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## An Exploratory Study of Elementary-Aged Children's Conceptions of Death Through the Use of Story

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN'S  
CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH THROUGH THE USE OF STORY

by  
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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

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May  
1987



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This Dissertation submitted by Thurman Norris Guy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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This Dissertation meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

A. William Johnson 2/26/87  
Dean of the Graduate School

Permission

An Exploratory Study of Elementary-Aged Children's Conceptions  
of Death through the Use of Story

Department Center for Teaching and Learning

Degree Doctor of Education

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In closing, I echo the words of Peabo Bryson (1985):

When I lift the veil from my eyes and gaze upon my nakedness, I am suddenly aware of how fragmented and fragile humankind really is. In concluding my thoughts, my innermost feelings lead me to believe that these frail bits and pieces that make us what we are, in reality are the essence of those we have loved and have been loved by.



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore elementary-aged children's conceptions of death through the use of stories and to examine the use of story as a medium in the expression of children's conceptions of death.

The subjects were 31 elementary-aged children (12 kindergarteners, 9 second graders, and 10 fourth graders). Each group was randomly divided into Group I and Group II. Group I (contextual stories) listened to three stories that reflected real life experiences with death; stories were adapted from children's literature. Group II (media stories), on the other hand, listened to three stories that presented an actual death experience based upon newspaper accounts. Both groups were presented with a sequence of three stories within a one-week period. The sequence of stories introduced the idea of death, proceeding from a remote indirect experience in the first story and progressing to a more personal, intimate, and direct experience in the later two stories. Group discussions followed each of the story sessions in order to assess children's conceptions. Questions were designed to facilitate open discussion. Data obtained were descriptive in nature, and children's responses were classified using Kane's (1979) components of death.

The major findings of this study were:

1. Using Kane's components of death, variable patterns were found in kindergarten, second, and fourth grade, as the sequence of



three stories unfolded in both groups.

2. Stories designed in a contextual or media format were feasible tools to evoke elementary-aged children's conceptions of death.

3. A storyteller or a discussion leader (e.g., teacher or counselor) presenting different contextual and media stories in a school setting promoted an atmosphere of acceptance of the death experience.

4. Children in the study did not "personify" death. This is in contrast to Nagy's (1948) study, who found that children between the ages of five to nine personified death.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

The present study explored elementary-aged children's conceptions of death through the use of selected stories and examined the use of story as a medium in the expression of their conceptions of death. The major purposes of this study were threefold:

1. To explore students' conceptions of death as evoked by story, using Kane's components (1979).
2. To explore changes occurring in death conceptions using Kane's components as the sequence of stories unfolded in both Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories).
3. To compare children's responses between Group I and Group II to determine whether different storytelling approaches yielded differences in expressions.

The study was intended to explore the preceding purposes in a heuristic manner.

#### Background of the Problem

We feel ourselves to be symbolic, ethereal, timeless beings, and yet we know we are creatures of flesh and matter, subject to decay and death. (Jones, 1982, p. 175)

Death is a part of life, the two are intertwined and inseparable. "The relation between life and death is organic, for man as individual behaves in a quite identical way, that is, according to his nature" (Nagy, 1948, p. 3). With this inherent concept of death, children as individuals are oftentimes left unprotected in their efforts to understand the life process, particularly its end. Comprehension of the total process of life, including its end, is very important; for comprehension facilitates the ability of children to obtain a mature view of death.

Most children today are introduced to death in more ways than were children of previous times. Today's perceptions of death may be easily stimulated by a song, a newspaper, a book, or a television program. Matter and Matter (1982) stated:

At an early age they are confronted with the phenomenon of death: a pet is killed, a grandparent dies, a classmate or friend is killed in an automobile accident, a president is assassinated, and the pictures of death from around the world are portrayed daily on television. (p. 112)

Some studies have mentioned a change in the conception of death as the child matures. Vogel (1975) hypothesized that, on the whole, children under age five possess limited ability in interpreting and understanding death, while children who reach age 10 can usually understand the concept of death. According to Fredlund (1977) "there is general agreement that [a child's] understanding develops in an orderly sequence from a state of total unawareness in very early childhood through several stages to the point where death can be considered logically in terms of cause and outcome" (p. 533).

Similar findings from studies by Anthony (1972), Ilg and Ames (1955), Koocher (1973), and Matter and Matter (1982) postulated that children's intuition on the cause and effect of death have to do with their level of cognitive development.

Kane (1979), in a study on children's thinking about death between the ages of three and 12, identified 10 components or concepts held by children at varying age levels. The components were (a) realization, (b) separation, (c) immobility, (d) irrevocability, (e) causality, (f) dysfunctionality, (g) universality, (h) insensitivity, (i) appearance, and (j) personification. The components identified by Kane were used in this study to aid in the analysis of children's conceptions of death. A more detailed discussion of Kane's components may be found in the definitions of terms and the review of literature.

One of the earliest and most comprehensive studies on the child's view of death was conducted by Nagy (1948) who studied 378 children in Budapest. Nagy's results indicated that children's perceptions go through different stages in interpreting death-related experience.

A good deal of literature and research emphasizes the relationship between children's conceptions of death and the appropriate media being used to influence their concepts (Delisle & McNamee, 1977; Weinstein, 1977). Research by Dobson (1977) stressed the importance of using appropriate media, especially stories, in influencing children's conceptions of death. Similar findings from a study by White, Elsom, and Prawat (1978) reported that "the variable relating to the attractiveness of the story character significantly affected children's responses regarding cause of death" (p. 307). The results



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indicated a positive relationship between children's understanding of death and the different levels of attractiveness of story characters that were read to them.

Pitcher and Prelinger (1963) indicated that stories told by children can measure the stage of their development and oftentimes, as children develop chronologically, their ability to tell stories about death increases. "Children often use stories and play to help develop an intellectual understanding of concepts as well as to begin to cope with abstract and emotional issues" (Glicker, 1978, p. 76). Similarly, Dobson (1977) pointed out the importance of the death experience with stories by stating:

Young children, in their experience with books and stories, can be encouraged to develop empathy and to release their own feelings about loss, separation, and death. Empathy, the ability to experience the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of another person, is a prerequisite to the whole process of mourning. The nurturing of the ability to [empathize] can be encouraged in young children through careful selection of children's books that appeal to the young child's basic needs for survival, security, and protection. (p. 173)

Wass (1979) reported that in many ways the best material for explaining death concepts is literary works. "Death has long been a part of oral and written traditions for children; but it has recently become more central to plot and character development in many stories" (Wass & Corr, 1982, p. 68). Accordingly, Ulin (1977) strongly suggested that a framework for conceptualizing death be

provided for children, and that one important way for children to perceive death is through children's literature.

In addition to some of the points made previously, Whitley and Duncan (1982) stated:

Literature is a door through which children may share their feelings openly and reflect on examples of supportive behaviors, whether they are expressing grief or joy. Can a teacher reading Charlotte's Web to children fail to be moved to shed tears along with the children? Even after reading it for more than 25 years? Children need to know that big people cry too. (p. 35)

For years the use of such literature in school and hospital settings as bibliotherapy was recommended (Bernstein, 1983; Narang, 1975; Russell & Shrodes, 1950). Bibliotherapy represents "a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature" (Russell & Shrodes, 1950, p. 335). In utilizing the process of bibliotherapy, readers may identify with others whose experiences are similar, release emotional feelings as a result of this identification, and finally gain insights into their own experiences (Delisle & McNamee, 1977).

### Procedure

One public elementary school located in a small midwestern city in the state of Minnesota was selected for the study. The sample consisted of 31 students, randomly divided into two groups in kindergarten, second, and fourth grades. Group I and Group II for each grade level consisted of four to six subjects. All students

had parents' permission.

The students listened to selected stories being read to them in their school library. A series of three stories were read to each group within a one-week period. The selection of stories was limited to literature dealing with death as the main theme. All stories were evaluated based on guidelines from crisis-oriented literature by Jalongo (1983). A more detailed discussion of Jalongo's guidelines may be found in the rationale for selecting story materials (see chapter 3).

Group I listened to three contextual stories read to them by the researcher; each story contained a death experience selected from two children's books while the third story was written by the researcher. Group II listened to three media stories read to them by the researcher, and each story contained a death experience selected from newspaper articles. A brief discussion flowed from each story for both groups so that the researcher could discover the children's conceptions of death. The total process for each story and discussion lasted approximately 25 minutes. This was video recorded for later analysis.

The discussion following the stories was not conducted by the researcher but by two graduate students in Counseling at the University of North Dakota. Open-ended questions for both groups dealing with matters of the story were directed to the students.

#### Limitations and Delimitations

This study was conducted within the framework of the following limitations and delimitations:



1. This study was concerned with students from a small midwestern city.
2. The samples are small in number and it is not assumed that the samples are representative of grade or age groupings. The results of this study may not be similar to age or grade groupings.
3. This study lasted approximately one week for the participants.
4. The subjects' attitudes may have been influenced by encounters with events and experiences of the mass media.
5. The deletion of one student due to a recent death-related experience would perhaps skew the sample.

#### Definitions of Terms

Research reflects the idea that death is an extremely confusing term that has no universal definition, least of all a universally valid one. For purposes of this study, death was not defined from any particular perspective, realizing that no one definition is conclusive or satisfactory to encompass children's interpretations and that children's perspectives differ from adults'.

The following key terms are defined and widely used throughout this study:

#### Bibliotherapy:

A frequently used term to describe the use of books to ameliorate or solve children's problems. "Biblio" refers to books, and "therapy" refers to experiences designed to bring about a social adjustment. In the joining of the two words we have the coining of the term most appropriate to describe



that which is done when books are used to help solve the myriad problems encountered by children. (Garner, 1976, p. 37)

"A process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature--interaction which may be utilized for personality assessment, adjustment, and growth" (Russell & Shrodes, 1950, p. 335).

Contextual stories: Stories that reflect real life experiences with death. Each story in Group I was written in a creative form. In the contextual stories, language and tone were lively and colorful; characters were presented to engage empathy. They were portrayed honestly and sensitively. In the study, the researcher developed the first story given to Group I. The remaining two stories in Group I were taken from the literature and modified by the researcher.

Media stories: Stories that reflect real death experiences based on real events. Each story in Group II was written in a report form. Media stories were basically factual and informative. In the study, all stories presented in Group II were taken from newspaper articles and rewritten by the researcher.

Realistic: Shrodes (as cited in Rubin, 1978) stated that:  
. . . the author treats recognizably real people in real situations rather than stereotypes of people or situations contrived to demonstrate popular schematizations of experience. The characters will thus be governed by motives which are clearly recognizable as universally valid human motivations and the events will follow one another in

an inevitable and logical sequence as the result of the interaction of the characters' psycho-biological natures with the world in which they have their being. Realistic literature presents not only the phenomena of experience but its genesis. (p. 69)

#### Components or Conceptions of Death

Kane (1979), in her study which included a review of related works in the field, used 10 components when referring to ideas that children have when explaining their conceptions on death. They are as follows:

1. Realization is the awareness of death, of the state of being deceased, or an event which happens. Death can happen to someone, or it can be something which makes the living die.

2. Separation deals with the location of the dead and is concerned with the child's idea of where the dead are: i.e., "In the trees," "Under the ground."

3. Immobility has to do with the child's notions concerning the movement of the dead. The dead may be seen as totally inactive or partially or completely active.

4. Irrevocability has to do with the child's idea of death as permanent and irreversible, or temporary and reversible.

5. Causality is a belief of what brought about the state of death, whether from internal causes, such as heart attacks or external causes such as guns, or a combination of

the two.

6. Dysfunctionality deals with the ideas about bodily functions other than the senses. A child could believe that the dead are totally dysfunctional, or that they are partially or completely functional.

7. Universality deals with the child's ideas of mortality. A child could have notions that everybody dies, or that nobody dies, or that there are exceptions.

8. Insensitivity is a consideration of mental and sensory functions such as dreaming, feeling, thinking, and hearing. Ideas may be held that the dead are totally insensate or partially or completely sensate.

9. Appearance is the notion of the way the dead look. Ideas could be held that a dead person cannot or does not look as though he were alive or, to the contrary, that he looks the same.

10. Personification is a notion of death as concretized and reified as a person or thing. (p. 144)



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The review of literature will address the study of children's conceptions of death through the use of story. The focus of the first part of the review of literature will be a discussion of (a) comparison of children's past and present conceptions of death, (b) classic studies related to children's perceptions of death, and (c) children's conceptions of death from age two to age 12; while the focus of the second part of the chapter will concern itself with children's literature regarding death and bibliotherapy. Each focus will be treated separately in the chapter.

#### Children's Conceptions of Death:

##### Past and Present

In the 19th century, death at any chronological age was a common occurrence; that is, people died at all ages and from all types of consequences. [Many] "parents expected, and to some extent were prepared, to lose at least one child during his early years" (Burton, 1974, p. ix). With limited medical knowledge and its

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<sup>1</sup> For ease in reading, the masculine pronoun is used wherever the gender of the referent could be either male or female. No sexual bias is intended.

application and prevalent unsanitary conditions, diseases and common illnesses like scarlet fever, diphtheria, and tuberculosis often occurred in epidemic proportions among the population. Meanwhile, increased premature births and birth complications and infections among infants and mothers contributed to society's high mortality rates. With high mortality rates and the fact that funerals took place in the home, children were personally exposed to more death-related experiences than they are today (Shipley, 1982). These situations provided a freer atmosphere for ideas and discussions to occur with children.

