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From the Book Page to the Big Screen:
An Exploration of Literature-to-Film Adaptions and Their Use in the Classroom

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Abstract

Many classic titles of children's literature have been adapted into feature film presentations. Although often regarded as a mere form of entertainment, movies can and should be incorporated into the elementary classroom as supplementary material to be paired with their corresponding works of literature. The four examples provided include *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* by Judi Barrett, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, and *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie. Each of these four works originated as a book that was later recreated into a film format with varying degrees of accuracy to the original story. Through a close examination of the author, theme, classroom application, and film connection, a greater appreciation is gained for the integration of film in the language arts classroom.

Keywords: film, literature, language arts, storytelling

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An Exploration of Literature-to-Film Adaptions and Their Use in the Classroom

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what then is the value of literature in the classroom? Students have been increasingly influenced by the image-saturated culture to become visual learners. Although not static, learning styles assist teachers in reaching all students through differentiation. Current trends show that the population of visual learners is on the rise; thus, teachers must be prepared to accommodate the needs of every student in their classroom. One excellent tool of which teachers must take advantage is book-to-movie adaptations. Children's literature will always hold an irreplaceable role in the classroom; however, films provide a creative reinterpretation that promotes critical thinking through an enjoyable medium. By no means should literacy development be neglected in the classroom. Rather, motion pictures should be regarded as a supplemental resource. Although encouraging literacy through reading is certainly a high priority, teachers must be mindful that language arts also includes visualizing and visually representing. Only by embracing all types of language arts as equally valid modes of communication are students given the value of a holistic education.

The Constitution of Storytelling

Many educators may be hesitant to bring film into the classroom in fear that it may replace traditional printed literature as the integral force of education. However, what teachers must realize is that a proper understanding of storytelling as an art form is not limited nor should it be restricted to the written word. According to Roney (1996), "In its most basic form, storytelling is a process whereby a person (the teller), using mental imagery, narrative structure, and vocalization or signing, communicates with

other humans (the audience) who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily via body language and facial expressions, resulting in the co-creation of a story” (p. 7). By this definition, storytelling is more of a social activity than an academic pursuit. Thus, film as visual representation must be valued as a natural and necessary complementary component of understanding and interpreting literature.

Two other definitions by Livo & Rietz (1986) and Roney’s (2009) summary of Lipman (2002) respectively encapsulated the elements of storytelling as an ancient art, sophisticated practice, an immediate experience, a negotiation between teller and audience, an entertainment, and a game (Livo & Rietz, 1986, pp. 7-11), as well as “words, imagination, narrative, interactivity, and nonverbal behavior” (Lipman, 2002; Roney, 2009, p. 49). The Brenemans (1983) said, “Storytelling is the seemingly easy, spontaneous, intimate sharing of a narrative with one or many persons; the storyteller relates, pictures, imagines, builds what happens, and suggests characters, involving him- or herself and listeners in the total story—all manifested through voice and body” (pp. 7-8). Finally, Pellowski (1977) quoted Scheub with his original definition being “the creation of a dramatic narrative whose conflict and resolution are derived from . . . remembered core clichés and shaped into a plot during performance” (p. 15). She then expounded to further define storytelling as “the art or craft of narration of stories in verse and/or prose, as performed or led by one person before a live audience; the stories narrated may be spoken, chanted, or sung, with or without musical, pictor[i]al, and/or other accompaniment, and may be learned from oral, printed, or mechanically recorded sources; one of its purposes must be that of entertainment” (p. 15). As demonstrated by

the vast variety of sources, the concept of storytelling is almost impossible to define, precisely due to its fluid nature.

Literature and Film in the Classroom

Rather than succumbing to the fear of academic compromise of motion pictures in the classroom, teachers have advantageous opportunity to embrace the benefits film offers as a supplemental material. There are many recent examples of book-to-movie adaptations that provide excellent pairings for curriculum enrichment. Instead of avoiding films in order to rely strictly on printed literature, combining instruction by utilizing both can draw out deeper themes, help students to develop critical thinking skills, and establish real-world connections.

