

# The Pedagogic Value of Children's Literature

Lok Raj Regmi

## Abstract

The texts of children's literature have unique features and the language teachers still have limited ideas on how these texts support language learning. At this juncture, this article aims at exploring the value of children's literature in language learning. Simple, interesting and linguistically rich texts of children's literature make classroom environment conducive to learn. These texts engage students in different communicative and cooperative tasks: pair and group discussions, jigsaw, simulation and role play. These texts contribute to students' language enrichment, development of communicative competence, inferential, and interpretive skills and ultimately lead them to creative writing. Children's literature is pedagogically crucial for students and teachers.

*Keywords:* children's literature, pedagogic purpose, cooperative tasks, interpretive skills

## Introduction

### Background of the Study

Children's literature as a genre encompasses a wide range of works including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books, stories (fairy tales, fables and others), poems and other primarily orally transmitted materials intended for and used by children and young people. Supporting this view, Cullinan and Galda (2002) rightly say that children's literature refers to material(s) written or produced for the information or entertainment of children and it includes all forms of literature. It can further be qualified by noting that it is designed to convey the rules, attitudes and information necessary for children with their culture. In the words of Seth (2008), this genre presents what children have heard and read.

Children's literature in the early days consisted of spoken stories, songs and poems that were used to educate, instruct and entertain children. It was only in the eighteenth century, with the development of the concept of children, that a separate genre, i.e, children's literature emerged in its own different dimensions and canon. The earliest of these books were educational books, books on conduct and simple alphabets often decorated with animals, plants and anthropomorphic letters (Lyons and Martin, 2011). Children's literature is a dynamic entity in its own right that offers its readers many avenues for pleasure, reflection and emotional engagement. In line with this statement, Mallan(2017) states that the place of children's literature in education was established centuries ago, and this association continues today, such reciprocal relationship lies at heart to bring the world into the classroom and take the classroom out into the world. The study of Leland et al. (2022) also states how children's literature contributes to classroom pedagogy. It claims that children's literature engages students in critical reading, assimilations, and different activities to develop their exposure to the use of language. As a result, students respect other's culture, hone the use of language and develop criticality to social justice. *The Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell; *A Little Princess* by F.H. Burnett; *The Wonderful Wizard* by L. Frank Baun; *The Witchess* by Roald Dahl; *Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland* by Lewis Carrol, *What Katy Did?* by Susan Coolidge, and *Words are Birds* by Francisco Alarcon are some examples of children's literature. At this juncture, the present study aims to explore how the texts of children's literature support the classroom for pedagogic purposes.

**Forms of children's literature** According to Hunt (2004), the children's literature can be categorized:

**Picture books:** This form includes interdependent art and text, concept through illustration in specific although all genres may appear in picture books.

**Poetry:** This form of children's literature comprises imagery, condensed language, rhythmic expression, expression of imagination, perception.

**Folklore:** It includes traditional stories, myths, legends, nursery rhymes, songs from the past, oral tradition.

**Fantasy:** Word(s) to express imagination, made belief; fiction sets in places that do not exist, creatures that do not appear and events that do not happen are the major concerns of this form.

**Science fiction:** Stories what might occur in the future, fiction based on scientific inventions/discoveries based on scientific principles to their logical outcomes are the areas of this form. It often deals with possible future.

**Realistic fiction:** Events could happen in real world, characters seem real, and contemporary settings are the major concerns of this genre.

**Historical fiction:** Events set in the past, reconstructed stories, things that could have or did occur can be found at the centre of this form.

**Non-fiction:** Facts about the real world, informational books that explain subject or contents can exist in this variety.

**Biography:** This form of children's literature includes plot and themes based on person's life: Part of a life history, letters, memoirs, diaries, journals, autobiographies.

### **Characteristics of Children's Literature**

It is Perry Nodelman who has established the grounds for the configuration of children's literature as a genre in its own right (Gubar, 2011). It is a means to formulate the concept of childhood from the adult's perspectives. The authors, who would like to expand the territory of children's literature, state that it doesn't need to feature just young protagonists, there is no demarcated boundary/buffer zone between children's fiction and adult fiction (Schanzer, 2000). Children are visual readers, especially the younger ones. They depend a lot on images even if they can read and understand the texts. Such literature has illustration that can easily catch the attention of the children. The illustrations offer an element of excitement and linguistic development (Songoren, 2013), as a result, the children will keep on reading, eager to find out what will happen next, what the next illustration will look like. Besides, it is always more interesting if the words we read have visual representations. The features displayed by children's literature can be summarized:

**Repetition:** Children's literature allows repetition. In other words, the ideas/views in children's literature are repeated over and over to remember it.

