply to understand the humor, the teacher doesn't believe they read

them as closely.   This is a fascinating piece of outlying data that underscores the

need for closer attention to the role of humor in children's reading.

In spite of this contradictory example, it is clear that young readers,

authors, and the teacher expressed many common themes. A closer discussion of

this data as well as its implications for teachers will be found in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

"Funniness runs in the human race. I mean books are written to make people laugh or for people to understand the history and if half of the books written are to make people laugh we don't live forever so we can't read all the books so we just want to read the ones that are really funny…"
Fourth Grader, John

This study examined how humorous children's literature served to engage two groups of middle-grade children in reading. It involved three different perspectives; that of the children, their teachers, and selected authors. Based upon the data, there are many implications that could benefit classroom teachers.

Overview of study

The study was conducted in two classrooms in a suburban school located within a large Midwestern city. Two multiage classrooms, one a third and fourth grade, the other a fourth and fifth grade, at Whynot Elementary School, provided the child and teacher data. Three children's authors were also interviewed via electronic mail for this study. The children completed humor surveys at the beginning of the research that helped in the author selection for this study.

After six authors and books were chosen, the students were asked to select one of the books to read. The students were then placed in book discussion groups that met daily to discuss the humor found in the books. In the third and fourth grade class, each student read three of the five books. In the fourth and fifth grade

class, individual students were allowed to read as many as they wanted, or none of the books. Seven children chose to read books for the study.

The data gathered from the children were analyzed and compared with the author's and teacher's interviews.   Common themes and patterns, as well as unique characteristics from each perspective, were analyzed and presented in chapter four. This chapter serves to further the discussion and examine the implications for teaching.

The Role of Humor

This study confirmed some of what Shannon (1999) found in her study of humorous literature. Her study identified four different areas of humor that children prefer: superiority, physical events and appearances, the gross or taboo, and language or word play.   Her four categories correspond to the five categories of humor in children's literature discussed in chapter two; humorous characters, poking fun at authority, physical humor, nonsense, and humorous discourse. The categories from chapter two align with Shannon's work, but also include the category of nonsense. This research confirmed that language or word play is an attribute of humorous literature that appeals to the young reader.   This was apparent in the students' responses to how characters spoke with one another in the books. The events in the Fuzzy and Puffy stories that the third and fourth graders loved so much in *Radio Fifth Grade,* also coincide with Shannon's category of physical events. The young readers' enjoyment of characters could also be correlated with Shannon's category of the physical appearances. The

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Herdman's psychotic cat is one such character that stood out to the group of girls in the fourth and fifth grade class.

While this research did find a few similarities, there were also some significant differences with respect to Shannon's research. The first difference was the idea of the unexpected. The young readers in this study repeatedly talked about how they were caught off guard with different ideas in the books. They described how they enjoyed the unexpected, and in the case of *Chancy and the Grand Rascal* were on the look out for a whopper to be told, or the unexpected turn in the story. This idea was not found solely with the students. The authors mentioned it as well. Sid Fleischman and Jon Scieszka, in particular, talked about how they used the unexpected intentionally to hook readers into the story. The teacher of the younger group also supported this idea in her description of how early in the fourth grade her students begin to understand the use of humor, recognizing that there may be something else coming up. This idea of the unexpected is an important attribute for teachers to focus on. Being cognizant of this attribute would help teachers in understanding that there are specific attributes to humorous literature that not only appeal to children, but also benefit them as readers.

Another attribute of humorous literature that assumed new prominence in this study was that of the cliffhanger. This storytelling convention is most commonly identified in other genres such as adventure or mystery. However, this is an idea that the young readers in the study initiated themselves. I struggled from the first transcription that included this term to find a better word to fit this

category. However, after repeated analysis of the data as well as a comparison to the dictionary definition, I determined the term cliffhanger was the best word. The idea of the cliffhanger was one that was found repeatedly in the data. Many students described how they were drawn into the books because they enjoyed knowing that something funnier was on the horizon. This idea was repeated in an author interview. Gordon Korman described how he knew readers were on the lookout for the next big payoff. The cliffhanger works in this way; it creates the mood for the next big payoff, or laugh, and it draws the reader into the text.

Motivation to read is an integral part of reading engagement, as was discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation. Classroom teachers would love to have a room full of intrinsically motivated readers. In this study humorous cliffhangers motivated children to keep reading. This idea has important implications for classroom teachers searching for books that will help motivate their students.

Finding these attributes of humorous literature was unique to this study, and it would be interesting to see if there were similar attributes from other genres that engaged readers. Given the fact that cliffhangers are quite common in many genres it would be important to determine if cliffhangers keep children reading in other genres as well.