Additionally, the use of film to supplement printed literature accommodates various learning styles and students with special needs. Learning disabilities such as dyslexia are better addressed when students are supported with resources outside of the traditional printed material. Film offers a dynamic presentation that combines visual, auditory, and vicariously experienced kinesthetic elements, inviting the viewer to become a secondhand participant in the storyline (Coencas, 2007). To prevent students from passively staring at a screen, hands-on activities should follow to solidify comprehension. Through an exploration of several samples, further beneficial effects of pairing film and literature become apparent.

Stories for the Big Screen

The famous picture book *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* by Judi Barrett was reimaged as a brand-new story under Sony Pictures in 2009. Taking on entirely different plotlines, both the book and the movie capture children's imaginations through

zany descriptions and imagery of wacky weather. The book and the movie complement each other well with the original literature providing the backdrop of setting for the film's expansion of dramatic narrative components.

Produced in 2018 by Disney Studios, *A Wrinkle in Time* captures the magic of Madeline L'Engle's original classic in a dazzling visual masterpiece. This adaptation holds true to much of the original story, yet it removes most references to religion, which is troubling to some readers. Instead, the film focuses on a predominantly feminist agenda by casting strong female lead roles.

In 2014, Lantern Entertainment and Walden Media collaborated to recreate *The Giver* in film format. Although it retained much of the original storyline, some plot points were exaggerated, extended, and edited to compose a more compelling movie. This dramatized effort caused some original readers and fans to disconnect from the film adaptation.

J. M. Barrie wrote *Peter and Wendy*, which was published in 1911, based on his original play, *Peter Pan: The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. Since then, it has been retold through many perspectives, beginning with the animated Disney classic in 1953. Another more recent adaption includes *Hook* by Steven Spielberg with Sony Picture Studios and stars Robin Williams as Peter Pan, Dustin Hoffman as Captain James Hook, and Julia Roberts as Tinkerbell (Spielberg, 1991).

Each of these four stories provides visual enrichment through the accompaniment of the film counterparts and are presented for inclusion and implementation within classroom curriculum. The powerful themes they project are best highlighted at different

literacy development stages; however, they can be modified to accommodate various grade levels.

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs

Published in 1978, this classic children's picture book has inspired imaginations for just over four decades. Despite its lack of a Caldecott Award, the fanciful illustrations paint an equally vivid interpretation as the accompanying text. In 2009, it was reinterpreted by Sony Pictures as the origin story of the zany island and what led to its weird weather. Focusing more on the inhabitants, specifically Flint Lockwood and his friends, the film further developed Chewandswallow's unique characteristics. The torrential menu resulted in opposite outcomes in the book and the film, with the book taking a positive and almost utopian approach, while the film explored the weather's apocalyptic characteristics.

Judi Barrett. Judith Barrett was born in Brooklyn, New York, 1941. Later in life, she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in advertising design from Pratt Institute, also located in Brooklyn. After her graduation, Barrett pursued freelance advertising design work until she became a schoolteacher of art and woodworking in 1968. Over the following years, she continued to teach while completing graduate level work for her master's degree in early childhood education from Bank Street College of Education. Barrett continued to pour into her artistic ability and passion by studying pottery and painting at the Brooklyn Museum, as well as by teaching young painting students at the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. She went on to marry Ron Barrett, an accomplished children's book illustrator who would contribute greatly to her work. In

addition to her writing and art projects, Judi Barrett has served as a reviewer of children's books in the New York Times from 1974 until the present ("Barrett, Judi 1941-," 2016).

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs was such a well-received book that the Barretts continued the saga with the sequels *Pickles in Pittsburgh* and *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 3*. *Pickles in Pittsburgh* described the community's return to the island of Chewandswallow as they sought to clean up the mess and share their food supply with those living around the rest of the world. The message of philanthropy clearly communicates the importance of environmental restoration, along with the necessity of addressing world hunger as an international pandemic. The final installment in the series, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs 3*, occurred in a dream sequence. The grandfather fell asleep while watching a news report on the television in which astronauts had discovered a mysterious type of precipitation on the planet Mars. In his dream, Grandpa envisioned the curious substance as pie filling to be used in an intergalactic bakery he builds with aliens.

