

**My Philosophy of Teaching Children's Literature**

**The Importance of Being a Gatekeeper**

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As a future educator, I have a responsibility of being a gatekeeper for children. This means that I am responsible for what types of books and other materials children are exposed to in the classroom as well as at home. This is a huge responsibility that I am ready to take on because of all I have learned about children's literature. As a future gatekeeper, I hope to expose children to as many different genres of literature as possible, as they all have something valuable to teach.

The first genre of literature that children are usually introduced to is picturebooks. "Picturebooks are books in which images and ideas join to form a unique whole. In the best picture books, the illustrations are as much a part of our experience with the book as the written text (if there is one)" (Kiefer & Tyson, 65). There are many different types of picture books, including wordless books, alphabet books, counting books, graphic novels, and storybooks. Picture books are valuable for children because they introduce children to literature in an engaging, fun way. The illustrations in a picture book are intended to convey the message the author is trying to use the words to get across, but the pictures make the message easier to understand for younger readers (Kiefer & Tyson, 78). Pictures in a book can also enhance the storyline of the book. For example, in the book *The Little House* by Virginia Lee Burton, the images are used to show the reader how the house visually changes from living in the country, being taken care of, to living in the city, being neglected (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). The text in this book does not explicitly state all the changes that are occurring with the house, but the images do an amazing job of showing the reader the impact that living in the city has on the quality of the house. As a gatekeeper, I intend to show children a wide variety of picture books so they can gain everything they have to offer through reading them.

One controversial genre of literature that gatekeepers struggle with introducing to children is fantasy literature. Some gatekeepers don't want to expose children to fantasy literature because they want children to read stories that are relevant to their daily lives and not get caught up in the excitement of an unreal world. There are also hesitations about reading fantasy books that include goblins, trolls, and witches, as some gatekeepers do not want children to believe that they are real and engage in dangerous behaviors such as witchcraft. However, what some gatekeepers do not know about fantasy literature is that it is riddled with enriching stories that can help children to understand themselves. Lloyd Alexander, a children's fantasy author, says that fantasy literature is one of the most valuable genres to expose our children to. He says that "fantasy touches our deepest feelings and in so doing, it speaks to the best and most hopeful parts of ourselves. It can help us learn the most fundamental skill of all- how to be human" (Kiefer & Tyson 133). One example of a fantasy book that teaches readers how to be human is *Charlotte's Web*. *Charlotte's Web* dives into what true friendship means (Kiefer & Tyson, 133). Even though most of the plot points in the book are unrealistic, the moral of the story that is shown is unmatched and valuable for any child to engage with. The fantasy elements in a story allow children to use their imaginations to run while also learning how to survive in our realistic world. As a gatekeeper, I intend to allow children to engage in fantasy books to allow their imaginations to grow as well as teach them valuable life lessons.

One genre of literature that has the power to evoke strong emotions in those who engage with it is poetry. Poetry is a genre that is geared towards all ages, but children's poets have a special job, as they have to write their poems in a way to reflect the emotions of childhood (Kiefer & Tyson, 167). Poetry is introduced to most children at a young age, through finger plays, nursery rhymes and songs. Children are attracted to the elements of poetry, which include

rhythm, rhyme & sound, imagery, figurative language, and shape (Kiefer & Tyson, 169-173). It is important for children to engage with poetry at a young age because it is a good way for them to get in touch with their emotions. It is also valuable to allow and teach children to write poetry at a young age to help them engage with their emotions and place them on paper, as well as teaching them the elements of poetry so they can learn more about their surroundings. As a gatekeeper, I intend on introducing children to poetry as a way for them to relate to what they are reading, as well as learning more about themselves and the world around them.