In contrast to the last century, present advances in science, medical knowledge, and social conditions have prolonged human life expectancy considerably. With life expectancy longer, impersonal and isolated phenomena of death presented by the media, along with death usually occurring in hospitals and other institutions away from home, recent generations of children are aware of death, yet "death has become a foreign experience for many" (Shipley, 1982, p. 1). Children are less likely to be present at the time of death or to attend the funeral, therefore, limiting children's ideas and discussions of death.

In a similar manner according to Whitley (1976):

Most children have never even seen a dying or dead person. People seldom die at home these days. Following death, the body is taken from the hospital to the funeral home to the cemetery. Children, shielded from the mourning, are sent away to visit a few days with those less directly affected. Upon returning to the scene, children miss the

loved ones and often wait for their return. Hence, ignorance, mystery, and myth are perpetuated. (p. 77)

In an article entitled "You and Death" (1970), published in Psychology Today, Edwin Shneidman designed a questionnaire for adult respondents to obtain data on the discussion of death during their childhood. From a total of 30,000 responses, Shneidman's (1971) results indicated:

. . . in our culture that a third of the respondents could not recall from childhood a single instance of discussion of death within the family circle. In more than one-third of the families, it was mentioned with discomfort, and in only 30 percent was death talked about openly. (p. 44)

Gordon and Klass (1979), in their book They Need to Know, made a distinction between the way modern children and children of the past experienced death. They discussed this in the following manner:

Two trends over the course of this century have influenced and continue to influence the relationship between the child and death. The first is the increasing distance of the immediate experience of death from everyday life. The second is the increasing distance of the child from the adult world. Taken together, these trends have radically changed how a child can respond to death. (p. 5)

According to Zeligs (1974) children throughout history have been deeply involved in coming to grips with the inevitability of their mortality. Children have deep anxiety about death. Historically, children, through their interaction with others, have developed concepts based upon what they view, hear, and feel. Their experiences



are integrated into their mode of understanding death. Accordingly, the growth of their understanding and conception of death is dramatic.

### Classic Studies Related to Children's

#### Perceptions of Death

Anthony (1940, 1972), in her pioneering studies, tested children's views of death by story completions, intelligence tests, and through family diaries. The results revealed different stages of development that children's perceptions of death undergo. Children between age three and age five have a limited capacity for understanding the word "death" or the actual event of death. Between the ages of six and eight children are preoccupied with death ritual. Children around age nine or age 10 are beginning to understand the word "death" and the biological and logical essentials of the death experience.

Nagy (1948), in her study, investigated Hungarian children's perceptions of death from the age two through the age 10. She employed written compositions, drawings, and brief discussions (talking individually and collectively with children). Nagy theorized that children pass through three stages of development in coming to understand death.

Stage one (three to five): This stage is characterized by children viewing death as temporary, not as a final point. In children's minds, the deceased can still run and jump, eat, go to the bathroom, and think while in a coffin. Children also believe that the dead person is just taking a nap. "In his egocentric way he imagines the outside world after his own fashion, so in the outside

world he also imagines everything, lifeless things and dead people alike, as living" (Nagy, 1948, p. 26).

Stage two (five to nine): This stage is characterized by children viewing death as personified. In their minds, death is not a process, but a person or being, such as a ghost or the "boogie man," who comes to take you away. "Death exists but the children still try to keep it distant from themselves. Only those die whom the death-man carries off. Death is an eventuality" (Nagy, 1948, p. 26).

Stage three (nine and above): This stage is characterized by children recognizing that death is final and universal. "In general it is only after the age of nine that the child reaches the point of recognizing that in death is the cessation of corporal life" (Nagy, 1948, p. 25). In their minds, death is a realistic process which is a part of everyone's life. Children understand that death happens to everyone at any time of age; it will even occur to them sometime in their lives.

Kane (1979), in her exploratory study, found results inconsistent with Nagy's study on the development of children's concepts of death. Kane used children from age three to age 12, collecting data from open-ended questions about human death. Children's death concepts were collected from interviews and later placed into categories--categories in one or more components. The 10 components were (a) realization, (b) separation, (c) immobility, (d) irrevocability, (e) causality, (f) dysfunctionality, (g) universality, (h) insensitivity, (i) appearance, and (j) personification. She proposed a developmental sequence of these 10 components in children's acquisitions of understanding death, but categorized the components into three distinct



stages (definitions were presented in chapter 1). Kane's (1979) stages are as follows:

Stage one (three to six): Children's conceptions of death appeared in relation to the "here and now" concept. Children's conceptions were demonstrated in three components held concurrently, realization, separation, and immobility.

According to Kane (1979) children's thinking was:

. . . egocentric and magical; they could make someone dead by their behavior, wish, or label. They effected the separation of death by closing the eyes of the dead; this apparently made either the children or the dead disappear. The Stage One's tended to see death as a particular position; getting into the position was what made deadness. Death's dysfunctionality was a lying down immobility. Death was a description. (p. 149)

Stage two (seven to nine): Children's conceptions of death appeared in a concrete manner with an enormous number of details and specifics. Children developed death concepts through a continuation of the development of (a) realization, (b) separation, and (c) immobility which in turn lead to increased development through (d) causality, (e) universality, (f) irrevocability, (g) dysfunctionality, (h) appearance, and (i) insensitivity. According to Kane (1979), these six components of children's death concepts are held concurrently and are not interrelated.

Kane (1979) concluded that children in Stage Two:

. . . realized only the most obvious dysfunctions; the dead cannot eat or speak. As they grew older, they understood

the less obvious dysfunctions; the dead cannot drink or hear. Older children recognized subtle dysfunctions; the dead cannot feel cold or smell flowers. Still older children comprehended more subtle dysfunctions; the dead cannot dream or know they are dead. (p. 150)

Stage three (10 to 12): Children developed death concepts in abstract form in uncommitted fashion. Children's thinking in this stage was logical.

Kane (1979) found that for children in Stage Three:

. . . death was a state of internally caused dysfunctionality. Death was a definition. Inactivity, dysfunctionality, and insensitivity were the condition [sic] of death; i.e., responsiveness is not just a characteristic of life, but a requirement for life. (p. 150)

As a result of her research, Kane (1979) modified two concepts held by Nagy (1948) on children's conceptions of death. Nagy's research suggested that children around age nine viewed death as an inevitable experience. Kane concluded that Nagy's interpretation of children's understanding of death at age nine as an inevitable experience occurs much earlier, "frequently by age 6, and it was seen consistently in children 8-years-old and above" (p. 151). Second, Nagy's results indicated that children between age five and age nine personified death; death was expressed in terms of a spirit, a skeleton, or some unusual figure. Kane's results, however, suggested that only 4% of the children (ages nine and older) reified death.

Researchers' studies have shown considerable agreement that children's perceptions of death are developed in an orderly sequence

and through a series of stages (Anthony, 1972; Kane, 1979; Koocher, 1973; Nagy, 1948). Several research studies related children's death concepts in part to their natural curiosity about the world. While children are constantly being exposed to death-related experiences they are also being forced to develop and search for their own meaning of death. Many times these searches leave unhealthy attitudes that touch their lives. Available studies by Nagy (1948) and Kane (1979) have shown that children from the age group of two to three have a very limited comprehension of death, but as they enter the upper age groups (nine to 12) they begin to view death as final.

### Children's Perceptions of Death

#### Ages Two to 12

Much research showed little comprehension of the meaning of death by children two or three years of age (Brennan, 1983; Jackson, 1965). Children perceive death in the form of "here now and gone later." Children have little understanding of time and separation (Grollman, 1967; Lonetto, 1980). Even a separation for a short period of time from a significant individual such as father or mother could become a stressful situation for a child under three years of age.

In a similar way Grollman (1967) stated:

. . . especially from psychoanalytic contributions, that separation can arouse the most profound anxieties in children as well as adults. How the young child experiences and attempts to come to terms with [the] separation situation might well influence [not only] his subsequent ideas of death--the ultimate separation--but also



contribute to the shaping of his basic character structure.

(p. 96)

Children aged three to five years have a limited understanding of death. Wass (1979) characterized their understanding as "magical thinking." "Magical thinking" by youngsters allows them to believe that princes can turn into frogs and monkeys, that flowers whisper, etc. Children of age three to age five also view death as a sleep or trance in a temporary state of life (Pope, 1979).

Vogel (1975) described understandings of death by children from the ages of three to five "as something temporary that may come in degrees" (p. 17). She further suggested that:

We may hear a child say, "I shot you dead, real dead."

In the next instant, the dead one can be alive and well and the game goes on. For the young child there is no clear distinction between life and lifelessness.

It is not unusual for a young child who has been taken to his grandpa's funeral to ask later, "Is Grandpa coming to play with me today?" It's not that he has forgotten or that he failed to understand what he was told. Most likely, this question reflects his inability to see death as something final and permanent. (p. 17)

Children between the ages five and nine gradually began to view death in a more personal and universal manner (Vogel, 1975). Children between the ages of five and nine years viewed death as personified (Brennan, 1983). These children tended to personify death as an angel, skeleton, death person, or a grim reaper. Brennan's findings upheld the conclusion of Nagy, but contradicted those of Kane.

Many children in this age group are beginning to explore the wider world around them more because they are (a) attending school; (b) going to and enjoying amusement parks, movies, and ball games; (c) shopping at department stores; and (d) worshipping. Children, particularly at age eight, find that "there is a growing awareness of life's mysteries, and the mystery of death can be related to the other mysteries of life" (Jackson, 1965, p. 54).

From age nine through age 12, many children begin to understand the universality and inevitability of death. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (1979) children in this age group "begin to comprehend fully that death is irreversible, that all living things die, and that they too will die someday. Some begin to work on developing philosophical views of life and death" (p. 6). It is in this age group that children perceive death as inevitable and final.

In summary, several empirical studies concerning death (age five through age 12) yielded two major findings: (a) As children develop they realize that death is final and (b) children develop attitudes gradually in certain defined developmental stages (Delisle & McNamee, 1981). This model of age-typical perceptions of death by children is summarized in Table 1. This table provides an easy reference and contains observable information as a framework for interpreting research based on age/years of children's perception of death (Delisle & McNamee, 1981).

#### Children's Literature on Death

In an informal gathering with some professors and graduate students at the University of North Dakota, a stimulating conversation

Table 1

Age-typical Perceptions of Death

Age (Years)	Nagy (1948)	Anthony (1940, 1972)	Koocher (1973)	Fane (1979)
3	Deny death as regular and final	Ignorant of meaning of word <u>dead</u> ; may be interested in word <u>dead</u> ; limited or erroneous concept of <u>dead</u>	Egocentric conceptualization; fantasy reasoning; magical thinking; symbolism closely ties to own experience	Egocentric and magical; death is defined in descriptions
4	Death = departure of temporary change			
5	Death personified			
6	Death kept distant from	No evidence that children do not understand the word <u>dead</u> ; preoccupied with death ritual; define <u>dead</u> by reference to humanity but include nonessential information		
7			Specific, concrete conceptualization; specific means of inflicting death; specific weapons, poison, assaultive acts	Enormous number of details and specific; cannot eat, speak, drink, dream



Table 1 (Cont.)

Age-typical Perceptions of Death

Age (Years)	Nagy (1948)	Anthony (1940, 1972)	Koocher (1973)	Kane (1979)
8				
9	Death for all is inevitable; a realistic view of death	Understand word <u>dead</u> and the event; define it by reference to biologic essentials		
10			Abstract, generalized conceptualization; death a natural phenomenon and a physical deterioration	Abstract; thinking is logical in structure; death is defined in greater details

The emotional problems posed by death are unique and common to children both before and after death, each in varying situations.

Note. Adapted from "Children's Perceptions of Death: A Look at the Appropriateness of Selected Picture Books" by R. G. Delisle and A. S. McNamee, 1981, Death Education, 5(1), p. 4.

occurred. One of the professors stated that he and his five-year-old son were about to attend a Ricky Nelson concert; but the tickets were sold out, and since they could not obtain any, they returned home. Some months later, Nelson was killed in a plane crash. His son, hearing this on the T.V., said, "Will Ricky Nelson be here tomorrow?" The father explained to his son, as best he could, what death was while his son listened patiently with a puzzled expression. Several days later the local newspaper, still covering the news of Nelson's death, used one of their filed pictures of Nelson which showed him performing. The little boy said to his father, "You see, I told you Ricky is alive."

Beth, a nine year-old girl, along with her mother purchased a Newsweek magazine at a chain store. Beth indicated that her teacher, Mrs. Sullivan, wanted her class to read from a magazine or newspaper about the Challenger tragedy. Within 74 seconds after launch, the space shuttle exploded. America was shocked by the tragic loss of the space shuttle Challenger. Over 2.5 million children observed the tragedy which sealed the fate of the Challenger and its crew in an uproar of colorful, propelling explosions.

These brief narratives of true stories indicate that children do experience death and are interested in concepts of death. Children "are subjected to a remote experience of death by viewing and reading about assassination, war, and violence. This is part of the American life-style" (Dobson, 1977, p. 172). Children, now more often than ever, vicariously experience death on television, on radio, in the newspaper, or through other printed materials at least once a day. Many of these printed materials children could either read or have



read to them as part of their everyday life.

Several research studies (Chaffee & McLeod, 1972; Eron, Lefkowitz, Huessmann, & Walder, 1972; Gerbner, 1972; Singer, 1970) revealed significant effects the media and society have on children. However, research studies of the media's effects on children's conceptions of death have been limited and inconsistent. Further, results from Lonetto (1980) indicated no attempt to examine the influence of literature on children's conceptions of death. For years, "psychologists and thanatologists have been urging parents to seek a better balance for their children among fantasized portraits of death on television, direct personal encounters with death, and constructive accounts in children's literature" (Wass, 1983, p. 5).