Making predictions and academic application. This whimsical picture book presented a silly series of events that young students from kindergarten through third grade will find amusing. Opening the book, readers follow along with two siblings as they listened to a tall-tale bedtime story from their grandfather who told of strange weather occurrences caused by familiar foods. This structure highlights the importance of generational storytelling and its positive impact on children. Two other films that mimic this message are *The Princess Bride*, which also opens with a grandfather sharing a story time with his grandson, and *Bedtime Stories* starring Adam Sandler. The latter of these two motion pictures echoes a similar plot to *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Barrett,

1978), in which the fantastically impossible can be made reality through the unstoppable power of imagination. Although it may never rain spaghetti as on the island of Chewandswallow, or gumballs as in the hypothetical world of *Bedtime Stories*, in reality, both films emphasize to children the power of their own thoughts (Barrett, 1978; Shankman, 2008). Literature and film collaborate to assist in shaping students' attitudes toward learning and their general life outlook, which in turn will determine their destiny.

How does this outlook translate into academic enrichment? As an outrageously fun and ridiculously imaginative story, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* provides an interdisciplinary approach through literature at a young age. The crazy weather patterns mentioned open the discussion for the field of meteorology and learning to recognize patterns in everyday life. Drawing a connection between earth science and general mathematics demonstrates to students the interconnectedness of academia. Language arts is presented through new vocabulary, plot structure, and the elements of storytelling. Health and nutrition can be introduced through the variety of menu items, and social studies ties everything together through civic education. Holistic education is not segmented but rather unified (Barrett, 1978; Lord & Miller, 2009).

Picture books in the classroom. The majority of contents circulated by elementary school libraries consists of a wide selection of picture books. By definition, a picture book requires illustrations to complement its story plot. Rather than simply using pictures to accompany written text, picture books are built on the structure of the combination of both elements. Despite the common assumption that picture books are focused on the early grade levels, this genre can also be appropriately implemented in upper elementary grades, middle school, and even high school. *Cloudy with a Chance of*

Meatballs is aimed at a lower reading level; however, other picture books such as *Crow Call* by Lois Lowry would be an appropriate addition to a high school curriculum as it explores a girl's reconnection with her veteran father on a hunting trip. High school students have developed a more mature mindset that enables them to analyze subtly nuanced plot characteristics such as tone and theme.

Picture books also serve as connection points for integration across subjects through the component of art appreciation. Students are introduced to the powerful concept of visual communication within the pages of picture books. Vivid depictions add a deeper level of credibility that cannot be created by words alone, validating the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. Educators can utilize the dualistic nature of picture books in training students to recognize literary coherency and cohesion which rely on more than the artwork's subjective beauty. The Caldecott Award specifically recognizes talented illustrators and their pieces, honoring the critical contribution of visualization to literacy development and comprehension.

Film connection. *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* focuses on describing the wacky weather patterns on the island of Chewandswallow, but the film develops an exciting plot line within the setting of the town. After a series of failed inventions, Flint Lockwood made a breakthrough when he discovered that his "Flint Lockwood Diatonic Super Mutating Dynamic Food Replicator" (FLDSMDFR) had created a giant food superstorm. With the help of amateur news reporter Sam Sparks and Brent McHale, formerly known as "Baby Brent" and the face of advertising for Baby Brent Sardines, Flint regained control of his invention before it mass-produced enough food to overtake Chewandswallow. Meanwhile, the antagonist in the movie, Mayor Shelbourne, sought to

capitalize on the meteorological misfortune by manipulating the events to create a worldwide tourist attraction rooted in gluttony. Although none of these characters are mentioned specifically in the book, the film builds upon its initial setting with a story that identifies similar issues, such as consumerism and persistence in the face of failure (Lord & Miller, 2009).

This book and film pairing is applied for the purpose of teaching prediction intertwined with interdisciplinary studies and character education in the elementary school classroom. The integration of literature across the curriculum is a method that has been increasingly embraced by educators as they recognize literacy as valuable to all disciplines. Due to the prominence of weather, the first topic to be addressed is that of science. Science processing skills such as observation and prediction are emphasized through topics such as meteorology and nutrition. Mathematics skills often accompany scientific subject matter in the form of recognizing patterns and problem-solving strategies. Second, social studies is indirectly introduced through the film's subtle civic influences, with both the book and the film alluding to the formation and organization of society due to different driving forces. Third, incorporating both a picture book and film reinforces the language arts of visualizing and visually representing, without neglecting the importance of reading and writing. Read-aloud activities give students the opportunity to collaborate on projects linking the major content areas and finishing the class time with appropriate clips from the film. Due to the film's primarily non-academic nature, selecting abbreviated sections to demonstrate specific ideas breaks it into more digestible chunks.

