

INFS 431

LITERATURE AND SERVICES

FOR CHILDREN

Session 6 – TYPES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Lecturer: S. Nii Bekoe Tackie, School of Information and Communication
Studies, Department of Information Studies
Contact Information: snbtackie@ug.edu.gh



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

College of Education

School of Continuing and Distance Education

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Session Overview

Children's literature, also called **juvenile literature** includes stories, books and poems that are enjoyed by children. Children's literature may be classified by genre or by the intended age of the reader. When I talk about literature for children, I mean both fiction and non-fiction books written specifically for children from age 0 – 18 years.

There are several genres in children's literature. These include traditional literature, modern fantasy, Realistic fiction, non-fiction or informational books written as fiction.

Session Objectives

At the end of the session, you should be able to:

- Describe the two ways of classifying children's literature
- Identify the various types of children's literature
- Discuss the content of each type
- Provide examples of each type

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the Session are:

- Topic One: Traditional Literature
- Topic Two: Modern Fantasy
- Topic Three: Realistic Fiction
- Topic Four: Non-Fiction or Informational Books as Fiction
- Topic Five: Classification by Age Group

Reading List



Topic One:

TRADITIONAL LITERATURE



Introduction

Children's literature, also called **juvenile literature** includes

- stories,
- books and
- poems

that are enjoyed by children.

- Children's literature may be classified by
 - genre
 - intended age of the reader.
- There are several genres in children's literature.
- traditional literature,
 - modern fantasy,
 - Realistic fiction,
 - non-fiction or informational books written as fiction.

Literature for children means both fiction and non-fiction books written specifically for children from age 0 – 18 years.

Traditional Literature

Traditional literature refers to stories that have been passed down from generation to generation and that have changed slowly over time.

- These stories provide a link between the past and the future.
- Traditional literature offers a great opportunity to introduce children to the concept of a story and to expose them to different types of stories.
- Traditional literature consists mainly of
 - folktales and
 - other stories that are also considered as traditional literature.
 - cumulative tales,
 - wonder tales,
 - fables
 - myths.

Traditional Literature:Folktales

Folktale

Defined as all forms of narrative

- written or
- oral
- that have been handed down from generation to generation.
- All cultures have folktales.

Though they come from different parts of the world, they have certain common features.

- A common characteristic of folktale is the plot.
- simple and direct.
- It is made up of a series of episodes that make for a quick flow of the story.
- Characters are quickly sketched and the action in the story shows the conflict situations that are present and then there is resolution of the conflict.
- There is repetitive element also in the story, i.e. there are repetitions of responses. There are chants also in folktales.
- Another common characteristic is the time and place and these are quickly established. In folktales, the time is always in the past.

Traditional Literature:Folktales(Cont.)

The introduction of the folktale always presents

- the conflict situations,
- characters and
- place
- done in a few sentences and the storyteller then moves to the heart of the story.
- This is done to capture the hearts of the audience.
- The conclusion of the story follows immediately after the climax.
- The structure of the folktale starts from its introduction and the economy of incidence and its logical conclusion, because the storyteller has to keep the attention of the audience.
- Each episode has to make a contribution to the main theme of the story.

Traditional Literature:Folktales(Cont.)

Characterization in folktales

- Characters in folktales are drawn in a flat dimension or caricatured.
- There is no growth or development in folktales.
- The characters always symbolise good or bad.
- The qualities of the character i.e. the strengths and weaknesses are quickly shown
- It is the strengths and weaknesses of the characters that will lead to the resolution of the conflict or the plot.

Traditional Literature:Folktales(Cont.)

Style of writing in folktales

- Dialogue is used a lot in folktale and that makes the story more readable and interesting.
- The words of the characters show clearly the actions and the tone of the story.
- A major feature of the style of the folktale is that, it maintains the atmosphere and the culture of the country from which the story is coming from.
- The second feature of the style is that, it represents a story told by the storyteller.
- Since folktales originally were oral, the reading version has a resemblance of a storytelling.
- Thus, a lot of folktales are usually written in verse form.