In addition to some of the points made previously, Klingman (1980) stated that literature:

. . . especially the short story, offers one of the richest, and most variegated opportunities to explore with young children, in the classroom setting, what death is and what death means to them. It also enables us to respond, in the context of a developmental-preventive, rather than a remedial, way to the needs of children to prepare for encountering death as they grow up. (p. 272)

In the last decade, many writers in literature for the young are writing stories with concepts that depict death themes as part of life (Bernstein, 1979, 1983; Ordal, 1979; Wass & Shaak, 1976). Themes that examine death in stories are anticipation of death from a prolonged illness, the unexpected death of a child, the death of a family member or a pet, the grieving and mourning process of a loved

one, artifacts that are used in a death ceremony, and the dialogue between a parent and child about a loved one (Bernstein, 1979; Delisle & McNamee, 1976). It is such themes in children's stories that touch and shed insight to all facets of human existence.

In addition, Ross (as cited in Ulin, 1977) suggested that young children should avoid literature that carries explicit death themes and, instead, be provided with picture books emphasizing themes of emotional security in family relationships, friendships, and natural experiences. She recommends books such as Little Bear's Visit (Minarik, 1961); On My Beach There Are Many Pebbles (Lionni, 1967); Johnny Crow (Brooke, 1907). These books avoid explicitly death stories with young children but set the stage to enable children later on in their development to interpret the death-related experience.

For older children (over eight years of age) death themes in children's literature are more complicated. Death themes in stories are plentiful, with themes ranging from the death of parents, siblings, or close friends to causes of death by diseases, tragedies, or accidents (Ulin, 1977). Books such as Fog (Lee, 1972); A Taste of Blackberries (Smith, 1973); The Summer After the Funeral (Gardam, 1973) are presented in a realistic manner reflecting the complexities of children's reactions.

Bailis (1977-1978) researched 40 children's books, analyzing the concept of death in children's literature. His results indicated the following:

1. Death as an event is treated as temporary the majority of the time with no emphasis on finality.



2. Immortality, inevitability, and the inherent effects of death are the three major conceptions that were discussed in children's books.

One study by White, Elsom, and Prawat (1978) examined children's developmental perceptions of death following the presentation of two different versions of a story. One group of children was read one version of a story about an elderly woman (Mrs. Wilson) who was a likeable (nice) person, while the other group was read another version that portrayed an elderly Mrs. Wilson as an unlikeable (mean) person. Both groups of children were asked to respond to several questions regarding the cause of the story character's death. The results indicated that there was no correlation between children's understanding of death and the different stories presented, but that the story variable of the attractiveness of the characters affects "children's views regarding the cause of death" (White, Elsom, & Prawat, 1978, p. 309).

In conclusion, Dobson (1977) and Wass and Corr (1982) have shown that children's literature (stories) with death-related themes may well be appropriate material that younger children use to understand the concept of death. As realistic stories with death themes are presented in children's literature, children are better able to understand death as part of the life cycle. To identify these works that will be most conducive to understanding, we must seek enduring simplicity, those books which Paul Hazards (as cited in Wilcox & Sutton, 1977) notes will "distill from all kinds of knowledge, the most difficult and the most necessary--that of the human heart" (p. 266).



## Bibliotherapy

Since ancient times, guided readings in literature have shown a therapeutic effect on the personality of the reader by the type of literature one reads. This process is called bibliotherapy. Educators, clinical personnel, parents, and others have used bibliotherapy successfully for many years to deal with delicate subjects such as death, divorce, and sex as children learn to empathize and see their problems from new perspectives. Bibliotherapy, when used with appropriate stories in literature portraying a death experience, may act as an integral part of the enhancement of children's understanding.

According to Pardeck and Pardeck (1984) bibliotherapy encompasses more than providing books to a reader:

. . . when used as a form of therapy, the reader must be able to identify with the character in the book who is experiencing a problem similar to the reader's.

Similarities between the reader and this character must be evident to the reader. The reader must also interpret the motives of the character and must assess the relationships between the story characters. At this point of the process, the reader makes inferences regarding the meaning of the story and is guided by the helper in applying this meaning to the problem confronting the reader. (p. 2)

There are several useful children's books dealing with death concepts that one might use in bibliotherapy. In several of the children's books dealing with concepts of death, the young reader

could be brought through a similar death experience by using bibliotherapy to meet his emotional needs. If the child could clearly understand death through bibliotherapy, it could be a case of "getting the right book to the right child at the right time about the right problem" (Lundsteen, 1972, p. 505). However, it would be highly impossible to predict that the same or similar books would have similar effects on someone else (Cornett & Cornett, 1980).

The researcher examined several children's books that appeared often in bibliographies on the topic of death, two of which were A Taste of Blackberries (Smith, 1973) and Charlotte's Web (White, 1952). A Taste of Blackberries was used in this study because the story portrayed a death experience in a more realistic and natural manner than Charlotte's Web. With this in mind, the researcher examined the story and the story character's way of responding to grief stages as described by Kübler-Ross (1969, 1983). This will be discussed as follows.

A Taste of Blackberries is a story that explains the death of Jamie, a close friend of a boy, who dies while picking blackberries, after being stung by a bee. One of the themes of the story deals with death as part of life--an inherent part of any life cycle.

Within the context of A Taste of Blackberries, the main character is a boy who progresses through five stages of grief similar to those described by Kübler-Ross (1969, 1983). Kübler-Ross discovered that there were five stages in a death or dying experience through which a person and his family and friends move. Each stage is distinct, usually following a sequential order, but sometimes occurring simultaneously. It is possible that people move out of and



then back to a stage, and that any stage may last an indefinite period of time. Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief are those of denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Following is a description of Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief and the corresponding descriptions of how these stages are presented in A Taste of Blackberries.

Stage one: Denial and isolation. "Denial is a person's reaction that 'it cannot be true.' Denial functions as a buffer after shocking news and allows a person to collect himself and mobilize less radical defenses" (Kübler-Ross as cited in Delisle & McNamee, 1976, p. 684).

Stage one: Denial and isolation (main story character). The boy wouldn't listen to his mother's explanation of Jamie's death; instead, he believed that Jamie was alive and that he was only dreaming.

Stage two: Anger. "When denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by anger, rage, envy, resentment" (Kübler-Ross as cited in Delisle & McNamee, 1976, p. 684).

Stage two: Anger (main story character). The boy showed signs of resentment or revenge outside the funeral parlor in destroying a flower to shreds.

Stage three: Bargaining. "Bargaining emerges because anger has not worked. Bargaining, then, is an attempt to postpone; a chance that one will be rewarded for good behavior and be granted a special wish" (Kübler-Ross as cited in Delisle & McNamee, 1976, p. 684).

Stage three: Bargaining (main story character). The boy tried to recreate several experiences by imitating the way that Jamie would eat or make funny faces, hoping that he would be granted a wish to



return Jamie to life.

Stage four: Depression. "When a person can no longer deny, rage, bargain, he/she will soon feel a sense of great loss and resulting depression" (Kübler-Ross as cited in Delisle & McNamee, 1976, p. 684).

Stage four: Depression (main story character). The boy's regular activities decreased and he exhibited a "low profile"; he became silent much of the time while contemplating in Mrs. Mullin's garden.

Stage five: Acceptance. This stage occurs when a person has command of the experience and is "no longer denying, angry, bargaining, or depressed" (Kübler-Ross as cited in Delisle & McNamee, 1976, p. 684).

Stage five: Acceptance (main story character). As time passed, the boy realized that Jamie would not come across the street. He finally accepted Jamie's death.

According to Russell and Shrodes (1950) in stories similar to A Taste of Blackberries the story content could affect the reader. As the reading content affects the reader, the reader will probably progress through three stages in bibliotherapy. The three stages are (a) identification, (b) catharsis, and (c) insight. Cornett and Cornett (1980) described the following stages:

1. Identification. The reader makes inferences from the story by understanding its meanings, situations, and characters in the book. The reader empathizes with what he reads or sees at a conscious or unconscious level.

2. Catharsis. When the reader reaches the climax of his feelings, he or she then relinquishes those feelings or emotions either verbally or nonverbally under controlled or safe circumstances. "The reader feels secure because he isn't actually the person involved in the emotional circumstance. And yet the similarities in the character's and reader's lives enable the reader to get a new perspective on his problems" (Cornett & Cornett, 1980, p. 18).

3. Insight. This is the final step, where the reader has thought about possible solutions or options needed to resolve the problem, and has developed some type of approach or mechanism to control his feelings. "This insight may come through reading one book, but more often it is a cumulative process in which several bibliotherapeutic encounters contribute to the resulting insight" (Cornett & Cornett, 1980, p. 19).

How does one implement a session in bibliotherapy in a preventive manner or with a child suffering from a death-related experience? Cornett and Cornett (1980) suggest two distinct modes--preparation and implementation.

#### Preparation Steps:

1. Identify needs by gathering information about student problems through observations, school records, conferences, student writings, discussions, etc.
2. Match student with the appropriate materials, such as books, films, filmstrips, slides, etc. Select the proper reading and interest levels, with a focus on appropriate plots, characters, settings, etc., in the literature.



3. Decide the setting, time, as well as introductory and follow-up activities necessary for privacy within the environment, so that the child can be relaxed.

4. Prepare the materials, supplies, or equipment that will be used.

Implementation Steps:

1. Motivate students with introductory activities such as displaying books on tables, posting annotated booklists on bulletin boards, and by having book sales.

2. Provide the reading/viewing/listening experience with alternative materials containing or presenting short stories, poems, pamphlets, etc., for children with reading difficulty.

3. Allow incubation time, by providing opportunities for the youngster to integrate and become critical in viewing and achieving the necessary insight.

4. Conduct follow-up discussion, in order to draw conclusions about the child's experience. A model of a suggested discussion sequence is presented in Table 2. Table 2, according to Cornett and Cornett (1980), provides an example of what the therapist, teacher, counselor, etc., might use to follow the students' literal information through interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

5. Conduct evaluations and direct students toward closure by having the student individually discuss the effect of the book and evaluate its effect.

In summary, Bernstein (1983) and Whitney and Duncan (1982) indicated that the topic of death could be appropriately explained through literature--that is, by the use of bibliotherapy. The process



Table 2

Suggested Discussion Sequence


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<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Student</u>
1. "Tell me what you read in your own words," or "What was this story about?"	1. Retells story
2. "What were the problems in the story? Why were they problems?"	2. Identifies main problems and themes
3. "What happened to the character(s)? Why?"	3. Identifies main characters
4. "What other things happened? Why?"	4. Identifies secondary problems
5. "How do you think the characters felt?"	5. Explains how characters felt
6. "How did the character(s) change from the beginning to the end of the story? Why did they change?"	6. Examines changes in story
7. "What would you have done if you had been the character? Why?" "Has anything like this ever happened to you?" "How could the situation be changed?"	7. Relates self to character(s) and evaluates actions
8. "What was the story really about?" "What do you think about the story now?" (p. 34)	8. Draws conclusions and summarizes

---

of bibliotherapy provides the reader with kinds of growth and insight that stimulate children to reexamine their world. Many children using bibliotherapy go through three stages: empathizing with the situations, characters, etc. (identification); relinquishing those emotions or feelings under safe conditions (catharsis); and developing options to solve the problem (insight).

The problem with using bibliotherapy in explaining life and death concepts lies in the preparation and implementation stages. Preparation in devising and gathering information about the child and the death-related experience must be done carefully. In the implementation of bibliotherapy also, the teacher, the counselor, or therapist must (a) be skilled in asking questions at all levels, (b) be knowledgeable of developmental levels of youngsters, (c) be capable of showing empathy, and (d) have a broad background in children's literature. One can easily acquire and learn the areas of knowledge and necessary skills but may not have the necessary attitudes and values to provide a successful bibliotherapy experience.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to explore elementary-aged children's conceptions of death through the use of story and explore the use of story as a medium in the expression of their conceptions of death. The present study was heuristic in nature. The focus was on the conceptions of death that children expressed through listening to stories using Kane's components (1979). One of the purposes was to explore changes occurring in death conceptions as the sequence of stories unfolded in both Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories); the study also compared children's responses between Group I and Group II to determine whether varying storytelling approaches yielded differences in expressions.

This chapter describes the methodology used in the study. Included are a description of the sample and procedures for the selection of subjects, preparatory steps, a description of materials, the rationale for selection of story materials, descriptions of the story sessions, and a description of how the data were treated.



## Description of Sample and

### Selection of Subjects

The research took place at a public elementary school in a small midwestern city in Minnesota. The school was located in a small rural community of approximately 9,000 people. The school had a total population of 326 students attending kindergarten through the sixth grade.

Parental permission was sought for a total of 91 children in kindergarten, second, and fourth grades to participate in the study. The parents of 41 children granted permission for their children's participation in the study. From that number, the names of 31 subjects were drawn from a hat. Children from kindergarten, second-grade, and fourth-grade classes participated in the study; 16 girls and 15 boys comprised the sample. Girls and boys were equally represented only in Group I of the kindergarten and second grade, but not in the other remaining grades grouped. The students' ages ranged from 5.6 years to 11.3 years. A more specific profile of students' sex, age, and grade groupings is presented in Table 3.