A Wrinkle in Time

This Newbery-winning publication explores the idea of time travel between different dimensions. The female protagonist Meg teamed up with her younger brother Charles Wallace, a prodigy, along with her new friend and blossoming love interest Calvin for a quest to rescue Mr. Murry, Meg and Charles' missing father. While Disney's 2018 film production closely adheres to the original plotline, like many movies, it abbreviates the overall story by cutting details deemed unnecessary.

Madeleine L'Engle. The award-winning author was born in 1918 to a world-traveling author for a father and a performing pianist mother from New York City. Thus, L'Engle grew up surrounded by her parents' creative energy, which would serve as a source of inspiration. Furthermore, L'Engle married actor Hugh Franklin in 1946, adding to her artistically influential inspirations. Together, they had three children, Josephine, Maria, and Bion.

Before settling down to begin a family, L'Engle graduated from Smith College with honors and New School for Social Research. She later went on to complete graduate work at Columbia University while pursuing her career as an actress. However, most of her working adult life was spent as a teacher, librarian, and author.

Her most well-known novel, *A Wrinkle in Time*, was the first in a five-part "Time Fantasy" series and a Newbery Award winner in 1963. This book, along with many of her other works, wove the genres of science fiction and fantasy with morality and familial love. Despite her growing success in publishing during the late 1940s, L'Engle stepped away from her work in deference to the care of her family. She continued to write in her spare time and submitted her stories to magazines only to be rejected several times over.

This obstacle discouraged her until she attempted to dismiss writing from her life altogether. Yet she was unable to sacrifice such an influential passion. Through dedication and perseverance, L'Engle returned to selling her writing but was met with resistance when *A Wrinkle in Time* was turned down by 26 different publishers over a span of only two years. Finally, some editors from Farrar Straus gave her one more chance because they personally enjoyed her books. After great success, L'Engle continued the rest of the "Time Fantasy" series, published a picture book titled *The Other Dog* and collaborated with her adopted daughter to write *Mothers and Daughters*, a non-fiction compilation of prayers, prose, and quotes. Throughout her entire writing career, L'Engle regularly referenced her fervent faith closely associated with the Episcopalian church and heavily influenced by the Anglican tradition ("Madeleine (Camp Franklin) L'Engle," 2002).

Courage and character application. *A Wrinkle in Time* embodies the value of courage in an unorthodox manner as it follows young Meg Murry on her journey to confidence. As Meg continually pressed in toward her fears in hopes of rescuing her father from his ominously dark captor, she often experienced crippling self-doubt, causing her to consider turning back multiple times. However, she was reminded by Mrs. Whatsit that fear is natural: "Only a fool is not afraid." (L'Engle, 1962, p. 97); but courage is the driving motivation by which fear is overcome. Educators may then take advantage of the opportunity for character education, emphasizing the need for courage when facing everyday challenges. For students who come from troubled homes, the tenacity of Meg to find her father, no matter the cost, can be an inspiration to keep choosing love in spite of difficult trials (L'Engle, 1962).

One expression of courage from *A Wrinkle in Time* that manifests itself in the modern classroom is the confrontation of traditional gender stereotypes. Specifically, in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers, an overwhelming male majority dominates the field. *A Wrinkle in Time* features a female protagonist who also happens to be a gifted mathematician. Meg's friend Calvin recognized her unusual abilities and approached her for tutoring assistance before they embarked on their rescue quest (L'Engle, 1962). Meg gained confidence in her giftings along the way which serves as a positive example for female students who may feel the discouraging pressure of sexual discrimination. It is every educator's duty to fight the power of prejudice and empower all students, regardless of gender, to perform according to their highest potential rather than conforming to the societal standard (Riley, 2014).