Traditional Literature:Folktales(Cont.)

Themes in folktales

- The very purpose of a folktale is to tell an interesting story.
- However, the stories are based on interesting and important themes.
- Some of the themes are based on the behaviours of foolish people in society.
- Their actions are so much exaggerated that the audience or the reader who has such tendencies will see his own foolishness and by so doing change his way of life.
- Some themes in folktales also provide an outlet for people's feelings against their kings, chiefs, elders who oppress the poor.
- The values of people's culture are also expressed in folktales or folklore.
- Thus, virtues like **humility, kindness, patience, sympathy, hard work** and **courage** are rewarded
- The reward reflects the aims and aspirations of the people.

Traditional Literature: Others

Cumulative Tales.

This is another important type of literature for young children.

- Cumulative tales have the barest of plots.
- They are made up of a series of short episodes.
- Each new episode repeats all or a part of the preceding episode.
- The repetitiveness fascinates children and compels them to read on and even ask for more.
- The tongue-twisting repetitions require a skilled storyteller to negotiate his way through the episodes.
- Many cumulative tales feature a series of animals or forces of nature each more powerful than the preceding one.
- Typical examples of such stories is
 - *The House that Jack Built*
 - *Old McDonald Had a Farm*
 - *The Gingerbread Boy*
- In some books it is called
 - *The Gingerbread Man.*

Traditional Literature: Others(Cont.)

Beast and Animal Tales.

These are stories in which animals talk and act like human beings.

- Examples of such are
 - *Red Riding Hood*
 - *The Lion King*
 - *The Three Little Pigs*

Wonder Tales

These are fairy tales and tales of magic and supernatural beings.

- In such tales, there are encounters with witches, giants and dwarfs.
- Such stories always have a “**happily ever after**” ending in which good is rewarded and evil is punished.
- Examples are
 - *Jack and the Bean stalk*
 - *Cinderella*
 - *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

Traditional Literature: Others(Cont.)

Fables

These are brief didactic tales which are presented in the form of dialogue and in verse.

- In the story, animals speak like human beings but the characters are impersonal and they retain their own animal nature.
- For example, a rabbit remains a rabbit and a fox is a fox.
- The characters represent different aspects of human life.
 - the lion represents a king,
 - the fox represents a sly and cunning person while
 - the sheep represents innocence and humility and
 - the tortoise represents determination.
- The basic feature of fables is to teach morality or lessons about life.
- Fables are credited to *Aesop*, a great Greek storyteller of the 6th Century B C.

Traditional Literature: Others(Cont.)

Myths

These are stories that are told as if they are real in order to make them meaningful.

- They show the relationship between human beings and the gods or relationships among the gods themselves.
- Sometimes, myth stories tell about how people accept their destiny and fulfil it.
- They show also how people deal with the issues of good and evil,
- Others myths talk about the origins of civilization.
- Some also are about natural phenomena.
- Three different kinds of mythical stories may be identified as:

Creation Myths

These are about how the world began and the origins of civilization.

- Every culture has its own creation stories.

Traditional Literature: Others(Cont.)

Nature Myths

These explain natural phenomena like

- the characteristics of animals and
- the seasonal changes.

Hero Myths

These are stories which are based in history. They embellish the life of a real person.

- The facts and adventures of the person are exaggerated to make the individual famous for his or her deeds.
- These stories often feature a hero who is given very difficult tasks to accomplish. Sometimes the gods intervene and help the hero to accomplish his tasks but
- Sometimes too they make things difficult for the hero.
- Examples of hero myths include
 - *Hercules*
 - *Sinbad the Sailor*
 - *Jason and the Golden Fleece*
 - *Conan the Adventurer; Conan the Barbarian; Conan the Destroyer*
- Hero myths are called legends also.

Topic Two:

Modern Fantasy



Modern Fantasy

Fantasy stories portray a world of make-believe.