The study involved 12 kindergarteners, 9 second graders, and 10 fourth graders. Subjects in each grade were divided into two groupings: Group I and Group II. Group I consisted of six kindergarteners, four second graders, and five fourth graders, while Group II consisted of six kindergarteners, five second graders, and five fourth graders. Group I listened to three contextual stories read to them by the researcher. The last two stories contained a death experience selected from two children's books and the first

Table 3

Sample Group Summary

Age (in years and months)	Group I			Group II		
	Grade	Girls	Boys	Grade	Girls	Boys
5.0 - 5.6	K	0	0	K	1	0
5.7 - 6.0	K	1	1	K	0	1
6.1 - 6.6	K	1	1	K	1	2
6.7 - 7.0	K	0	1	K	0	1
7.1 - 7.6	-	0	0	-	0	0
7.7 - 8.0	2	0	1	2	2	0
8.1 - 8.6	2	2	1	2	2	1
8.7 - 9.0	-	0	0	-	0	0
9.1 - 9.6	-	0	0	-	0	0
9.7 - 10.0	-	0	0	-	0	0
10.1 - 10.6	4	1	2	4	2	0
10.7 - 11.0	-	0	0	-	0	0
11.1 - 11.6	4	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	4	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>
Total		8	7		8	8

story was written by the researcher. Group II listened to three media stories read to them by the researcher, and each story contained a death experience selected from newspaper articles. A brief discussion followed both Group I and Group II stories so that the researcher could discover the children's conceptions of death. This discussion will be described later in the chapter.

Subjects' participation in the study was voluntary and all information received was held strictly confidential. The researcher maintained the subjects' anonymity, which led to the fictitious names of subjects used in written documentations.

#### Preparatory Steps

The following preparatory steps were taken before the story sessions were introduced:

1. The classroom teachers of the participating children and the principal were given related information on the purpose, content, and materials used in the study.

2. The researcher met with the principal and the three teachers in an informal meeting. The discussion was focused on the information mentioned in the preceding step. The principal and three teachers mutually accepted the content and materials that were used in the study with minimal changes. The researcher responded to questions that were asked and clarified several concerns that the principal and the teachers had related to the study.

3. The researcher requested that all teachers in the meeting review each potential subject's background and academic experience and screen potential participants looking for the following:



(a) subjects who have not had a recent death-related experience and (b) subjects who are not inclined to severe and inappropriate emotional response from stories or discussions that center on death. If a child did not meet both criteria he would be deleted from the sample.

One child was excluded from the study because of a death-related experience. The researcher, in fact, felt that this was a sound decision in that it spared the youngster from any further emotional stress.

4. The researcher met individually with teachers and received their approval for all participants based on the preceding criteria.

The major purpose of these meetings was to reach an understanding with the teachers and the principal about what they could expect to gain from the study, what children might experience from the different stories, what would be expected of them, and what they could expect of the researcher. The researcher also hoped to gain the teachers' support in reassuring parents of their child's welfare in the research study.

### Materials

The students listened to selected stories being read to them in their school library. A series of three stories was read to students within a one-week period. A brief group discussion followed each story, and this was video recorded for later analysis. The materials used included six different stories related to death concepts. The game "Simon Says" was played as an introductory activity, while a stretch exercise was used as a transition activity.

Group I listened to contextual stories that reflected real life experiences with death. The first of the stories given to Group I was developed by the researcher. The remaining two stories in Group I were taken from children's books and modified by the researcher. Each story in Group I was written in a creative form.

Group II listened to media stories that presented real death experiences based on real events. All stories in Group II were taken from newspaper articles and rewritten by the researcher. Each story in Group II was written in a report form.

#### Rationale for Selection of Story Materials

The selection of the stories was limited to literature dealing with death as the main theme. All stories used in the study reflected realism. "For most children, however, more realistic stories are probably more meaningful" (Ryerson, 1977, p. 171).

The researcher used a selection criteria for evaluating all stories presented to the subjects in the study. The following list summarizes evaluation questions used in selecting crisis-oriented children's literature (Jalongo, 1983):

1. Can children identify with the plot, setting, dialogue, and characters?
2. Does the [story] use correct terminology, psychologically sound explanations, and portray events accurately?
3. Are the origins of emotional reactions revealed and inspected?



4. Does the [story] reflect an appreciation for individual differences?
5. Are good coping strategies modeled for the child?
6. Does the [story] present crisis in an optimistic, surmountable fashion? (p. 32)

#### Description of Story Sessions

Research over the years suggests that there is no single storytelling approach or method for reading stories to youngsters (Weinstein, 1977). The researcher used the following steps in both groups in the story sessions:

1. Motivated students with an activity: Played the game "Simon Says" for approximately three minutes.
2. Story experience: Read the story to students (a) using a conversational tone of voice; (b) eliminating unnecessary words or use of "and," "er," etc.; (c) glancing at all students from time to time; and (d) changing the reading tempo of the story as actions presented themselves.
3. Transitional activity: Upon completion of the story, and before each group discussion, students participated in a stretch activity using large and small muscles for approximately two minutes.

Both groups in each grade had three story-discussion sessions within a one-week period. One story was read during each story-discussion session for each group. The story, together with discussion questions that flowed from the story, lasted approximately 25 minutes.



Subjects in their respective class groups were assembled by the researcher for each story session. Subjects were asked to sit facing the video camera, and the camera was positioned behind the researcher's back. The camera was primarily utilized to focus on nonverbal behavior as well as to capture the words of the subjects.

Subjects were informed that they were involved in a study concerned with their attitudes relating to different stories read to them. Subjects were informed before the first story-discussion session that the stories would relate to death. The researcher stated in each story session the following guidelines to all participants:

1. During any portion of the research, if any student feels uncomfortable, the student will be permitted to remove himself from the session.
2. There are no right and wrong answers to the discussion questions.
3. When one is speaking, respect must be given to the speaker by being quiet.

During each session, Group I subjects were read one of a sequence of three contextual stories. These contextual stories were brief stories taken from two children's books and the third written by the researcher with universal experiences described in a novel context that reflected realistic concepts and characters. The sequence of stories introduced the idea of death, proceeding from a remote indirect experience in the first story and progressing to more personal and intimate direct experiences in the later two stories. A group discussion was conducted after each story. (The reader should consult Appendix B for the stories used.)

Group II subjects were read three media stories that centered around death experiences reported in the media. Media stories were brief stories taken from newspaper articles that contained death accounts of famous people. The sequence of stories introduced the idea of death, proceeding from a remote indirect experience in the first story and progressing to more personal and intimate direct experiences in the later two stories. A group discussion was conducted after each story.

Students in both groups were then asked to respond to several discussion questions related to the story that was read. Students were allowed to draw conclusions and to tie related experiences to the discussion. Time was allocated for student responses during each discussion question before proceeding to the next.

These discussions were not conducted by the researcher. Rather, discussions were conducted by two graduate students in Counseling at the University of North Dakota. Both had completed at least one full year of graduate training with background in group techniques. In both Group I and Group II sessions, neither the researcher nor the graduate students made any judgments about the responses from the students, nor did they provide any answers to the students' responses or questions. When answers were requested by students, a reflected response was instead given. Group I and Group II subjects were given the same opportunities to express both their feelings and conceptions of death that flowed from the different stories read to them.

Several of the questions used were predetermined by the researcher. Given the nature of an informal discussion, however, the discussion leaders were free to follow interesting leads from the



students. Open-ended questions that dealt with matters of the story were directed to the students, and the following questions were introduced in all discussions as a springboard:

1. Can you tell me about the story?
2. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
3. What other things happened in the story?
4. What was the story really about?
5. What does the story mean to you?

In the second story session, one question specifically related to death was introduced: How do you feel when someone dies? Finally, in the third story session, two additional leading questions on death were introduced: What does it mean when someone dies? What happens when someone dies?

Upon completion of the study, the researcher and elementary students engaged in an open discussion that flowed from their concerns. Following the completion of the sessions the researcher returned to the school and presented a story hour to the participants in the study. The purpose of the follow-up session was to provide balance to the groups by telling positive stories. The story content reflected positive emotional feelings for the participants.

#### Treatment of the Data

The treatment of the data is descriptive in nature. The subjects' verbal expressions concerning their conceptions of death that flowed from the stories (for both groups) were audio taped and video taped and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed by



the researcher for patterns in (a) students' conceptions of death as evoked by story, using Kane's components (1979); (b) changes occurring in death conceptions using Kane's components as the sequence of stories unfolded in both Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories); and (c) comparing children's responses between Group I and Group II to determine whether different storytelling approaches yielded differences in expressions.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results and analysis of the data collected using children's responses from contextual stories and media stories were reported in this chapter. The children came from three grade levels:

(a) kindergarten, (b) second grade, and (c) fourth grade.

The present study explored elementary-aged children's conceptions of death through the use of selected stories and examined the use of story as a medium in the expression of their conceptions of death.

The major purposes of this study were threefold:

1. To explore students' conceptions of death as evoked by story, using Kane's components (1979).
2. To explore changes occurring in death conceptions using Kane's components as the sequence of stories unfolded in both Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories).
3. To compare children's responses between Group I and Group II to determine whether different storytelling approaches yielded differences in expressions.

Findings in this chapter were presented in the preceding order of stated purposes. The reader should see Appendix C for data springing from the children's discussions.

Kane's (1979) components were used to analyze the content of children's responses during the study. For the sake of classifying children's responses, the components are listed as follows. (See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of Kane's components.)

1. Realization: The child's awareness of the death-related experience.
2. Separation: The child's notions concerning the location of the dead.
3. Immobility: The child's ideas concerning the movement of the dead.
4. Irrevocability: The child's notions that death is viewed as reversible and temporary or irreversible and permanent.
5. Causality: The child's beliefs concerning the cause of death, whether by internal or external causes.
6. Dysfunctionality: The child's ideas concerning bodily functions of the dead.
7. Universality: The child's ideas concerning mortality.
8. Insensitivity: The child's notions concerning the sensory and mental functioning of the dead.
9. Appearance: The child's ideas concerning the way the dead look.
10. Personification: The child's notions concerning death as a person or a ghost.

Classification of children's responses to death was based on the component's presence flowing from the story discussions, and were classified in two ways: (a) presence of the component and (b) absence of the component. The component was held to be present, if a child



uttered a statement that reflected a component. While, on the other hand, if a child failed to utter a statement that reflected a component, it was considered to be absent. For example, one child stated, "My grandpa died from a heart attack." From this example, the component of causality was considered present. (The grandpa's death was imputed to be caused by the heart attack.)

Children's responses were classified into components and scored on the presence and absence of the component. Components that were present were scored "1" and absent components were scored "0."

### Students' Conceptions Using Kane's

#### Components by Grade Level

To explore children's conceptions of death using Kane's (1979) components, children from both story groups were asked the following eight key questions:

1. Can you tell me about the story?

(Appears in each session)

2. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

(Appears in each session)

3. What other things happened in the story?

(Appears in each session)

4. What was the story really about?

(Appears in each session)

5. What does the story mean to you?

(Appears in each session)

6. How do you feel when someone dies?

(Appears in sessions two and three)

7. What does it mean when someone dies?

(Appears in session three)

8. What happens when someone dies?

(Appears in session three)

Children's responses generated from the discussion questions that followed each story were later classified into components. The presence or absence of each component was computed by tabulating the total number of children's responses that flowed from each contextual and media story discussion.

1. Kindergarten. Children's responses viewed at this level most often reflected Kane's (1979) components of realization, causality, and separation. The realization component was present more often at this level than any other component, in that all children's responses contained at least one notion of the awareness of death. For example, one child indicated, "He's dead, and they buried him." However, most of the children conceived of personal death as happening to someone else. They associated death with someone or something that had been around them. For example, "My dog died," or "My grandpa died."

As can be seen in Table 4, the causality component was seen in 8 of 12 children at this level. Their responses indicated that death is either caused by internal or external causes. For example, Sharon stated that, "I had a cat and it died after a dog fight. I gave it to a friend and he left the cage open and the cat got out. He got in a fight with a dog and he died." Several of the other children associated causality with old age and heart attack.

Table 4

Kindergarten Sequence of Kane's Components: Group I (Contextual Stories) and Group II (Media Stories)

Components	Total Number of Each Sequence		Total Number of Students Responding		Total for Both Groups Responding
	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	
Realization	6-6-6	3-4-5	6	6	12
Separation	1-7-2	0-0-2	6	1	7
Immobility	0-0-2	0-0-0	2	0	2
Irrevocability	0-0-2	0-0-0	2	0	2
Causality	2-4-4	0-3-2	6	2	8
Dysfunctionality	0-0-2	0-0-0	2	0	2
Universality	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0
Insensitivity	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0
Appearance	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0
Personification	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0



The component of separation was expressed by 7 of 12 children (see Table 4). Separation refers to the location of the dead. One child viewed separation as "those who die go to heaven," while the majority of children simply mentioned that a dead person is buried.

At this grade level, most of the children held limited responses reflecting the components of immobility, irrevocability, and dysfunctionality. Three main findings emerged here. First, regarding the immobility and irrevocability components, 2 of 12 children stated both components concurrently. For example, Sharon indicated that "dying is like when you go to sleep and you can't wake up." Similarly, Kay stated that "when you die you don't come back for a week." Second, the component of dysfunctionality, bodily functions of a dead person, was expressed by only two children. Their responses indicated that the heart will stop and the dead will stop breathing.

Finally, at this grade level, the components of insensitivity, appearance, personification, and universality were not present in children's responses. However, on several occasions the researcher felt the children used words that reflected the preceding components' usage but were not coherent enough in their expressions to permit categorization.

2. Second grade. Realization, causality, and irrevocability were the three components that the second graders dominantly expressed. As indicated in Table 5, the components of realization and causality were seen in 9 of 9 children at this level. Children expressed the realization component with "he died," "the boy's dog died," and "the dog was special to him." The causality component for second graders was evident in these descriptions of a truck accident, poison, car

Table 5

Second-Grade Sequence of Kane's Components: Group I (Contextual Stories) and Group II (Media Stories)

Components	Total Number of Each Sequence		Total Number of Students Responding		Total for Both Groups Responding
	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	
Realization	7-10-4	6-4-6	4	5	9
Separation	0-6-2	0-0-2	4	2	6
Immobility	0-0-3	0-0-3	2	3	5
Irrevocability	0-1-3	1-2-5	2	5	7
Causality	1-6-0	0-2-4	4	5	9
Dysfunctionality	0-0-0	0-0-2	0	1	1
Universality	5-1-3	0-1-3	4	2	6
Insensitivity	0-0-0	0-0-1	0	1	1
Appearance	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0
Personification	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0



accident, and cancer. Seven of 9 children emphasized the component of irrevocability of the dead in the following fashion: "The person never comes back again," "they won't be back," and "grandma died and could not take her to the park."