Fantasy in the classroom. Fantasy as a genre has the power to capture students' attention through the use of imagery and descriptive language. Opportunities for classroom integration of fantasy literature alongside classic works of literature introduce students to strong symbolism simultaneously. Fantasy is closely connected with the genres of science fiction and fairy tales, but fantasy embraces the setting of an alternative universe. Thus, the presupposed laws of nature are often suspended as the characters must operate by a foreign set of rules usually involving the use of magic. Unfamiliar circumstances shift the readers' perspectives to examine the influence of cause-and-effect in a world that functions under a different set of operational principles. Students' heightened awareness of fantasy characters and the events they encounter transfers into a complex discussion on the concept of choice and its impact. Through consideration of

another world, students gain a fresh understanding of the significance behind everyday decisions (Cantrell, 2010).

According to children's author Laurence Yep, writing fantasy is nothing more than realistic fiction which embraces the perspective of an outsider. By dismissing standard "mental filters" (Yep, 2005, p. 54) that govern an understanding of everyday circumstances, students can explore the possibilities of an alternate reality without the limiting confines of the world in which they presently live (Yep, 2005). Deeply rooted in ancient mythologies, fantasy as a genre recalls historic human stories and connects them to current experiences with relatable themes through the use of metaphoric analogies. Two great authors and theologians, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, provided additional classic examples of fantasy through personified animals in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and mythological creatures in *The Lord of the Rings*. Both men cited George MacDonald as a major inspiration for their work, and all three greatly contributed to the field of literature by normalizing the merit of fantasy and the elements it contains (Thomas, 2003).

More than an imaginative form of storytelling, research has demonstrated the educational benefits of introducing fantasy as early as in the preschool classroom. One study (Richert & Smith, 2011) sought to test young students' abilities to apply themes and concepts from fantasy sources. Their findings reflected a negative relationship between the transfer of ideas from fantasy to everyday situations when compared to the transfer between realistic fiction to ordinary life. However, students with a higher fantasy orientation were more likely to connect concepts from fantasy to reality.

Film connection. The 2018 film put a strong feminist spin on this literary classic. Additionally, several minority celebrities highlighted the power of diversity including

Oprah Winfrey and Mindy Kaling. Several details were altered or removed altogether in Disney's feature film, causing many readers to become disappointed. One of the major alterations included the removal of the beloved character Aunt Beast, after which an entire chapter in the original book was named (DuVernay, 2018). Another of the complaints from religious readers was the omission of the words of Jesus Christ, despite the remaining spiritual references including strong New Age ideals. The spiritual component of both the book and the movie open the gateway for academically appropriate religious conversations in the classroom. Young readers can then compare and contrast the supernatural implications from their reading of the book and watching of the film.

The Giver

The main character of the story, Jonas, was eager to receive his life work assignment during the coming-of-age ceremony but became uncertain when he was the only one selected for an apprenticeship under the collective "Giver." As he began his training, Jonas soon discovered that there is much more to the world than what the community was experiencing. Yet in a society where unpleasantness was suppressed in favor of maintaining the status quo, Jonas fought to free himself, his family, friends, and neighbors from the bondage of a utopian fantasy (Lowry, 1993).

Lois Lowry. Born in 1937 in Honolulu, Hawaii, Lois Lowry was the daughter of an army dentist. Thus, her childhood was filled with challenging changes and trying transitions, one of which included moving with her pregnant mother and older sister Helen to live with her grandparents in the rural area of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Lowry recounted the difficulty of her father's absence and her grandmother's disagreeable

disposition toward children but speaks well of her grandfather's kindness. As she began attending school, her remarkable literacy abilities were recognized by both her teachers and family. Instead of playing with the other children on the playground, Lowry preferred to bury herself in independent reading. She recalled her reading history without a precise recollection of the moment she learned to read but rather relayed that "it just happened" at the young age of three years old, as indicated by a nursery school teacher's written comment ("Lois Lowry 1937-," 2002, p. 135).

Lowry's early propensity toward language and writing propelled her into a career of journalism and photography. She began to write for children after an editor from New York City read an article that she had submitted to a women's magazine and pushed her to pursue that avenue. Her first book, *A Summer to Die*, followed the tragic medical deterioration of Meg's older sister Molly who suffered from leukemia. As Meg processed through her sister's illness and eventual passing, she befriended local neighbors who supported and encouraged her through inclusion in their lives. Despite the incredible weight of intense grief, *A Summer to Die* was well accepted, perhaps due in part to Lowry's personal experience with loss. Her own older sister Helen passed away from a battle with cancer when Lowry was a young adult. This example serves as evidence that an author's personal life often heavily influences and inspires his or her writing.