**Didacticism:** Apart from entertaining the readers, children's literature is written to teach them. Livingston and Brown (2017) are of the opinion that children's literature has the use of simple language and can teach the readers a moral lesson.

**Illustration:** Pictorial illustrations and actions are found at the centre of children's literature

**Simplicity:** children's literature in general doesn't have complicated plots and sub-plots. Most of them are brief and comprehending.

**Informative and entertaining:** The texts of children's literature are motivating and interesting. These texts can expand the horizon of knowledge as well as provide students with information by a range of exciting texts.

**Optimism:** There is always hope, foreshadowing and other elements to raise the spirits.

**Fantasy or fantastic:** Children's literature tends toward fantasy and accepts fanciful ideas with less concern of reality. Wishful thinking is common and imagination is deeply rooted in the texts of children's literature.

In addition, Children's literature acknowledges characters that are children, includes childhood events, actions, happenings, and child's point of view lies at the centre. There is a tone of joy and innocence associated with children, their closeness to nature and unquestionably reliable friends.

### **Using Children's Literature for Pedagogic Purpose**

Children's literature is a dynamic entity in its own right that offers students many avenues for pleasure, reflection, emotional engagement and language enrichment (Mallan,2017). Children's literature, as discussed earlier, includes all genres and gives children/ students access to all varieties of literature for their educational success. Wisely selected texts of children's literature represent a valuable source for improving students' language skills. For example, *What Katy Did?* By Susan Coolidge is a children's novel and some representative dialogues exist in this text contribute to design the activities to teach listening and speaking. The teacher engages students in performing different tasks, for example, comprehending, describing, comparing and contrasting, explaining, making a gist etc. The substance of this analysis is similar to the interpretation of Pulimeno et al. (2020) who conclude that children's literature supports to build conducive classroom environment and provides ample opportunities to develop students' language skills. Likewise, the study of Ye (2021) shows the significance of using children's literature in language learning as the texts of such literature cultivate students' language acquisition.

The students can adopt children's literature to develop their constructive views to different culture. It means, students by reading the culturally embedded texts of children's literature can appreciate their own cultural heritages as well as those of others. It cultivates emotional intelligence and nurtures growth and development of students' social skills. For example, students can read a children's novel *What Katy Did?* by Susan Coolidge and will be familiar to how a twelve year old girl Katy Carr learns social behaviours, genuine family phenomena and how she transforms them in practices. As a result, students learn the culture of family and transform such family culture in their own, they can assimilate their own experiences with the themes of the texts. This interpretation is similar to the study of Sen (2021) who concludes that teaching of children's literature provides an opportunity to assimilate the life experience of learners to the themes of the texts of children's literature and it leads them to self transformation through awareness. *What Katy Did?* presents how the shift in social learning of children facilitates students' real learning in classroom. When Katy Carr is in bed rest after the injury, she is detached from her family members, her room is dark, dirty and cluttered with the bottles of medicine. The visit of her cousin Helen encourages Katy to maintain her family love and transform her mind set. She learns to make her room tidy and nice and create amicable environment among the family members. Likewise, *Black Beauty* (another text of children's literature) by Anna Sewell, an autobiography of a horse, makes the students aware of the animal rights and children learn to acknowledge the existence of the animals.

In line with the above discussions, the texts of children's literature include different social issues, for example, segregation, love and hatred, indifference, class and disparity. The students can read such texts and respond these issues using their own views. In addition, children's literature makes the students familiar to their own psychology. For example, the reading of *Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll encourages students to discuss their own innovative and curious mental state. Norton (2010) argues that there are countless values in exposing students to the reading of children's literature and it can provide students with opportunities to respond to literature, as a result, they can develop

communicative competence, critical ability and creative thinking. The texts of children's literature manifest different language use, these texts can be supportive in developing students' language acquisition. Norton again says, "Wordless picture books are excellent stimuli for oral and written language" (2010, p.9). The students will be acquainted with such pictures, describe them, construct the dialogues and develop their own story.