The universality and separation components at this grade level were demonstrated by 6 of 9 children (see Table 5). In the universality component several children's thoughts of death were in abstract forms. For example, Kim stated, "It means that you have no more life and that everybody cherish you when you die." In another example, a child stated, "They stop breathing and they cannot wake up. They can't talk, and they can't hear. They can't have another chance, and they can't do anything." Six of the children made responses indicative of the separation component, suggesting that children were concerned with the location of the dead. Some examples were: "Found a stone and put it in the grave," and "they had to bury it."

The components of dysfunctionality, insensitivity, and immobility revealed a limited number of responses. In the dysfunctionality component, one child responded. However, the child expressed the dysfunctionality and insensitivity components concurrently. This child stated, "They stop breathing and cannot wake up. They can't talk and they can't hear. They can't have another chance, and they can't do anything." While in the immobility component, five children expressed the component with "they never come back again" or "there is no more life."

Finally, personification and appearance at this grade level were absent. Children at this level made no response revealing the two components.



3. Fourth grade. As can be seen in Table 6, three of the most dominating components present for children at this grade level were realization, causality, and universality. Ten of 10 children exhibited the realization component. Typical expressions of the component of realization were: "He died and that he didn't lie to them," "we had a death in our family when I was just a little girl," "and all of a sudden he died." Ten of 10 children expressed one or more descriptions related to the component of universality. Children at this level indicated with regularity that death is the universal end of life. Illustrations of expressions revealing universality were: "My grandma died of cancer in an old folks home. She used to tell me stories and play with me quite a lot. We were very close; in fact, I was sad when I realized that she was gone." Another 10-year-old indicated that "when somebody dies the body stops working."

Eight of 10 children at this grade level exhibited the causality component. Several causes of death were mentioned: "He got sick and died," "got hit by a car or a truck," "fell and died," "became ill and died," "died from a heart attack," "like the Challenger incident," "died from old age," and "a simple accident can cause you to die."

Many of the children at this grade level had begun to understand the cessation of bodily activities, distinctions among causes of death, and the universality of death. For example, Reggie, a 10-year-old, indicated, "Sometimes you die of old age; that's because the organs inside your body have worked so hard and a simple accident could result in your having a heart attack. Or you could break your neck and you could die as a consequence."

Table 6

Fourth-Grade Sequence of Kane's Components: Group I (Contextual Stories) and Group II (Media Stories)

Components	Total Number of Each Sequence		Total Number of Students Responding		Total for Both Groups Responding
	Group I	Group II	Group I	Group II	
Realization	14-9-9	6-7-6	5	5	10
Separation	0-6-3	0-0-1	4	1	5
Immobility	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0
Irrevocability	0-1-3	0-0-1	2	1	3
Causality	5-2-5	0-3-1	5	3	8
Dysfunctionality	0-0-3	0-0-2	3	2	5
Universality	5-6-10	3-4-5	5	5	10
Insensitivity	0-0-1	0-0-1	1	1	2
Appearance	1-0-1	0-0-0	2	0	2
Personification	0-0-0	0-0-0	0	0	0



The separation, irrevocability, and dysfunctionality components at this grade level were expressed by some children (see Table 6). Five of 10 children made responses indicating the presence of the separation component; 3 of 10 made comments indicating the irrevocability component, while the dysfunctionality component was held by 5 of 10. Typical expressions of the separation component were: "It is usually sad; just watching him being put to the ground," and "the soul goes to heaven." The irrevocability component was expressed as: "They're here but really not here," and "they never come back." However, several children reflected that a dead person may leave his presence through memories in the living. Dysfunctionality was expressed as "the heart becomes still," and "the body stops working."

The presence of the appearance and insensitivity components at this level was found in the responses of two children (see Table 6). Related to the component of appearance, the responding children stated, "The head was crushed and the eyes were rolling off its sockets. It was somewhat gross" and "I pictured him in my mind as being kind of young and he died." While on the other hand, the insensitivity component was expressed as "the stuff the dead person is made up of is still with you" and "you don't have to worry because you are going to a good place."

Finally, at this level, the components of immobility and personification were absent in the youngster's discussions. Thus, the component of personification was absent from the discussions of all the groups except the kindergarten Group I. The reason for the presence of this component for kindergarten Group I is addressed



in chapter 5.

Changes Occurring in Death Conceptions  
Using Kane's Components as the Sequence  
of Stories Unfolded in Both Group I  
and Group II

In order to examine patterns of change using Kane's (1979) components in each sequence of stories, children from both story groups were asked the following eight key questions:

1. Can you tell me about the story?

(Appears in each session)

2. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

(Appears in each session)

3. What other things happened in the story?

(Appears in each session)

4. What was the story really about?

(Appears in each session)

5. What does the story mean to you?

(Appears in each session)

6. How do you feel when someone dies?

(Appears in sessions two and three)

7. What does it mean when someone dies?

(Appears in session three)

8. What happens when someone dies?

(Appears in session three)

A sequence of three stories was read to the youngsters in each group over the period of one week. The stories differed from Group I and Group II. After the story sessions, the presence or the absence of Kane's components in children's responses was computed for Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories). In reporting children's responses, to indicate the sequence of stories the frequency will be given for the three stories. For example, the presence of the realization component might be indicated as (10-12-15). The order of the numbers presented reflects the sequence of the stories. Number 10 reflects the number of times that component was expressed after the first story session; number 12 reflects the second story session; and number 15 reflects the third story session.

Findings in this section were presented based on the sequence of stories. The reader should see Tables 4, 5, and 6 for data springing from the discussions.

Kindergarten. In reviewing Table 4, some interesting patterns emerged. The component of realization increased for Group II (media stories). In Group II, children's responses increased by one response (3-4-5) as the sequence of stories progressed. Although the increase in children's responses for each story was modest, it was the only component to reveal progressive change at the kindergarten level. However, in Group I (contextual stories), children's responses on the realization component maintained the same level of presence (6-6-6). It should be noted that the contextual stories seemed to promote consistency in the realization component.

It was found in the third story of Group I that the components of immobility, irrevocability, and dysfunctionality all increased



from 0 to 2 (0-0-2); while in Group II these components were never present (0-0-0). It should be pointed out that the third contextual story, Why Did Grandma Die?, of Group I apparently was effective in evolving the expression of these components.

The components of separation and causality varied in their appearance for both groups. Within these two components, children's responses fluctuated in an undefined pattern as the sequence of stories was presented. For example, in Group I, the presence of the separation component was (1-7-2) and in Group II its presence was (0-0-2); while the causality component in Group I responses was (2-4-4), in Group II it was (0-3-2). Finally, in both groups there was an absence of the components of insensitivity, personification, appearance, and universality (0-0-0).

Second grade. At this grade level both story groups' expressions fluctuated in a rather undefined manner (see Table 5). Examples of the components' presence as the stories unfolded in Group I (contextual stories) were: realization, (7-10-4); separation, (0-6-2); irrevocability, (0-1-3); dysfunctionality, (0-0-0); and insensitivity, (0-0-0). In Group II (media stories) the presence of the components was: realization, (6-4-6); separation, (0-0-2); irrevocability, (1-2-5); dysfunctionality, (0-0-2); and insensitivity, (0-0-1).

It should be noted that in the third story in Group II (media stories), all five components were maintained or increased in the responses. Again the power of the Samantha Smith media story is evident. On the other hand, the results showed that for Group I (contextual stories) the components' presence was greater, except for the realization component.



At the second-grade level the components of causality, universality, and immobility increased for Group II. The component of causality (0-2-4) in Group II increased in its presence as the sequence of stories progressed, but fluctuated in presence (1-6-0) in Group I. The universality component in Group II increased (0-1-3), while decreases were seen in Group I (5-1-3). The component of immobility showed equal presence (0-0-3) for both groups. Finally, appearance (0-0-0) and personification (0-0-0) continued to be absent as the sequence of stories progressed.

Fourth grade. It was found that at this level the presence of components in children's responses fluctuated as the sequence of stories progressed (see Table 6). In Group I the pattern was as follows: (a) realization, (14-9-9); (b) separation, (0-6-3); (c) irrevocability, (0-1-3); (d) dysfunctionality, (0-0-3); (e) insensitivity, (0-0-1); (f) appearance, (1-0-1); and (g) causality, (5-2-5). Thus, the components of irrevocability, dysfunctionality, and insensitivity revealed an increase in the third story for Group I. Again the power of the contextual story, Why Did Grandma Die?, is evident.

In Group II the pattern of components was: (a) realization, (6-7-6); (b) separation, (0-0-1); (c) irrevocability, (0-0-1); (d) dysfunctionality, (0-0-2); (e) insensitivity, (0-0-1); (f) appearance, (0-0-0); and (g) causality, (0-3-1). A slight increase in the components of separation, irrevocability, dysfunctionality, and insensitivity is seen for Group II.

The only component to progressively increase with every story was universality. This was true of both groups. For Group I

universality increased (5-6-10) while in Group II the component (3-4-5) increased, though modestly. From this study it appears that the use of story--irrespective of approach--will evoke and encourage the consideration and expression of universality among fourth-grade students.

Finally, in both groups the immobility and personification components were absent. This indicated that neither story approach had any effect in evoking the expressions of the components of immobility or personification for this study.

Comparison in Children's Responses  
between Group I and Group II As to  
Whether the Storytelling Approaches  
Yielded Differences in Expressions

In comparing children's responses in both groups, a total of three key questions was used to discern differences in expressions regarding the concept of death. Comparison of the first story sessions in both groups will not be discussed because there were no specific questions asked related to death. In the second story session of both story groups the following question specifically related to death was introduced: "How do you feel when someone dies?" Finally, in the third story session of both groups, two additional leading questions on death were introduced: (1) "What does it mean when someone dies?" and (2) "What happens when someone dies?"

Findings in this section were presented in the preceding order of questions for each age group. The reader should see Appendix D for data springing from the three discussion questions.



Kindergarten. In response to the question, "How do you feel when someone dies?," the common answer from both story groups reflected sadness. The only two responses from Group II were: "You don't have to feel sad all the time" and "sad." In a similar manner, children in Group I stated "sad." In addition, several children in Group I, in contrast to Group II, suggested that when someone dies it is from being sick and from being old. These two responses to the question suggested that children in Group I understand causes of death.

Children in Group II, in comparison to Group I, were extremely limited in their verbal responses to the question, "What does it mean when someone dies?," but did respond to death in a general way as a sad experience. Two children from Group I, on the other hand, in response to the question stated, "You go to sleep and you can't wake up" and "just like Heidi's grandma." Their responses reflected story content from the third story, Why Did Grandma Die?

In response to the question, "What happens when someone dies?," both story groups had various responses. Children in Group I indicated the location of the dead (e.g., "She died by a tree" and "those who die go to heaven"), death as being reversible (e.g., "When you die you don't come back for a week"), and death as being partially functional (e.g., "Her heart stop" and "you stop breathing"). Few of the children in Group I made no response to the question. However, the majority of children in Group II had no response to the question. One child's response indicated a cause and effect relationship in response to the question. The child stated, "My grandpa got shot by a king in World War IV." The child obviously had the wrong world war but presented causality as an explanation of "What happens when



someone dies?"

Other observations. Children in Group I (contextual stories), as compared to Group II (media stories), spoke with greater ease, were more spontaneous, and the interchange of thoughts was deeper in meaning. Children in Group I had a variety of death-related thoughts and expressions that were central to the story content. It appeared that children in Group I had begun to utilize details from the story in responding to the questions. The questions appeared to encourage children in Group I to use more reflected thinking than they did for children in Group II.

In Group II children initiated brief responses with limited details in their descriptions of death. Children in Group II also took longer to respond to the questions than did children in Group I, and appeared to use less story content in their expressions.

Second grade. The results of the question, "How do you feel when someone dies?," in both groups were significantly related to only one word--"sad." However, one child in Group I reflected a higher insight into her feelings and attitudes toward death by stating, "The person who dies makes others feel sad especially when others are very close to the person who dies."

Children in Group I when asked, "What does it mean when someone dies?," replied with limited responses such as "a lot," "I can't," and "I can't think of anything." In contrast, the majority of children in Group II appeared to have developed their own personal philosophy of death to the question. For example, "If you die in an accident you'll be okay. Others will be sad, but they'll be cared for." In addition, their responses were consistently related to the

viewpoint expressed in the story and reflected a higher order of reflection.

Finally, in answer to the question, "What happens when someone dies?," both groups used vivid and similar descriptions in expressing death as the end of the life cycle. In a similar manner both groups stated, "No more life" and "they never will come back."

In addition, the majority of children in Group II, in contrast to Group I, appeared to draw on science in their conceptualizations. Examples of this were: "A person heart stops," "a person stops breathing," and "the person cannot wake up."

Other observations. Group II children provided more dialogue, and their expressions reflected the deeper meanings of these questions than Group I. Examples of Group I were: "They have to be put in a coffin because they won't be back" and "I can't think of anything to say." In contrast, Group II stated, "I don't know why I was happy; but I was sad because he died" and "it means that one is very special and everybody will go to the funeral." Accordingly, it would seem that the media stories were more effective in generating dialogue of greater meaning than were contextual stories with second graders.