Lowry continued to address deeply emotional and mature issues such as an adopted child's attempts to locate her biological mother and a young girl's efforts to protect the Jewish community in Nazi-controlled Denmark. Somehow managing to delicately and powerfully discuss troubling topics in terms understood by children, Lowry won two Newbery awards for *Number the Stars* and *The Giver*. She then extended

The Giver series with three more books: *Gathering Blue*, *Messenger*, and *Son*. As she continued to write throughout the rest of her life, Lowry acknowledged that children are often more consciously capable than is credited to them. It is a common misconception to consider children's lives carefree, as if they are somehow immune to the greater difficulties this world has to offer. Instead, Lowry insisted that writing should be tailored to meet children's needs on their level without minimizing the severity of life's challenges and stresses. Lowry mastered the art of empathy by embracing a child's perspective through the verbalization of their thoughts and feelings ("Lois Lowry (1937-)," 2012).

Community and philosophical application. *The Giver* entertains one of the greatest questions humanity has ever sought to answer, the problem of pain. The main protagonist, Jonas, lived in a highly-developed society in which the effects of imperfection had been eradicated with the existence of everyday citizens improved for an optimized lifestyle. By implementing a streamlined approach to regulating human developmental stages, all forms of discomfort were minimized until they were virtually eliminated. However, the disappearance of the power of pain was accompanied by a loss of genuine pleasure. This paradox raises the issue of the price tag of pain and whether it is a necessary side effect for true happiness. A philosophy that embraces the value of pain challenges the current culture's preoccupation with manipulation of comfortable circumstances and sparks classroom discussion.

Students seek to analyze the purpose of suffering and the worthiness of the character it produces. By participating in both large and small group conversations, students are able to develop their communication and collaboration skills. In a controlled

community, students can safely exchange ideas and opinions with a sense of security. Giving students the freedom to reflect on challenging philosophical perspectives allows them to begin forming their own opinions and convictions as they develop.

The Giver poses the possibility of a society that seems to have solved the problem of pain by transferring all memories—both good and bad—to a substitute. The dilemma that is then posed is determining the cost of joy. Without sorrow, there is no concept of true happiness. Jonas discovered that beauty can only be appreciated after experiencing the effects of brokenness. Debate is sparked surrounding the theme of ethics as entertained by *The Giver*. The highest value regarded in *The Giver* is that of the common good, which is heightened by the collectivist mindset, standing in stark contrast to traditional American individualism.

Science fiction in the classroom. Many people first think of aliens and intergalactic battles in outer space when they hear the term science fiction. However, science fiction can take on a variety of unique forms without being confined to the traditional stereotypical setting in outer space. Rather, dystopian civilizations and alternate realities provide the perfect platform for exploring hypothetical circumstances and their effect on society. Science fiction engages students' imaginations to ask, "What if?" and consider the consequences of certain choices. In an exciting and fun format, science fiction reveals an exaggerated impact often caused by common dilemmas faced in students' everyday lives, such as environmental preservation.

As indicated by its title, science fiction incorporates scientific elements into fictionalized settings. Through the presentation of scientific fact in an entertaining and engaging medium, students' reception is improved, and knowledge is better retained.

Science fiction allows students to explore concepts and hypothetical theories that are otherwise impossible or inaccessible to the typical classroom. Strategically pairing experiments and hands-on activities with science fiction literature and corresponding film clips reinforces students' learning and disproves their scientific misconceptions. As a whole, the genre of science fiction promotes students' level of functioning scientific literacy, permitting them to better construct hypotheses, analyze observations, and communicate resulting discoveries (Cavanaugh, 2002).

Film connection. One of the main modifications the movie enacted is the aging of the main characters beyond the book's specification. The novel clearly defined Jonas as 12 years old, yet in the film he was portrayed as a teenager, thus older and more able to participate in a romantic relationship. Perhaps the most significant plot alteration was Jonas's rebellion and subsequent discovery of the Giver instead of the ending in the novel, which included his specific apprenticeship (Lowry, 1993; Noyce, 2014).