Children's literature, the source of authentic materials for contents, can expand students' horizon of knowledge. Supporting this view, Swanson & Krommes (2008) claim that the role of children's literature in language classroom is to nurture and widen students' horizon of knowledge, develop the ability to think and imagine. In addition, the theme that students adapt from children's literature can be useful in their personal and social life. Likewise, Crippon (2012) concludes that the quality the students earn by reading children's literature can be ancillary in developing student's interpretative ability. As a conclusion of the study about the use of children's literature in teaching and learning, Cremin (2008) states that children's literature can significantly contribute to students' communicative competence and their vocabulary achievement by providing an ideal opportunity to read and hold discussion with their classmates.

The use of children's literature in classroom allows students for their engagement in different learning activities. As literary texts are interactive by nature, they encourage students to hold discussions on particular textual issue/s among them. After a free or the teacher initiated discussions, students can interpret the meaning of a text. Likewise, the texts of children's literature provide ample opportunities to carry out different cooperative tasks and performance such as jigsaw, role play and simulation. Students can comprehend the texts of children's literature, find clues and premise, and construct the supporting details of specific statements.

## Conclusion

Children's literature as a genre includes children as well as adults as its readers. It presents many particularities of life and differentiates it from the rest of literary genres. However, Amer (2011) argues that children's literature remains unique through its limited implied readership. Children's literature is interesting, interactive and a useful resource in classroom. To some extent, it is simple, short and didactic. For classroom purpose, it engages students in different learning activities: group discussion, cooperative learning activities and performances. The texts of children's literature support students to involve in different tasks, for example, describing the textual facts, comparing and contrasting them, analyzing the textual issues, assimilating students' experiences to the theme of the text, finding clues and interpreting the text. These tasks develop students' communicative skills, language acquisition and cultivate their criticality, creative thinking skills, and interpretive skills. Using children's literature in language classroom is important and has pedagogic value. Children's literature is pedagogically crucial for classroom purpose.

## References

- Amer, M. V. (2011). Children's Literature in the Information Age: New Contents, Communication Strategies and Adult Attitudes in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials. An unpublished research report, Universitat de les Illes Balears.
- Cremin, T. (2008). Exploring Teachers' Knowledge of Children's Literature. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, vol. 38 (4), pp. 449-464.
- Crippon, M. (2012). *The Value of Children's Literature*. [luther.edu/oneota-reading-journal](http://luther.edu/oneota-reading-journal). Retrieved on 15 Dec, 2022.

- Cullinan, B. E. & Galda, L. (2000). Research on Children's Literature. In R. Barr, L. Michael, P.B. Kamil & P. Mosenthal (Eds.). *Handbook of Reading Research*, vol.3, pp.361-379.
- Gubar, M.(2011). Children's Books, Dolls and the Performance of Race. [www. cambridge.org.com](http://www.cambridge.org.com).
- Hunt, P (2004) (Ed.). *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*. London and Newyork: Routledge.
- Leland, C.H. et al. (2022). *Teaching Children's Literature*. Newyork: Routledge.
- Livingston,C. & Brown, M. (2017). *Introducing Children's Literature: A Guide to the South African Classroom*. Hatfield, South Africa: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Lyons, A.C. & Martin, B. (2011). *The ABCs of Lesser-known Goddesses: An Art Nouveau Colouring Book for Kids of All Ages*. [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).
- Mallan, K. (2017). Children's Literature in Education. In Noblit, G.W. (Ed.). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. US: OUP.
- Norton, D. (2010). *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature* (8<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Pulimeno, M., Piscitelli, P., & Colazzo, S. (2020). Children's Literature to Promote Students' Global Development and Well-being. *Health Promot Perspect*, vol. 10 (1), 13-23.
- Schanzer, W. (2000). Children's Literature. <https://en.org.com>. Retrieved on 12 Dec, 2022.
- Sen, E. (2021). Children's Literature as a Pedagogical Tool: A Narrative Inquiry. *An International Online Journal of Education and Teaching*, 8(3), 2028-2048.
- Seth, L. (2008). *Children's Literature: A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Songoren, S. A. (2013). The Place of Children's Literature Texts in Teaching German as a Foreign/ Second Language. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 70(25), 1825-1830.
- Swanson, S.M. & Krommes, B. (2008). *The House in the Night*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co.
- Ye, X. (2021). Using Children's Literature to Develop Pupils' English Language Acquisition. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 64, 200-203.

### Author Note

Dr. Lokraj Regmi works at faculty of education, Mahendra Ratna Campus, Kathmandu.  
Email: [regmilokraj20@gmail.com](mailto:regmilokraj20@gmail.com)

Received : 26/05/2023  
Revision received: 08/09/2023  
Accepted: 05/01/2024