Fourth grade. In answer to the question, "How do you feel when someone dies?," the majority of the children in both story groups used the word "sad." One of the children in Group II stated, "You don't have to know them to feel sad. Like the Challenger incident." In contrast, two children in Group I gave responses that appeared to be deducted from the story, Why Did Grandma Die? Their responses described qualities of individuals. Such examples were: "The stuff the dead person is made up is still with you" and "the things she



taught me are still important."

When asked, "What does it mean when someone dies?," both story groups' responses were extremely limited. The responses indicated that children thought that "the soul goes to heaven," "the heart becomes still," and "people die inside."

Finally, in answer to the question, "What happens when someone dies?," both story groups at this level had similar responses that used detailed descriptions in expressing death as irreversible. Examples were: "They never come back," "is like a long sleep from which you never wake up," "it's kind of sad to die," and "you don't have to worry because you are going to a good place." However, it should be noted that story Group I responses were much more detailed than Group II responses. For example, they discussed narratives of death (e.g., "Cat died in a car accident," "bird became ill and died," and "grandma died of cancer") indicating the components of causality and irrevocability. In addition, these three narratives from Group I reflected content related to the three contextual stories.

In both groups, several children indicated a common expression of sadness. This was, as stated earlier, true of the kindergarten and second-grade levels as well. It should be kept in mind that the stories themselves were sad in their content.

Other observations. Children in Group I (contextual stories) at this level as compared to Group II (media stories) focused on concrete accounts including specific references to personal death-related experiences. For example, one child stated, "My grandma died of cancer in an old folks home. She used to tell me stories and play with me quite a lot. We were very close; in fact, I was sad when



I realized that she was gone." Meanwhile, Group II used logical and abstract as opposed to perceptual and concrete thinking. One child stated, for example, "It is like you don't want to say heaven is real, I suppose."

The majority of children at the fourth-grade level in both groups freely interpreted and understood death-related concepts. In comparing Group I to Group II, the children in Group I used humor and joked about death in expressing death as universal and inevitable; while the children in Group II discussed death in a matter-of-fact manner and without emotions.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The primary purpose of the study was to explore elementary-aged children's conceptions of death through the use of stories and to examine the use of story as a medium in the expression of children's conceptions of death. It was stated that story may be a feasible tool for teachers, parents, and other health-related professions for assisting children to develop and express conceptions of death (Dobson, 1977).

Specifically, the study attempted to find (a) students' conceptions of death as evoked by story, using Kane's components (1979); (b) changes occurring in death conceptions as characterized by Kane's components as the sequence of stories unfolded in Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories); and (c) comparisons of children's responses between Group I and Group II to determine whether different storytelling approaches yielded differences in expressions.

The researcher randomly selected a total of 31 subjects from one kindergarten classroom, one second-grade classroom, and one fourth-grade classroom. The school selected was located in a small

midwestern city in Minnesota. The children were selected if they met the following criteria: (a) children who had not had a recent death-related experience and (b) children who were not inclined to severe and inappropriate emotional responses from stories or discussions that centered on death.

The study involved 12 kindergarteners, 9 second graders, and 10 fourth graders. Children in each grade were randomly divided into two different story groups by placing their names in a hat. Each grade had its own Group I and Group II.

The children from both groups listened to a series of three stories within a one-week period. The sequence of stories introduced the idea of death, proceeding from a remote indirect experience in the first story and progressing to a more personal, intimate, and direct experience in the later two stories. All stories presented were realistic, with death being the central theme. In addition, the researcher used a selection criteria by Jalongo (1983) for evaluating all the stories presented.

Children in Group I listened to contextual stories that reflected a real life experience with death. The first of the stories read to Group I was developed by the researcher while the remaining two stories were taken from children's books and modified by the researcher. Contextual stories were written in a creative form. In the contextual stories, language and tone were lively and colorful; characters were presented to engage empathy. They were portrayed honestly and sensitively. In contrast, Group II listened to media stories that presented death experiences based on real events. Media stories were modified by the researcher and written in a report



form. All the media stories were taken from newspaper articles. Media stories were basically factual and informative. Group discussions followed each contextual and media story.

Discussions in both groups were not conducted by the researcher, but instead by two graduate students in Counseling at the University of North Dakota. Discussions generally lasted approximately 25 minutes; they culminated in a natural fashion. Questions designed to address the purposes of the study were formulated into story discussions and were then asked. The specific discussion questions were:

1. Can you tell me about the story?

(Appears in each session)

2. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

(Appears in each session)

3. What other things happened in the story?

(Appears in each session)

4. What was the story really about?

(Appears in each session)

5. What does the story mean to you?

(Appears in each session)

6. How do you feel when someone dies?

(Appears in sessions two and three)

7. What does it mean when someone dies?

(Appears in session three)

8. What happens when someone dies?

(Appears in session three)

The data in the study were descriptive in nature and classified children's responses that flowed from discussions of the contextual and media stories. The discussion of data obtained from this exploratory study included descriptive components, tables, and frequencies.

### Conclusions

The major findings in this study are briefly discussed in this section:

1. Using stories as a springboard, children of the various grade levels expressed particular notions of death differently. The presence of Kane's components in children was seen in small clusters. Using Kane's components for analysis, their responses were placed into five clusters. That is, five major component clusters emerged.

First, the most dominating components present were realization and causality. The realization component presented the most responses and was held by all children at all grade levels.

Second, the separation and irrevocability components could be seen in most children. In this cluster, separation was the most dominant component.

Third, the immobility, dysfunctionality, and universality components appeared in no particular order. However, the component of universality did not appear until the second-grade level and was increasingly expressed at the fourth-grade level. Similar findings were presented in Kane's (1979) exploration study which indicated that children eight-years-old and above demonstrated death as an inevitable event.



Fourth, the appearance and insensitivity components had few responses from either group at all grade levels. The appearance component was not expressed at the kindergarten or second-grade level; there was slight evidence of the insensitivity component at the second-grade and fourth-grade levels.

Finally, none of the children from either group personified death. This is in contrast to Nagy's (1948) study, who found that children between the ages of five and nine personified death. However, kindergarten children during the first contextual story discussion did personify death as a result of an unusual event that occurred during the session.

During the reading of the story, The Loss of Magic, a book entitled The Yearling fell down from the library shelf. The children appeared puzzled and frightened by the extraordinary event, especially since the content of the story they listened to was related to magic. Most of the children indicated that they thought the magical man was present; and they suggested to one another that they were the magical man. From this, children's responses on the concept of death indicated the presence of a "spirit," "a ghost," or "a dead person." These fantasy reasoning, magical thinking, and "here now and gone later" concepts emerged in personifying death. When this event occurred a different type of thinking was observed. Their responses were contradictions to what had been previously expressed. In this specific event, personification was seen as a way to explain what seemed inexplicable.

2. Kindergarten children described death in a personal manner. Death appeared to be characterized by their patterns of thoughts and



socialized speech. For example, "My dog died," or "my grandpa died." Fewer personal references were made by the second and fourth graders.

3. The majority of children from both the contextual and media story groups had no difficulty in interpreting and responding to the eight questions related to the different story contents as the sequence of stories was presented. Fourth graders from Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories) made more inquiries and comments about the story content in comparison to kindergarteners and second graders. For example, fourth graders in the Group I story, The Loss of Magic, asked specific questions related to "how old was the magical man?" and "is it a true story?"

4. In this study, it was found that a storyteller or a discussion leader (e.g., teacher or counselor) could present different contextual and media stories in a school setting promoting an atmosphere of acceptance of the death experience. In addition, evidence indicated that stories on the delicate subject of death can promote trust and rapport between a child and a storyteller or discussion leader.

5. The results of this study indicated that stories designed in a contextual or media format were feasible tools to evoke elementary-aged children's conceptions of death. These contextual and media stories, containing death-related concepts that reflected or represented real experiences, could easily stimulate a dialogue with children.

6. Many of the children in both story groups failed to respond to all the discussion questions for reasons that were not determined. In addition, several of the children in both story groups contradicted

themselves without apparently realizing it, thereby demonstrating changeable and unsettled concepts of death.

7. Children's conceptions of death, analyzed with Kane's components, in kindergarten, second, and fourth grade fluctuated in an increasing and decreasing manner as the sequence of three stories unfolded in Group I (contextual stories) and Group II (media stories). However, certain exceptions to this finding occurred in the third story sequence for components at each grade level. Several components from the third story of the sequence in Group I, Why Did Grandma Die?, and in Group II, Air Crash Kills Girl Who Wrote Andropov, were increased or maintained.

First, at the kindergarten level in Group I (contextual stories), the components of immobility (0-0-2), irrevocability (0-0-2), and dysfunctionality (0-0-2) increased. In Group II (media stories), realization (3-4-5) was the only component to increase in the sequence of the three stories.

Second, in Group II (media stories), the components of separation (0-0-2), immobility (0-0-3), insensitivity (0-0-1), and dysfunctionality (0-0-2) increased or were maintained at the second-grade level. In addition, the components of causality (0-2-4), universality (0-1-3), and irrevocability (1-2-5) increased in responses for Group II as the third story was introduced.

Third, at this level, fourth graders in Group I either increased or maintained consistent patterns in the components of irrevocability (0-1-3), dysfunctionality (0-0-3), and insensitivity (0-0-1). Once again, the power of the third story, Why Did Grandma Die?, in Group I (contextual stories) proved to be a rich, emotional story. While,



on the other hand, in Group II (media stories) in the third story, Air Crash Kills Girl Who Wrote Andropov, there was a slight increase in the presence of irrevocability (0-0-1), separation (0-0-1), dysfunctionality (0-0-2), and insensitivity (0-0-1). In addition, the greatest increase in Kane's components in Group I appeared in universality (5-6-10) in comparison to the universality (3-4-5) component in Group II. Thus, it appeared that for both groups in the third story sequence, children could achieve insight into their own feelings and attitudes toward death. The question arises as to whether the increase in such insight and expression was due solely to the content of and intimacy of the stories or to the fact that the youngsters were becoming more comfortable in the milieu as the sessions progressed.

#### Recommendations

The recommendations for further research and/or application that follow are based on the results of this study integrated with information from the review of the literature:

1. An in-depth study utilizing a more extensive grade-range sample should be conducted. The present study viewed kindergarteners, second, and fourth graders. The extension to higher grades (sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth) would help to clarify this tendency. Further, the study would explore differences among the grade levels.
2. A larger sample of children using the grade levels of the present investigation should be considered.
3. Related to the preceding, a follow-up study should be undertaken to see if increases in certain components of Kane (1979)



will be sustained.

4. Consideration should be given to the evaluation and arrangement of Kane's components (1979) into a developmental hierarchy. When, for example, do the components of appearance and personification emerge? Do the components begin to be expressed in a more abstract fashion as the youngsters develop?

5. Research should be conducted into the importance of storytelling with death themes on conversations within the home. What differences in family dialogues are occurring as a result of the storytelling within the school setting?

Many young children are confused and are easily upset from a death-related experience and require additional support to answer their questions. Therefore, open discussions rather than "hush-hush" attitudes (e.g., the death of a goldfish, brother, cat, father, grandmother, or friend) must come from parents.

6. In the present investigation, open-ended questions were used. It would be interesting to pursue more specific and content-oriented questions based upon the stories as a means of facilitating discussion.

7. A similar study could be conducted using two or more independent scholars who would serve as evaluators in reviewing video taped discussions to categorize responses into Kane's components.

8. Two video cameras should be explored as a means of gathering greater information on nonverbal behavior exhibited during the story sessions.

9. The present study supported the notion that story can be an effective vehicle in facilitating the exploration and expression of

death components among children. It was reported in the literature that teachers, parents, and other health-related professions must be made aware of the fact. It would therefore follow that there is a need to design quality inservice workshops and seminars to assist teachers, counselors, psychologists, clergymen, and parents in the use of story as a way of increasing understanding and conversation among adult and child.

10. In conjunction with the preceding, libraries in schools should become more aware of the literature on death-related themes and make such materials available to teachers and students.

11. Careful consideration should be given in a study to examine the therapeutic benefits from bibliotherapy with children who have experienced a difficult death situation. What is the feasibility of using bibliotherapy to encourage such children to participate in therapeutic sessions?

12. Writers, illustrators, editors, and publishers should become more active in developing better materials centering on the topic of life/death.

13. It is the hope of the researcher that the topic of death be included in the curricula of schools at all levels.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTENT TO CONDUCT STUDY

## CONSENT FORM

Your child is invited to participate in a study examining the conception of death that children express. The study will commence on March 19 and terminate on April 2, 1986.

Your child will be asked to listen to three short stories read to them in their natural classroom setting over a three-week period. Stories will be read to two groups centering around a death experience. Group I will receive stories selected from recognized children's literature books. Group II will receive stories selected from magazines and newspapers. Immediately after listening to each story, your child will be given the opportunity to express their conceptions of death from the different stories read to them, and these expressions will be audio and video taped. The entire process your child will be involved will last no more than 1½ hours.

Groups I and II will be selected by randomization. Randomization means selection of a treatment by chance. This is equivalent to flipping a coin to select one of two treatments.

The benefits to the individual in this research will be that they will engage in challenging, enjoyable, and interesting experiences. Also, the findings will hopefully benefit parents and the lives of their children. A summary of the findings of the study will be made available to parents upon their request. Benefits to society will be realized in a greater understanding of story method as a means of enhancing children's understanding of death.

It is possible that a recent (phenomenal) death experience might have occurred with a potential participant. If the child experiences such an event, it might evoke emotions in the experimental setting. Accordingly, if a child has recently experienced a death event, parents should notify the researcher and such child would not participate in the research. In other cases, if the phenomenon of death has an unsettling affect on a child at home or school, the child will not continue in the experiment but rather the child will be given immediate emotional support; this occurrence will be communicated to the school personnel and to the parents.