Peter Pan

There is much more to this beloved classic than it may first appear. Traditionally categorized as a children's story, this book contains many more mature elements than are addressed in most elementary classrooms. The original play and subsequent novel were much darker than Disney's upbeat, animated counterpart. Several sequels and subsequent adaptations have attempted to reinterpret and extend the original context.

The setting was Victorian era London in the home of the Darling family. When Mr. and Mrs. Darling attended an evening party and left their three children Wendy, John, and Michael at home, Peter Pan appeared and whisked them away to his home in Neverland where people never grow up. They went on many adventures involving

mermaids, Indians, and pirates, but eventually they became homesick and returned to their parents (Barrie, 1957).

J. M. Barrie. The controversial background of J. M. Barrie shrouds his career in mystery. As a young child, Barrie's older brother and mother's favorite child passed away. Attempting to console his grief-stricken mother, Barrie took on the persona of his deceased brother in an effort to draw her out from a dark, depressive season. Deprived of a childhood innocence, he went on to become the playwright of the famous work *Peter and Wendy*, which was inspired by his friendship with the Davies family. While walking his dog in Kensington Gardens, Barrie met the five young Davies boys and quickly became their playmate. Over the next weeks, he developed a close relationship with the boys as well as their mother Sylvia Davies. However, as the ties continued to deepen, Mr. Davies became jealous of Barrie and the excessive time and expense he lavished on the family. Yet when both of the Davies parents passed away, Barrie obtained partial custody of their children. Three of the five boys passed away before Barrie, but Peter Davies spoke well of their caretaker and his relationship with the children ("J(ames) M(atthew) Barrie," 1999).

Familial and social roles and application. Childhood is fleeting; thus, innocence must be preserved for as long as possible. Difficult to detect through the collection of chaotic episodes, *Peter Pan* reflects the turbulent inner life of the man who never grew up. The interesting effect is the counteractive message this book communicates in glorifying the beauty of childhood by a man who seemed imprisoned by it. Even young children quickly reason that Neverland is a fictional world and that no person can escape the reality of growing older. Thus, the tale of *Peter Pan* serves as a type of hypothetical

parable, warning readers and viewers of the dangers of immaturity. However, the family-friendly Disney film softened the original severity and instead focused on the beauty of a childlike belief.

Peter Pan redefines critical social roles by reassessing and analyzing familial connections. The original Lost Boy himself defied the confines of time by refusing to grow up, thus questioning the essence of childhood. The paradox of youthful innocence is nuanced by its elusive nature, which leads one to question what it means to be a child. Often there is great anticipation for the next stage in life, reducing childhood to a mere stage of preparation for the adult world. Instead of idolizing achievement, *Peter Pan* shifts the reader's perspective back to an appreciation for a simpler stage of life. Children are complete persons that, although not fully mature, carry intrinsic value, which is often more evident before the clutter of responsibilities descends. Children possess an uninhibited imagination that, when properly channeled, serves as key steps in the problem-solving process. To be a child requires an embrace of the current moment without concern for the past or worry for the future. However, children do not stay young forever, as was true of Wendy and her brothers. The Darling children were aware of their dependence on a caretaker, so when John and Michael began to forget, Wendy reminded them of the loving tenderness of their mother.

Perhaps the pinnacle theme of *Peter Pan* is not a focus on the children, but a reminder of a mother's role. Much of the story is centered on the Darling children's attachment to a mother figure. Even Peter was attracted to the idea of a mother as one who tells stories and tucks them in at night. Thus, once in Neverland, he enlisted Wendy to be the Lost Boys' surrogate mother. At first, Wendy enjoyed the opportunity to play

make-believe, stepping into the role of a grown up. As she and her younger brothers spent their days with Peter and the Lost Boys, the Darling children missed the comfort of their mother more and more.