The idea of visualization that was so strongly described as a key reading strategy of engaged readers (Guthrie & Anderson, 1999) would also be one to examine with other genres. Is the use of visualization found more in response to humorous literature than in response to other genres? Determining if it is easier to

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visualize with humorous literature would also have serious implications for classroom instruction. If this proved to be true, teachers could use humorous books to help teach visualization strategies.

A few young readers in this study described how they visualized cartoons as they read humorous literature. A few young readers from this study also reported that humorous books were easier to visualize. However, this took place in only two classrooms so this would be interesting to pursue with more classrooms. The classroom implications with this idea are quite important for teachers. As more teachers are held accountable for theirs students' reading ability, finding literature that can make practicing reading strategies easier would be beneficial to both teachers and students.

This same idea could be carried over to the next strategy described in chapter four, vocalization. Again, this may be a reading strategy found in other genres as well, or it could be a strategy that comes from modeling by classroom teachers or peers. It would be important to determine if humorous literature calls up vocalization more often than other kinds of literature. These two reading strategies, visualization and vocalization, were important strategies for these engaged readers; whether or not they are unique to humorous literature has significant implications for classroom teachers.

By being aware of these different reading strategies engaged readers in this study used, teachers might be better able to facilitate discussions of how these strategies worked for their students. The young readers' descriptions of how humorous texts assist them in visualizing cartoons, for instance, might help a

teacher create an image for how to imagine a movie in your mind while reading. This is a strategy that teachers can provide their students for assisting in comprehension.

Teachers could also use the idea of vocalization. The children in this study discussed how they used a voice for characters in the books. This was apparent with the parrot Winston Churchill from *Radio Fifth Grade*. Danielle also described how using voices helped put her "in the story". Using voices for characters allows the teacher two options for instruction. First, teachers would be able to use this idea to increase children's fluency in reading. By adding voices, children would be practicing reading with expression, thus aiding in fluent reading. Second, teachers can use vocalization to help their students find another way to enter into the text. Visualization and vocalization provide teachers opportunities to facilitate reading strategy discussions for their students.

Given the fact that children do use reading strategies while reading humorous texts, it is important that teachers have these texts available in their classrooms. Because children will also want to share these books with their friends, teachers need to take advantage of these books. Including these books in their classrooms will assist teachers in putting books in the hands of children that provide them opportunities to practice reading strategies as well as share books they enjoy with their classmates. By selecting these books for classroom use, teachers can encourage their students to be motivated and to practice reading strategies.

The young readers, authors, and teachers discussed the role of humor. Both the children and the authors described how humor has the ability to motivate children to read more. Readers are on a search for what author Gordon Korman refers to as "the next payoff" or a humorous event in the book. Author Jon Scieszka also described how he felt the role of humor was to motivate those children who might otherwise not want to read. Children discussed how they wanted to read more, because they believed the book would get funnier.

Children and authors also described how humor has an emotional role. Both expressed how important it was for humor to be a part of life. One fifth grader described how humor in life was like the frosting on a cake. He also described how he felt it was impossible to go through a day in life without humor. Authors Fleischman and Korman agreed that humor can help take the bite out of a challenging world.

The teacher perspective in regards to the role of humor was a bit different. Ms. F. felt that the humor helped children make a connection with an author. She described how once a connection was established, the children would then seek out other books by that author or books that were similar to the one they had read. This has major implications for teachers and how they can help children with book selection. Motivation was a major benefit of reading humorous books; the children were drawn to read more after completing a humorous text. As mentioned earlier, she also felt that students begin to understand that the humor may be there to help brace the reader for something unexpected to happen, some surprise, or tragedy. While she felt that humorous literature did have some

strengths, the teacher also felt that the students did not read humorous literature as closely. This idea will be examined further in this next section.

Ideas for Future Research

This study will hopefully lead to more research in the field of humorous children's literature. While there are many limitations here, some of which can be found in much qualitative research, these limitations can also lead to potential research questions in the future. Some possible questions for further research are:

1) What is the nature of engagement with humorous literature for children from different socio-economic backgrounds?

2) What is the nature of engagement with humorous literature for children of diverse cultures?

3) Are there specific attributes of humorous literature that appeal to children accross cultures?

4) If given its own category how do children rank humorous literature within their preferences for reading material?

5) What are teachers' overall beliefs about humorous literature and its role in children's reading?

The first three questions for further research are based upon the limitation of the population for this study. Given the lack of diversity found within the two classrooms used in this study, it would be interesting to pursue this work in classrooms with more diverse populations, both ethnically and socio-economically.

The fourth question for further research regarded children's preferences for humorous literature. Some of the students in this study described how humor was not their favorite genre. However, their contributions to the discussions and their thoughts on humorous literature seemed to contradict that idea. It would be interesting to examine if students' preference for humor is related to their likes and dislikes of other genres. If that were to be the case, then the availability of books in the classroom might reflect those preferences to the benefit of the students. Again, this would help teachers with the task of book selection.