All information received is strictly confidential and used only in a group summary, not on an individual basis. All signed consent forms will be kept and secured at the participant's school upon completion of the study. You are not required to enter into this research if you do not choose. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. There will be no conflict between your child's religious background and stories introduced in this research.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or if in the future you have a question, these will be answered by the investigator, Thurman Guy, by calling 777-3155. You will be given a copy of this form.

-----

I have read all of the above and willingly agree for my child  
\_\_\_\_\_ to participate in this study as explained  
by \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's or Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness' Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



APPENDIX B

CONTEXTUAL AND MEDIA STORIES

## CONTEXTUAL STORY (Session 1)

Sequence of Story 1: The Loss of Magic

The story, The Loss of Magic, was written by the researcher and read to the students in the following manner:

In the city of Jonesboro, there is a small, beautiful, red brick school called Jonesboro Elementary School. Most of the children at Jonesboro like the school because the teachers are very friendly.

One of the most exciting things about going to Jonesboro Elementary was what happened on Monday mornings. Monday was the day the Magical Man came to visit. The Magical Man would stop by to visit with the children, to talk with the principal and teachers, and, best of all, to tell stories.

As the Magical Man set up his stage with boxes, the children gathered around him. Instead of making his usual circle with the children, he made a special circle. He called it the "magical circle." The "magical circle" was made from cans, strings, colorful lights, and buttons. The children moved closer and closer to the magical circle. But the Magical Man said, "Please move back, move back boys and girls."

On this day a few of the children began whispering, "He's not a magical man, he's not a magical man. He's never, ever, shown us any magical tricks." The Magical Man heard this.

Slowly, he turned and looked at the boys and girls with his eyes right on them and smiled. He noticed a boy wearing a blue and red shirt and asked him to stand up.

"What is your name?" the Magical Man asked.

"My name is, my name is Marcus."

"Well, Marcus, would you like to come to the magical circle?"

he asked.

Marcus nodded his head and walked slowly to the magical circle. The children began giggling and talking. Again they shouted, "He's not a magical man." Meanwhile, some of the children wondered what he would do to Marcus; but the Magical Man suddenly smiled at the children and said, "Marcus, whisper into my ear a trick or wish that you would like me to perform."

Marcus quickly whispered into the Magical Man's ear and ran back to his seat.

"Marcus, on Monday your wish will come true," the Magical Man said.

The following Monday came and the children again gathered around the Magical Man as he prepared to tell his story. "We thought you would grant Marcus his wish," they said.

"I have!" the Magical Man said.

But the children said, "Where is it? We don't see anything, you're not magic, you're not magic."

"Marcus, when you go to your classroom take your seat and your wish will come true," he said.

After the Magical Man's story, Marcus ran to his classroom, opened the door, and sat in his chair. He looked around wondering and under his chair he found a big beautiful box. Quickly, he opened the box and found a pair of blue and white tennis shoes. He put the tennis shoes on and then began jumping and shouting, "The Magical Man gave me my wish, he is magic." The children started laughing at Marcus.



"That wasn't magic, Marcus, your mom and dad brought those shoes to school for you. The Magical Man didn't give you those tennis shoes; and even if he did, all he had to do was go buy them. That's not magic," they said.

When the next Monday came, the Magical Man wiggled his ears at the children and they laughed and laughed. After awhile, he noticed a little girl named Karen and asked her to come to the magical circle.

Karen stood up and walked very fast to the magical circle.

"Magical Man, what would you like me to do?" Karen asked.

"I would like you to make a wish," he answered. The children started laughing again.

Karen slowly whispered her wish into his ear and the Magical Man nodded and said, "You may have a seat, Karen."

"But, but Magical Man, will my wish come true?" she asked.

"Wait and your wish will come true," he replied.

On the following Monday, Karen came to the Magical Man and said, "My wish didn't come true, and you are not magic!"

"Oh, but I am, oh, but I am."

Karen walked slowly to her classroom, with her head hung down and sat at her desk. She heard someone say, "Good morning, Karen," and she quickly raised her head and in surprise cried, "He is magic! It's you, Mr. Jordan, you're back!" Mr. Jordan was Karen's teacher, her favorite teacher who had been sick for several weeks. Karen had really missed him. Her wish had come true.

By the time the next Monday came, the children sat around the magical circle questioning, "Is he magic? Could it be magic? He's not magic. He's not a magical man."

Marcus said, "He is magic!"

Karen said, "He is magic, he is a magical man." But the children did not believe Marcus and Karen.

Once again, the Magical Man made funny faces for the children and they laughed. Shawn asked the Magical Man if he could come to the magical circle.

"Yes," the Magical Man said.

Shawn got so excited he jumped all the way to the magical circle. He kept jumping until the Magical Man asked, "Shawn, do you have a wish?"

Shawn looked at the Magical Man. "Do you want me to tell you my wish?" he asked. The Magical Man nodded his head.

Shawn closed his eyes and made his wish. He jumped back to his seat and listened excitedly to the Magical Man's story.

When Monday came, Shawn waited and waited for the Magical Man to come to school. Shawn and his friends didn't see the Magical Man. They didn't see his stage or his boxes.

Shawn and the other children went to the principal's office and asked the principal, "Could you tell us where the Magical Man is? Have you seen the Magical Man? Has the Magical Man called?"

The principal said, "I have not seen the Magical Man. The Magical Man has not called!"

Shawn was so mad and angry that he cried out, "The Magical Man is not magic, he didn't make my wish come true. I never, ever, want to see the Magical Man again."

"Well," the principal said, "let me try to find the Magical Man." The principal called Scoop at the newspaper. Scoop was Jonesboro's

number one news reporter with all the answers.

But Scoop said, "No, I don't know the Magical Man. The Magical Man? Do you mean Mr. Jones?"

The principal said, "Yes, Mr. Jones, the Magical Man. Mr. Jones usually comes to school on Mondays and tells stories to the children. He hasn't been around today and the children were curious about his whereabouts."

The principal listened carefully to Scoop as he talked about Mr. Jones, the Magical Man. The principal walked into the classroom to talk with Shawn and the other children. But, before the principal could say anything Shawn shouted out, "The Magical Man is magic, he gave me my wish! He really did! My name is on Mr. Jordan's blackboard to take home the class pet, 'Joe Joe' the parrot." Everyday Shawn had been bringing "Joe Joe" bird seeds and bread crumbs to eat. Shawn just loved "Joe Joe" and had been dreaming of the day that he could take him home.

The principal did not know what to say or how to tell the children what Scoop had told her. Finally, she said, "I have some bad news for you. Mr. Jones, the Magical Man who tells us stories every Monday, will not be coming back to school. The Magical Man has died. He's been sick for a long time, but didn't let us know it. We all become ill sometimes and we usually get better again, but the Magical Man was seriously ill. He died. He will be buried on Tuesday."

"What? The Magical Man is dead? Not the Magical Man," the children asked.

The principal said, "Yes, Mr. Jones, the Magical Man, is dead."



The children were very sad and angry. Some of them cried and shouted out, "Why did he die if he was the Magical Man? Yeah, why did he?" the other children questioned.

The principal responded, "The Magical Man was a person and all human beings will die in their life time. The Magical Man was magical in the way he shared his life with us."

"Do you call that magical, the way he shared his life?" someone angrily said.

"Think about it, children, how many people share their lives this way? It is a special gift," the principal said.

Some of the children went to the window and made a wish and waited for the Magical Man to appear. But he didn't. Others laid their heads on their desks. The room became quiet as the students remained silent.

At the end of the school day the principal gathered all the teachers and children together, making their own magical circle. They shared stories about the Magical Man.

Marcus raised his hand and said, "It feels like magic when I wear my tennis shoes. I'm never going to take them off."

Karen said, "I think I have a magical teacher, Mr. Jordan. You're magical."

Shawn said, "Mr. Jordan, can we rename 'Joe Joe' to 'Joe M Joe M'?"

"What do the letters MM stand for?" he asked.

"Magical Man," replied Shawn.

## CONTEXTUAL STORY (Session 2)

Sequence of Story 2: The Accident

The story, The Accident, was taken from Carrick (1976) and read to the students in the following manner:

It had rained all day at the summer cottage until dinnertime. After the dishes were washed Christopher's father said,

"The lake is smooth as glass. Let's go for a canoe paddle."

But Christopher's favorite television program was starting so he and his dog [Grover] stayed home while his mother and father drove off.

When the program ended, Christopher and [Grover] started down the dirt road to meet Christopher's parents. They would be driving back from the lake by now.

[Grover] galloped ahead. Now and then he stopped and looked back at Christopher as if to say, Hurry up! Sometimes he cut off into the [woods].

Christopher wondered why his parents were taking so long. He and [Grover] had reached the paved road and still there was no sign of their car.

Christopher walked in the soft dirt along the highway. Some of the people waved to him as they drove by. The faster cars and trucks made so much noise and wind when they passed that Christopher thought the blast might knock him over.

It was getting dark by the time he and [Grover] neared the lake. How surprised his parents would be when they found him waiting at the boat landing. Maybe they would give him a canoe ride.

Then Christopher heard the pickup truck coming down the road.

[Grover] was trotting along the other side of the road. Christopher called him to come over and stay next to him, but [Grover] waited too long. He stopped a moment to sniff at something. Then he bounded into the road.

The truck's tires screeched as the driver swerved to avoid hitting the dog. Christopher's shoulders hunched and his eyes squeezed shut.

"[Grover]!"

There was a thump, a [screaming bark] from [Grover], and the truck came to a stop on the side of the road. Christopher couldn't believe it had really happened, but it had. He could see [Grover's] legs [laying] still [in the street].

Christopher started toward [Grover] but he was afraid to touch him, afraid he might hurt him. The driver jumped out of the truck and ran to kneel beside the dog. He raised his hand as if to hold Christopher back.

Christopher already knew, but he asked anyway.

"Is he dead?"

The man shook his head sadly.

"I'm sorry, sonny."



The man was bringing a blanket from his truck just as Christopher's parents pulled up. Christopher ran toward them.

"[Grover's] dead! That man hit him with his truck."

Christopher hoped that everything would turn out all right now. Somehow his Dad would take care of things.

"I didn't see him," the man explained as Christopher's father looked down at the dog and then covered him with the blanket. "He just suddenly ran in front of the truck."

His father silently nodded in understanding, but Christopher was disappointed. He was hoping his father would find that it was all a mistake, that [Grover] was going to be O.K. At least he wanted his father to get mad at this man and tell him he would be punished for what he did. Instead, his father was agreeing with the man, feeling sorry for him. He didn't even care about [Grover].

The man squatted next to Christopher.

"I know just how you feel, sonny. I have two dogs at home. One of them has puppies. Would you like to come over in a few days and pick out a nice little puppy?"

"I don't want a puppy. I want [Grover]," said Christopher. "And you killed him!"

"Christopher, Christopher," his mother [said], as she led him to their car. "The man didn't mean to."

Suddenly the feeling that this was all just a dream ended. Christopher was angry. It wasn't fair. Why did that dumb man have to hit [Grover]?

"I ought to run him over with a truck."

"Oh, honey, [Grover] ran right in front of him. The man didn't have time to stop."

They took Christopher home to bed where [he kept talking about the] accident over and over. He tried to pretend that the truck had missed the dog, or that he hadn't called and [Grover] had stayed on the other side. Or he pretended that they hadn't left the dirt road where there were hardly ever any cars. Or that they had stayed home and waited. [Finally Christopher went to sleep].

Christopher woke late.

When he entered the kitchen he stole a look at the corner where [Grover's] bowls always sat, but they were gone. His father was still at the table although he had finished eating.

"Hi, Chrisso."

"Chrisso" had been Christopher's baby name for himself. His father hardly ever used it any more.

"I waited for you," his father said. "Do you want to come fishing with me?"

Christopher knew his father never went fishing this late in the morning.

"No thanks," he mumbled.

"How about some French toast?" his mother offered.

". . . with jelly on it."

"I don't want anything."

Christopher went out and sat on the steps. [Grover] used to lie across the top step, ignoring the red squirrels that ran from the trees. Everybody always complained that he was

in the way. Well, now they wouldn't have to complain.

His father came out and sat with him. Neither of them said anything for a while. Finally Christopher got up the courage to ask, "What did you do with [Grover]?"

"I buried him near the [lake]."

"You buried him! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't think you would want to be there, Christopher."

"Of course I did!" Christopher exploded angrily. "He was my dog. Why did you go and bury him without me? You didn't care about him. You don't care about me, either."

He didn't stay to hear [what] his father [said].

"Christopher! Wait a minute."

[Christopher was mad as he walked down the road.] After a while he slowed down and turned back to the house, wondering what he was going to do now.

His father was still sitting on the steps. Christopher felt embarrassed. He was afraid to see his father's face.

"Christopher, why don't we take the canoe along the shore and find a nice stone to mark [Grover's] grave."

At first Christopher didn't feel [excited about the trip]. But as they paddled into the lake, he became excited about picking out the perfect stone for [Grover].

[The sun shined on the lake while Christopher and his father scrambled over the rocks.] Christopher called to his father from time to time to examine a stone that seemed special.



It was difficult to decide. But then Christopher saw the stone half buried in the [ground]. It had white lines running through it. They dug away the [dirt] and washed the stone before carefully lowering it into the canoe.

When the stone was in place at the foot of [Grover's] grave, Christopher didn't know what to say. But his father did.

"Remember how [Grover] used to come here on a hot day for a drink, and [play] in that icy water? And how he'd see the little trout and try to pounce on one? Then he would stop to look around and wonder why all the fish had disappeared."

