

Fun, Literature And Children

By: MJ Spyker

Fun with a purpose is a real help in educating children. It makes learning so much more attractive. Everyone has a good idea about what is fun and what isn't. The same cannot be as easily said about literature. How accomplished need writing be to qualify. With regard to children the question may be asked whether there is a category of writing that could be considered literature in the real sense of the word. Are children capable of engaging with an expression of language that meets literary requirements? The answer to that question is a resounding 'Yes!' But how often is such an engagement actually offered to a child? Far too sporadically, I believe.

Titles like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Rabbit* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* come to mind when considering children's literature. From books to be read and told these now have become movies and DVD's to be watched. From words that introduce a child to good language that stirs the imagination this fine literature has become a sequence of images and sound effects. It needs no Einstein to conclude that somewhere there is a loss for modern children and their development. How many children these days have the opportunity to listen to a quality story being well told while becoming entranced by what is happening merely through the medium of the spoken word? It will be few and they will be the ones who will more easily express themselves later in life and may find the joys a good book can bring to the soul. They are the lucky ones.

Allow me to quote a sentence from *Eloise, the Witch and the Wordsmith*, a recently released multimedia story that uses narrative as communication with the occasional illustration in support. The spoken word is central in the two hour presentation which children are able to listen to without any loss of concentration. Here comes the sentence.

'The Witch was so filled with her thoughts of vanquishing the Wordsmith that she didn't hear the soft hum of the Fireflies that grew and grew around her, exploding from their hidden places, surrounding her with hot brightness, fire light, scalding her with dazzling, brilliant, blinding brightness, enveloping her in such sparkling radiance that she cringed, folded herself into a desolate parody of greatness, and crumpled to the ground, spent of her power, slack with defeat.'

This, most likely, is the longest sentence in the story. It also introduces the most words in one sequence including a lot of not frequently used ones. It's not the only place where 'difficult' words are to be found in the Eloise adventure. Such words are scattered throughout the text. Overall there are well over a hundred words in the story that children would be less familiar with, or would haven't come across at all.

The most pertinent question is, whether the occasional use of more adult language in an exciting story creates difficulties for the children, or whether they just take it on board. The latter is the case. If the story is exciting children will happily be exposed to richly descriptive language and will benefit greatly. Their minds and imagination will actively create for them what's happening. They will experience some of the joys of language that has been so central to education in the history of human learning. If the language used is discussed a little, the benefits will be even greater.

Good fun makes literature accessible to children. That has been known for generations. This fun needs to be inherent in a story, but can be expanded beyond that. A good story usually has bearing on life in some way. That's a treasure of exceptional wealth. As mentioned, this wealth is becoming less accessible in modern days. The children of this world deserve better, an educational exercise that doesn't look like one. Isn't that the best kind of learning?

About The Author:

For years Michael Spyker was head of a distance education department at tertiary level. In designing his latest project <http://www.kid-ebook-stories.com> the presentation of Eloise, the Witch and the Wordsmith was never far from his thinking.

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