The fifth question for future research is based upon the teacher's statement that her students don't read humorous literature as closely as other genres, and that they are not really searching for anything in humorous books. The data from both the young readers and authors contradict these ideas, at least in part, and even the teacher contradicts her statement when she discusses how by early fourth grade her students start to look for unexpected plot twists when they encounter humor in the books they read. Examining what the teacher may have meant by her statement is important. How she views the role of humor may influence how she uses humorous literature in the classroom. Perhaps the teacher meant that humor does not address the deeper issues her class had delved into before the study began. Her thoughts could also be because she does not place humorous literature in high regard. It is apparent though that her assumptions about humor vary greatly as compared to those described by Shaeffer and Hopkins, (1988); Whitmer, (1986); and Nilsen and Nilsen, (1982).   Shaeffer and Hopkins (1988) describe how humorous literature can be used, "to teach critical reading by

determining the author's purpose, inferencing, and evaluating content...to supplement higher order questioning of informational materials and other critical reading activities" (p. 534). Nilsen and Nilsen (1982) share similar views for older readers, "...humorous literature forces teenagers to be active instead of passive readers" (p. 64). With these varying views of deeper reading, it is difficult to determine what she meant by her comments without follow up interviews. However, her comments do suggest possibilities for further research examining the thoughts of other teachers.

Because this is just one teacher in one classroom, it would be interesting to continue this idea in a larger scope. A humor survey for teachers could be created and sent nationwide to determine how teachers value humorous literature in their classrooms. If Michael Cart's (1995) idea is right, that humor gets no respect, it would be interesting to see if teachers believe this to be an appropriate stance on humor, and then to pursue research that shows to what extent such beliefs influence their selection of classroom literature and their interactions with children about their reading.

Finally, this research confirms some ideas found in humor theory discussed in chapter two. Both Kuchner (1991) and Keith-Spiegel (1972) address the social nature of humor. The data from this study agrees with the importance of social interaction with humor. A classroom setting aids in this idea of social interaction as did the book discussion groups. However, there were many examples of social interaction outside of the book discussion groups and the classroom. The example of Mae sharing *Radio Fifth Grade* with her friends

outside of the classroom as well as on the bus ride home is one example of this.

Ray mentioned how he shared his book with his mother, while Joey described his

belief that if he shared a humorous book with his older brother it would encourage

him to read more. These examples of social interaction correspond well with

Kuchner's and Keith-Spiegel's theory that humor is a social experience.

This idea also corresponds well with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural

theory. Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi (2000) describe this: "According to

Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is the primary means by which children arrive

at new understandings. It is through the exchange of ideas and subsequent

agreements and disagreements that students challenge one another's ideas as well

as their own" (p. 120). This study reported examples of students interacting with

others, both inside and outside of the classroom.   Students placed great value on

hearing others laugh about a book. Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi (2000) write,

"Sociocognitive theories of learning suggest that learning is enhanced when

children have opportunities to share and discuss what they are reading with

others" (p. 129). These types of interaction were apparent in this research. The

social interaction is also what appeared to motivate young readers in this study to

read other titles. Students wanted to be "in on" the different jokes being

described by each book discussion group. This desire to be a part of the informal

discussion in the classroom is one aspect that motivated them. Because every

classroom is its own community, the idea of sociocultural theory is important for

teachers. As the data showed, humorous literature encouraged social interaction

among students and a desire to share what they were reading. As sociocultural

theorists claim, such opportunities for sharing help enhance learning (Gambrell, Mazzoni, & Almasi 2000).   Or as Mae, Amanda, and Lesley describe it, humor can help create friendships. Literature has the ability to build a community of readers; humorous literature can help foster friendships.

Having a full complement of engaged readers is an important aspect in any classroom. As discussed in chapter two, an engaged reader must be intrinsically motivated, use reading strategies, and interact socially during and after reading (Baker, Dreher, & Guthrie, 2000; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Guthrie & McCann, 1997). All of these are important facets of an engaged reader. The data helped show that the young readers in this study of humorous literature used various reading strategies--visualization, vocalization, and critical reading to name a few. Their social interaction may have led them to be intrinsically motivated to read other books in this study. The humorous books used in this study had different attributes that contributed to the use of the components of reading engagement.

It is time for humorous literature to receive more respect. Humor is a genre that can engage children in reading. It motivates them, requires them to use various reading strategies, and encourages social interaction so they can share what they have read. By combining humorous literature with reading engagement a teacher may reach all readers. As Guthrie and Anderson (1999) state, "A classroom teacher who adopts the engagement perspective builds a classroom that looks very different than a traditional classroom. In an engaging classroom, reading lessons are designed to develop long-term motivation, knowledge, social competence, and reading skill" (p.37). Adopting the engagement perspective,

and valuing humorous literature will help build a classroom of students who will learn the skills and strategies needed to become lifelong readers, a goal of all teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Humor Survey

Circle one: Boy   Girl   Age: _____

What was the title of the book that you read or was just read to you?
_____

Using the following scale pick what made the book funny.