Fairy tales in the classroom. Although popular in the early elementary grades, fairy tales provide enriching material for any age level. This timeless genre presents students with the opportunity for deep literature analysis within an imaginative context. *Peter Pan* is of no equal standing with classic tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*; yet nonetheless, it holds firm to the same sort of fantastic elements. Hugo Crago defined a fairy tale as “a narrative which represents a society’s collective concerns with some aspect of ‘growing up’, and it explores these concerns at the level of magical thought” (Crago, 2003, p. 24). Many traditional folktales could be classified as fairy tales; however, the specific reference to a coming of age aspect directly parallels the themes found in *Peter Pan*.

By the standard of this definition, students are introduced to the purpose and value of fairy tales beyond creative entertainment. High school literature classes can explore the depths of symbolism, metaphor, and personification through the mode of classic fairy tales that many students could identify from the earliest years of their childhood. Under the guise of myth, fairy tales often communicate moral principles and valuable virtues that correlate with students’ personal lives.

There are multiple methods for incorporating fairy tales into the literature curriculum. Reader’s theater is an excellent way to actively engage students through a form of role play which forces them to step into the perspectives of the characters. Fairy tales often carry a certain stigma of childish nonsense; thus, it is imperative for educators

to correct this misconception by creatively incorporating them into the classroom in a way that is age-appropriate, student-centered, and academically enriching.

Film connection. The popular Disney film is a highly romanticized version of the story's heavily darker undertones. Where the animated movie portrays Tinker Bell as a sassy and jealous pixie, Barrie's original story contains her use of vulgar language and sharp spitefulness, which may shock the reader. Disney's similar interpretation of Peter as a self-centered, spoiled brat is far softer than Barrie's original psychopathic boy with personal baggage produced by bitterness from tragic past events. When Peter's baby carriage rolled away unintentionally, he interpreted the unfortunate accident as abandonment by his parents. He then harbored feelings of rejection as he persuaded other children that they were unwanted. If they did not comply, he resorted to stealing them away by force. As the ironic comparisons and contrasts between Peter and Barrie unfold, it becomes apparent that the animated classic does not accurately reflect Barrie's writing (Barrie, 1957; Geronimi, Jackson, Luske, & Kinney, 1953).

Steven Spielberg's *Hook* furthers the story into Peter's future as if he had left Neverland and grown to adulthood. Robin Williams portrayed the character of "the boy who never grew up" after he started a family of his own, but his adult responsibilities distracted him from his home life, which caused his closest loved ones to suffer neglect. The evil and eccentric Captain James Hook was brilliantly represented by Dustin Hoffman who brought an eerie darkness back to the original character as he kidnapped Peter's children, Jack and Maggie. In this alternate ending to Barrie's original tale, Peter returned to London with the Darling children to grow up and marry Wendy's granddaughter Moira. Similar to the original plot, Peter and Moira attended an evening

party while leaving Jack and Maggie at home. Out for revenge, Captain Hook returned to kidnap the children in hopes of luring Peter back to Neverland for one last battle. As he reconnected with his inner child, Peter was reminded of life's highest priorities (Spielberg, 1991).

However, the obvious disconnect between Barrie's play, book, and the Disney and Spielberg films should not discourage teachers from implementing film in a supplemental role. Secondary grades could be tasked with a project to include the reading of Barrie's original work, bibliographical research of the author, and integration of film scenes in the classroom. Referencing all three sources, students begin to draw connections between the constructive elements of a story. Thus, educators should not be fearful of films that seize enormous creative liberties but should embrace the opportunity for students to conduct in-depth analyses.

Conclusion: More Than Just a Movie

The power in these literature and film combinations lies far beneath the surface of their entertaining qualities. Instead of pulling out movies as a last resort at the end of a school year, teachers should recognize the value of film adaptations and how they reflect their literary forerunners. The use of comparison and contrast is one of the greatest strategies to be employed when reading literature and watching films in the classroom. Appropriate pairings encourage students' development of critical thinking skills as they practice through the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy; the use of film in the classroom cannot be a haphazard decision as a filler activity only referenced after the traditional literature material is exhausted. For optimization, film should be broken down into shorter clips, which the class will watch as a type of reward after finishing the

predetermined section of reading. This approach reinforces students' reading comprehension while motivating them with the extrinsic reward of watching a movie in class (Evans, 2007). Showing films in conjunction with their literature counterparts is more than a fun and engaging medium; it helps students connect literacy comprehension with visualization as a vibrant component of the language arts curriculum.

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