- They are imaginary rather than realistic and they force the reader to believe things which ordinarily he or she would not believe.
- Modern fantasy refers to make-believe stories that are contemporary.
- They are similar to Traditional literature.
- The only difference is that they are written rather than oral.
- They are also written by known or identifiable authors.
- They are imaginative tales which require young readers to accept elements and story lines that clearly cannot be true – readers must suspend disbelief.
- The stories may be based on
 - animals that talk,
 - elements of science fiction,
 - supernatural or horror, or combinations of these elements.

Modern Fantasy(Cont.)

When written for young readers, these books are called chapter books –

- Format that breaks a story into sequential chapters that move towards a final resolution.
- Examples of modern fantasy written for young readers up to 12 years old include:
 - *Charlottes Web*
 - *Winnie the Pooh*
 - *Alice in Wonderland*
 - *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*
 - *The Wizard of Oz*

Topic Three:

Realistic Fiction



Realistic Fiction

Modern trends in children's literature emphasises stories that show how life is lived in reality.

Realistic fiction therefore are those that give honest and sympathetic treatment of

current,

social,

political and

economic issues of societies and therefore

it helps children to come to terms with the realities of such societies.

Realistic fiction is imaginative writing that gives an accurate reflection of how life is lived in the past and how life is lived now.

Everything that happens in realistic stories is something that happens to real people.

Realistic Fiction(Cont.)

- In realistic fiction, there are stories about
 - home life,
 - school life,
 - adventure stories,
 - crime and detection and many others.
- They talk about how children were able to cope with the problems of growing up.
- They are about
 - how to fit into their families,
 - how they cope with their peers and
 - how they fit into the society.

Realistic Fiction(Cont.)

The stories centre on the home and the school.

- They centre on the home because it is the place where children learn about
 - love,
 - joy,
 - sorrow,
 - fear, etc.
- In the school, children take a bigger step into the unknown.
- They go out to make new friends and they learn how to solve problems by themselves.
- It is therefore necessary to expose children to stories that will help them to adjust to the trauma of finding themselves
 - among unfamiliar people and
 - in unfamiliar places.
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Realistic Fiction(Cont.)

- Realistic stories also expose children to experiences they never would have had because of their background.
- For example
 - a child from a rich home would not know how it feels like to sleep on an empty stomach.
 - Such a child would not have sympathy for the poor.
- Through realistic stories, such children will understand and empathise with people from
 - deprived areas and
 - people who are disadvantaged in one way or the other.
- Realistic stories reflect also special interests of children,
- For example
 - sports;
 - careers and
 - academic pursuits.

Realistic Fiction(Cont.)

Personality Development in Realistic Fiction

- The story of every individual is the story of growing up and becoming reputable.
- The kind of person one becomes depends on the kind of experiences that one had in childhood.
- Those who were important to us
 - as role models,
 - places we went to,
 - things we did and
 - things that we couldn't do and many others,
- come together to make us what we become as adults.
- Stories written about
 - love and loving parents and
 - family relationships
- important in the life of children,
- when they read about such stories, they adopt them and as they grow up they tend to exhibit these traits.

Realistic Fiction(Cont.)

- Stories about
 - growing up,
 - developing maturity,
 - sexuality,
 - coping with the human conditions of physically challenged persons
- Are all good for children to read.
- Stories about physically challenged people play two roles in children:
 - They provide positive images with which handicapped children may identify in the sense that they do not look at themselves from a negative perspective.
- - They help the physically normal people to develop intelligent understanding of the problems that physically challenged children face.
- It is important that stories about disadvantaged people should not
 - be sentimental
 - invoke pity for the child who cannot do anything for himself or herself.
- As in all written stories, those about handicapped people must depict the personalities as multi-dimensional characters that have feelings and frustrations.

Topic Three:

Non-Fiction or Informational Books as Fiction

Introduction

Non-fiction or subject books or books that provide information may be written in story form to help children learn more about real things.