One of the main goals of children's literature is to assist children in learning about the world around them. This includes the present world, as well as diving into what the world looked like in the past. When finding literature to dive into what the world previously looked like, most gatekeepers turn to historical fiction. Historical fiction is a genre that is a mix of two elements; fact and imagination. Authors of historical fiction use the information they know about the past to create the world presented in their book, as well as using their imaginations to make this world engaging for children so they gain a greater understanding of the past. Historical fiction has declined in popularity recently because more children want to read about what they know, and they find historical fiction books to be boring (Kiefer & Tyson, 229). However, as gatekeepers, it is very important to ensure that children get exposed to historical fiction. Reading historical fiction helps a child experience the past in a way that almost makes them feel as if they are immersed in it. This has the potential to trigger numerous emotional responses in children, such as empathy and compassion. When a child is immersed in a historical fiction book, it is also beneficial for them to make comparisons between what is presented in the book and what occurs in their daily lives. This is useful for children to do because it helps to enhance their critical thinking skills. When children compare their present life to what is shown in a historical fiction

book, it helps them see what occurred in the past and how our society has changed and evolved from that time. This teaches children about the value of humanity in society, as one of the goals of historical fiction is to hope that children do not repeat the injustices of the past (Kiefer & Tyson, 230-231). As a gatekeeper, I intend on giving children access to historical fiction novels to teach them more about the past, and to hone other essential skills such as critical thinking and compassion for others.

As well as being exposed to historical fiction books to be educated about the past and learn more about the world around them, children also need to be exposed to non fiction books. Non fiction books help children to learn about anything real they are interested in, from the thirteen colonies to the life cycle of a butterfly. Non fiction books utilize many strategies to help educate children, such as diagrams, pictures, words, and a glossary in the back of the book. The aspects of the book help in engaging children and educating them further (Kiefer & Tyson, 276). There are a lot of important reasons to explain why we need to be exposing our children to non fiction. Nonfiction books help build knowledge of the social and natural world. When a child engages with a nonfiction book, they acquire background knowledge about the subject which assists them in engaging with other texts or in real world situations. Nonfiction books also have the potential to boost a child's vocabulary and visual literacy skills. Most nonfiction books include a glossary or index to define words for children. This tool is very beneficial when teaching children new vocabulary, as if it is laid out for them clearly in a nonfiction book then they are more likely to retain it. The visual learning aids present in non fiction books, such as diagrams, tables, and graphs, help develop visual literacy in children as well (Kiefer & Tyson, 277). As a gatekeeper, I want to introduce children to non fiction books on a multitude of topics

to teach them more about the world around them as well as boosting their vocabulary and reading skills.

There are multiple different types of non fiction books. One of those types is a biography. Biographies are often the middle ground between historical fiction and nonfiction. A biography is telling the true story of somebody else's life (Kiefer & Tyson, 287). Usually biographies are centered around significant historical figures, such as Abraham Lincoln or Amelia Earhart. These books are written to teach children about different figures in history, as another way to educate them about the world around them and about how life was in the past. Some gatekeepers are hesitant to introduce certain biographies to children because not every biography is written about somebody that children should admire, such as Hitler. While most gatekeepers want to just expose children to books about positive role models, it is important to educate children about the negative as well, so they can reflect on various points of view, and, similar to nonfiction, pinpoint where society has gone wrong in the past and notice how we have changed and grown from that. When reading a biography about someone who is not admirable with children, it is important for gatekeepers to openly discuss the reality of both positive and negative life stories, emphasize the human capacity to grow and change, and cultivate democratic ideals (Kiefer & Tyson, 301). As a gatekeeper, I plan to introduce children to biographies about all kinds of people to help them gain a new perspective on the past, and to see issues from multiple different angles, whether positive or negative.

Each different genre of literature has a valuable lesson to teach children. From learning the value of friendship to enhancing critical thinking, there is an intentional purpose for every book genre. As a future gatekeeper, I am going to take my job very seriously and assure that I

diversify my reading genre palette with children to help them engage in literature in a way that will educate them, let their imagination run wild, and teach them valuable life lessons.

## References

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