HA? *Not really funny.*
HA! HA! *Kind of funny.*
HA! HA! HA! *Funny.*
HA! HA! HA! HA! *Extremely funny.*
HA! HA! HA! HA! HA! *One of the funniest books ever.*

1. How funny do you think this book was?
_____HA?
_____HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

2. How funny do you think the pictures were in this book?
_____HA?
_____HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

3. How funny do you think the character(s) were in this book?
_____HA?
_____HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA! HA!
_____HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

4. How funny was the way the book was read aloud (or to yourself?)

_____HA?

_____HA! HA!

_____HA! HA! HA!

_____HA! HA! HA! HA!

_____HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

5. How funny was the way language was used in this book?

_____HA?

_____HA! HA!

_____HA! HA! HA!

_____HA! HA! HA! HA!

_____HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

6. What made the way it was read to you (or the way you read it) funny?

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. What are some things that make **a** book funny? (You may check more than one.)

_____ pictures

_____ character(s)

_____ story

_____ the way it is read aloud

_____ the way people talked to each other

_____ the setting

_____ the way language was used (play with words)

_____ other _____

9. Please list the funniest books or authors you know.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Final Humor Survey
(Given at end of the study)

Name _____

Name you want to be called when I write this book _____

1) What was funny about the three books you read?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Would you read other books by these authors? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3.) What are some things that make **a** book funny? (You may check more than one.)

_____ pictures

_____ character(s)

_____ story

_____ the way it is read aloud

_____ the way people talked to each other

_____ the setting

_____ the way language was used (play with words)

_____ other _____

4.) Please list the funniest books or authors you know.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS

Chancy and the Grand Rascal Group 1
March 14, 2002

John: Sometimes…the humor is right there….like if it's an easy to understand joke..but other times what makes a book interesting..and this is also sort of what a cliffhanger is…you have to read a little deeper into it and ummmm every now and then you have to understand what just happened to make it funny. Because if you are reading a part and you skip to another part then you may not understand the funniness.

Teacher: so this story might get funnier the more you read it?

John: Yeah.

Teacher: Why..what might happen the more you read it…what might you start to see in this book.

John: More people…more characters added to the book which may be more of his siblings and…as more of them come..we may hear more whoppers (holds up his hands to make quotation marks)

Teacher: what makes these whoppers so funny?

John: They're just like plain out of the blue lies.

Teacher: Do other people realize they're lies or do they believe them?

John: They believe them, they're like good out of the blue lies.

Teacher: So..do you know that they're lies? Is the author telling you that they're lies or are you just smart enough to figure out they're lies?

Danielle: actually you told us they were sort of like lies at the beginning so that gave us a hint that there are people in here that are going to tell lies to trick this kid to do things..to take their money....that's it..

Radio Fifth Grade Group 1
March 14, 2002
Thursday

Z: Who wants to give us an update about what's happened so far.

Mae: The teacher, Ms. Panagopolous she gave them lots of homework and she gave them a test, did we already read this? So for the test, they didn't pay attention during the class, so for their radio show, they had the questions, people answered them, (others laugh here) and yeah, they gave out really weird prizes. Like turtle food and stuff. And...ummmm should I tell the whole thing or stop?....and they had the next radio show and Brad Jaworski, or whateve r he told...his teacher made him..well he read his story..she made him do it on the radio and...he wrote about Fuzzy and Puffy and the yarn ball it was funny.

Z: Did you say it was funny?

Mae: well, they were surprised and so was I, that the guy he would tell a story like that.

Z: Okay, why did that surprise you?

Mae: Because he, the bully that is totally the opposite.

Z: Okay, so it's the opposite of what a bully is like. Why did they give away such weird prizes for the radio show?

Elizabeth: Because he wanted the people to come into the store and buy things.

Z: who did? Benjy did?

Elizabeth: Mr. Whitehead

Z: Okay, so he just wanted people come into the store and buy animals. So he gave away prizes that would make them have to.

Donnie: And sort of the people who won they won a flea collar and he said, but I don't have fleas. And he said then give it to your dog and someone kept calling for Gretchen (LOUD laughing all the way around the table when this is mentioned)

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Mae: And they were like, I think you have the wrong number and he called again.

Candy: and then the parrot was like. This parrot is a rip off (more then one girl said this at the same time and BOTH used a Parrot Voice…more laughing by the table)

Mae: First he spoke French and then at the end he kind of ruined it by saying This Parrot is a Ripoff.