- Non-fiction books discuss subjects that are too advanced for children to understand.
- However, such subjects may be fictionalized (written in story forms) to fit the appropriate reading levels.
- For example children who may be interested in jets and rockets may not be able to read and understand rocket science.
- However, stories about rockets and jets will provide children with important information about rockets, jets, rocket fuels etc.
- Non-fiction books include The Bible, Science fiction, historical fiction, biography and poetry and drama.

The Bible as Literature

The Bible has its place in traditional literature because it is a record of man's continuous search

- for an understanding of himself,
- his relation with other human beings and
- his relationship with the Creator.
- **It is important then to introduce children to the Bible stories because the stories show**
 - human ambitions;
 - feelings of love and hatred;
 - obedience;
 - perseverance and
 - hard work.
- **Stories are not country bound nor are they time bound.**
- **They affect every country in the world and they continue forever.**
- **Examples of the Bible as literature include**
 - Noah and the Ark,
 - Samson and Delilah,
 - David and Goliath,
 - Joseph and Portiphar's Wife,
 - Cain and Abel,
 - Daniel in the Lion's Den, etc.

Science Fiction

These are stories that deal with scientific possibilities and potentials that may bring change in the society.

- Science fiction may be classified under fantasy but may be different from ordinary fantasy stories
- They are real hypothesis about the nature of mankind or the universe.
- Examples include
 - *Captain Planet*
 - *The Matrix*
 - *The Time Machine*
- One value of science fiction is that it stirs the imagination of children
- In the sense that most stories only offer a static picture of the society
- Whilst science fiction shows a picture that is slightly different to children.

Historical Fiction

This provides children with facts about life while at the same time helping children to experience the past and identify with

- the conflicts
- the sufferings,
- joy,
- happiness,
- wars
- Of those people who lived at that point in time.
- The stories about the past also help children to develop a feeling of the continuity of life.
- For Example
 - *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*
- The story in short portrays virtues of bravery, chivalry and perseverance of those people who lived in the past

Biography

It is a story that is based on the life of a person.

- Children enjoy reading stories about other people –
- Biographies form an effective “bridge” between storytelling and nonfiction – after all – everyone’s life is a story!
- Biographies are almost always published about notable people in notable fields
- They are often used to introduce children to the concept of non-fiction.
- Biographies can also be extremely motivating –
 - young children love to dream about what they will be when they grow up.
- The lives of famous, important people let children see how the process of growing up shapes
 - The opportunities,
 - The choices, and
 - Challenges
- people face in life.

Poetry and Drama

Poems and drama are important genres that introduce children to

- verse,
 - prose,
 - rhythm,
 - rhyme,
 - writing styles,
 - literary devices,
 - symbolism,
 - analogies,
 - metaphors.
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- From a librarian's point of view, they are important because they are written at different reading levels
 - Thus a young reader's interests can be matched with text that is consistent with his/her abilities.
 - This is especially important for children who read reluctantly and below their age group.
 - The simple language used in some poems and drama can be appreciated by readers of varying abilities,
 - Provides a context to learn a variety of language arts skills.

Classification by Age Group

Classification by age group is the second method of categorizing children's literature

- **The criteria for dividing by intended age is a rather vague one.**
- **Books that may hover between children and adult books may be classified in either way.**
- **Books for younger children are usually written in simple language; large print and have a lot of pictures (illustrations).**
- **On the other hand the language of books for older children is increasingly complex, have normal print and fewer pictures.**

The categories by intended age are listed below:

- **Picture books for pre-readers or children of ages 0-5**
- **Early reader books for children in the age range 5-7. These are intended to help children build their reading skills.**
- **Chapter Books. These are appropriate for children aged between 7 and 12**
- **Young-adult Fiction. These are appropriate for children between ages 12 and 18.**

References



Activity 1

List the main features of folktales

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Activity 2

Assignment

- How may children's literature be classified? With relevant examples, outline the various categories of children's literature.