Christopher giggled. The giggle turned into [a tear]. He began to cry, and then cry hard. It felt good this time.

"Oh, Dad!"

His father put an arm around Christopher's shoulders. Christopher turned and [smiled at his father]. He didn't feel angry with his father any more, and that felt good, too.

(pp. 1-33)

The following vocabulary words were presented to the teachers to determine the feasibility of the usage of the words in the story. In every case, teachers accepted the vocabulary as appropriate.

Vocabulary Words: The Accident

- |              |                 |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. trout     | 5. french toast |
| 2. screeched | 6. buried       |
| 3. squatted  | 7. shore        |
| 4. mumbled   | 8. grave        |

## CONTEXTUAL STORY (Session 3)

Sequence of Story 3: Why Did Grandma Die?

The story, Why Did Grandma Die?, was taken from Madler (1980) and read to the students in the following manner:

"I'm home!" shouted Heidi.

She slammed the front door behind her and ran into the living room.

All day long Heidi had been waiting for this minute. Today was the day her grandmother was taking her to the park for a pony ride. Heidi loved horses, and so did her grandmother.

The curtains were drawn in the living room. At first Heidi couldn't see anything.

Then she saw her little brother, Bobby, still in his pajamas. And there, stretched out on the sofa, was her grandmother.

"Grandma, why aren't you ready?" asked Heidi. "You didn't forget about the pony ride, did you?"

Her grandmother sat up a little. "How could I forget a thing like that?" she said. "I'm just tired, that's all. I've been resting."

Heidi frowned.

"I'm sorry, Heidi. We'll go tomorrow, I promise. You know I'm just as excited about going as you are."

Heidi nodded and smiled.

"Come on into the kitchen with me," said her grandmother. "Your mother and father will be home soon. I have to get supper started. You sit down and tell me what happened in school today. I want to hear everything."

Heidi and her grandmother moved Bobby's playpen into the kitchen. Then her grandmother made up a big batch of clay and showed Heidi how to make a horse out of the clay. That was one of the things Heidi loved most about her grandmother--she was always making such beautiful things.

Heidi sat at the kitchen table while her grandmother worked near the stove. Heidi was busy working with the clay and chattering. She didn't notice that her grandmother wasn't answering Heidi very often.

The following day, Heidi once again raced home from school.

She didn't know what to think when she saw a white truck parked in front of her building. Red lights flashed. Two men were lifting someone into the truck.

It was her grandmother.

Heidi's mother stood near the truck. Heidi ran to her.

"Where is Grandma going?" she cried. "And why are you home from work? What's going on?"

Heidi's mother held her close. "Grandma is very sick. She's going to the hospital. I'm going along with her, and Dad is meeting us there."

"I'll come too," Heidi said.

"No, it would be better if you stayed home with Bobby. Mrs. Kane will look after you till we get back."



Her mother gave her a kiss and got into the truck.

Mrs. Kane was the neighbor who lived across the hall. She was already cooking supper when Heidi came into the apartment.

"Have some of my cookies," said Mrs. Kane. "Supper won't be ready for a while."

"My grandma says cookies are bad for your teeth," Heidi said. She didn't mean to sound rude, but she was so worried about her grandmother that she could hardly think straight.

"These cookies have lots of good things in them," said Mrs. Kane. "I do love to bake. My own grandchildren live far away, so I thought I'd bake some for you."

Heidi didn't answer.

That night, she fell asleep before her parents came home. When she woke up the following morning, her mother was sitting on her bed.

"I have some bad news," she said. "Grandma won't be coming home. She died last night."

"Died?" Heidi whispered. "Why? Why did Grandma die?"

"Well, Grandma was very old."

"You mean people die just because they're old?"

"Sometimes," said her mother. "A person's heart is always beating. After many years it wears down. That's what happened to Grandma. Many old people are ready to die. They know that death is a natural part of life. Your grandma had a long and good life."

"I--I don't know," Heidi said. "I think you and Dad could have done something . . . something that would have saved her."

Her mother looked very tired. "Everyone tried their best," she said softly.

That day Heidi stayed home from school. Her parents stayed home from work too.

No one ate much at breakfast.

Afterward, Heidi's mother told her, "We're out of milk. Would you mind going to the store for me?"

Heidi was glad to get outside and walk around. After she had bought the milk, she came back and sat on the steps of her building for a while.

If I wish as hard as I can, she thought to herself, maybe Grandma will be waiting upstairs for me. Maybe . . . maybe we can go see the pony this afternoon.

When she got up to the apartment, the only people in the kitchen besides her parents were her Uncle Joe and Aunt Connie. Heidi liked them both, but today the only person she wanted was her grandmother.

Without a word, she ran into her bedroom and started crying.

A few minutes later, her father came into the room. His eyes were red too.

"It's okay to cry," he said. "We all miss Grandma, and crying is a good way of showing it."

"Oh, Dad, I was wishing so hard that she was here again."

"I know," he said. "But when people die, nothing can bring them back."

Suddenly Heidi stood up. "But I didn't even say good-bye!"

"Grandma knew how much you loved her. That's what matters most."

It seemed like half the city was there for the funeral. Heidi couldn't believe how many friends and relatives her grandmother had had. Having all those people there to share her sadness made Heidi feel a little better.

Some of the people made speeches, which Heidi had a hard time paying attention to. Then everyone took a turn going up to the place where the body of Heidi's grandmother was, to show their love and respect.

Heidi stared at her grandmother's body for a moment. Good-bye, she said silently. I love you.

Many of the people came back to Heidi's apartment after the funeral.

Heidi was standing by the window, looking at her grandmother's flower box, when Mrs. Kane came up behind her.

"I've been talking to your parents," said Mrs. Kane. "While they're at work, I'm going to take care of you and Bobby."

"The only one I want to take care of me is my grandma," Heidi said without thinking.

Mrs. Kane looked down. "Why don't you think it over?" she said, then turned away.

Heidi's father walked over and put his arm around her. "Come on," he said. "Let's take a walk."

They went to the park. They found an empty bench and watched children riding ponies and playing ball.



"If Grandma's heart wore out," Heidi said slowly, "does that mean my heart is going to wear out too?"

"In time everyone dies," said her father. "But they always leave something behind."

"You mean like Grandma left her flower box?"

"That too," her father said. "But what I meant was that it's the things you remember that stay with you."

"I remember lots of things about Grandma. She liked horses. And she was always showing me how to make clay animals."

"And maybe someday you'll show someone else. That's a part of Grandma that you'll always have with you."

Heidi was quiet. Then she took her father's hand. "Can we go back now? I have to talk to Mrs. Kane."

"Why?"

"She must hate me. I told her I only wanted Grandma to take care of me."

"If you tell her you're sorry, she'll understand."

They walked down the street together. Heidi stopped in front of their building.

"Look at Grandma's flowers--they're all dry," she said. "After I talk to Mrs. Kane, I'd better give them some water."

"Want some help?" her father asked.

Heidi smiled. "Sure!" (pp. 1-30)

The following vocabulary words were presented to the teachers to determine the feasibility of the usage of the words in the story. In every case, teachers accepted the vocabulary as appropriate.

Vocabulary Words: Why Did Grandma Die?

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. batch      | 4. funeral  |
| 2. chattering | 5. speeches |
| 3. rude       | 6. heart    |

## MEDIA STORY (Session 1)

Sequence of Story 1: Bill Scott

The story, Bill Scott, was rewritten from the Herald Staff and Wire Reports ("Deaths Elsewhere," 1985) and read to students in the following manner:

Bill Scott was a writer and producer of children's television cartoons. He died in November of a heart attack. "He was 65. Scott was best known as the voice behind several characters from the popular 'Rocky and His Friends' television show" (p. 5A).

"The show . . . starred a flying squirrel named Rocky and his moose [friend], Bullwinkle" (p. 5A). Thousands and thousands of children and parents enjoyed Rocky and Bullwinkle on Saturday morning cartoons. Also, Scott provided the voice for Dudley Do-Right; Mr. Peabody, the smartest dog around; and George, the swinging monkey of George of the Jungle.

The following vocabulary words were presented to the teachers to determine the feasibility of the usage of the words in the story. In every case, teachers accepted the vocabulary as appropriate.

Vocabulary Words: Bill Scott

1. producer

2. heart attack



## MEDIA STORY (Session 2)

Sequence of Story 2: Home Run King Roger Maris Dies

The story, Home Run King Roger Maris Dies, was rewritten from the Herald Staff and Wire Reports (1985) and read to students in the following manner:

Roger Maris was a baseball hero who once played for the New York Yankees baseball team. He became ill one day and went to the hospital and found that he had cancer. Doctors said that Roger had cancer for five years without knowing it. After becoming aware of it, he suffered for two years from the disease. Roger died of cancer in the hospital at the age of 51.

Roger grew up in Grand Forks and later moved to Fargo, North Dakota. He played football and baseball in high school and won many awards. In Fargo he met and married his wife.

Roger became famous when he played baseball for the New York Yankees, hitting 61 home runs in a year, more than anyone else who had ever played baseball. His last home run came on the last game of the year.

The state of North Dakota has named Roger a Roughrider, and a painted picture of him hangs in the state capitol. Roger also has a golf tournament named after him in Fargo. This golf tournament is played each year to raise money for people who are sick with cancer.

The following vocabulary words were presented to the teachers to determine the feasibility of the usage of the words in the story. In every case, teachers accepted the vocabulary as appropriate.

Vocabulary Words: Home Run King Roger Maris Dies

1. New York Yankees
2. ill
3. cancer
4. suffered
5. Roughrider
6. tournament
7. golf

## MEDIA STORY (Session 3)

Sequence of Story 3: Air Crash Kills GirlWho Wrote Andropov

The story, Air Crash Kills Girl Who Wrote Andropov, was rewritten from the Herald Staff and Wire Reports (Jackson, 1985) and read to students in the following manner:

Samantha Smith was only 11 years old when she wrote a letter to Premier of the Soviet Union, Yuri Andropov. The letter read, in part, "I would like to know why you want to conquer the world, or at least our country? The world [is] for us to live together in peace and not to fight" (p. 1A).

Mr. Andropov read this letter and later wrote back to tell Samantha that my country has no intention of conquering your country. He invited Samantha and her parents to visit his country.

After arriving in the Soviet Union, Samantha met many famous actors, writers, and dancers. She also attended several meetings and saw how the people of the Soviet Union lived.

When Samantha returned home "cheering crowds greeted her" at the airport. She had little "time [to] play softball" with her friends and to play fetch with her dog.

Samantha appeared on several T.V. shows, talked to many boys and girls across the country, and wrote a book about her trip titled, Samantha Smith-Journey to the Soviet Union.

On one of the T.V. shows, Samantha described some of the things she wanted to do in life:



There's so many things I want to do that I don't know what's going to happen. If people [keep asking me to be on their T.V. shows], I might end up being an actress after all. . . . I might end up being a veterinarian, or a hair stylist, or a makeup artist, I don't know. (p. 11A)

While returning home again from a T.V. appearance in London, England, Samantha and her father were killed in a plane crash. Samantha was 13 when she died. Samantha had just filmed four shows for the T.V. program "Lime Street."

The following vocabulary words were presented to the teachers to determine the feasibility of the usage of the words in the story. In every case, teachers accepted the vocabulary as appropriate.

Vocabulary Words: Air Crash Kills Girl

Who Wrote Andropov

- |                 |                     |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Soviet Union | 6. veterinarian     |
| 2. conquering   | 7. Premier          |
| 3. world        | 8. makeup artist    |
| 4. country      | 9. intention        |
| 5. actress      | 10. London, England |

APPENDIX C

DATA FROM CHILDREN'S DISCUSSIONS:

CONTEXTUAL AND MEDIA STORIES

## Data on Kindergarten Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: The Loss of Magic)

## Sequence of Story Session 1

Discussion Leader: I have a little boy and a little girl. Sometimes I read them stories just like Guy read to you. We talk about the story and they tell me what they thought about it. You think you guys can do that for me?

Children: Yes.

DL: Can you tell me about the story?

Amy: It had a happy ending.

DL: Can you tell me more about the story?

Randy: It had a happy ending but he died.

DL: It had a happy ending.

Sam: I think it was a good book, and kind of sad.

Bob: And the book fell down.

Sharon: The book fell down.

Sam: My hands started trembling.

DL: Can you tell me more about the story?

Children: Yes.

DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

Bob: When he died.

Sam: And he's dead, and they buried him.

DL: What does the story mean to you?

Bob: It was sad.

Sam: Sometimes that makes you cry.

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For ease in reading, the symbols DL were used for the Discussion Leader.



Bob: My grandpa died. He was sick.

DL: Sick.

Sharon: I was sick too before.

Kay: Me too.

DL: How do you feel about the story?

Kay: Sad, my daddy married a lady and they think she had a heart attack.

Bob: You know what? My father died and his father's name was Bob too.

DL: So, you and your granddad have the same name.

Bob: You know what? My grandpa when he died he ran in the street and a car ran over him. And I felt sad.

DL: What was the story really about?

Bob: Sometimes my mother reads me a story and my dad!

Amy: I can't read.

Randy: The magic, the magic.

Children: Total silence.

DL: The magic. When you were listening to the story and the book fell, we were talking about magic. What did you think happened?

Randy: I thought the magical man was here.

Sam: I thought Randy was the magical man.

Randy: I thought you were and you.

DL: (Pointing to other children.) So, everybody thought that somebody was the magic man.

Bob: I thought you were. . . . I thought the magical man was outside. . . . A man pushed it from the shelf.

DL: Magic, so this story kept magic in the air.

Amy: Randy was the magical man.

- DL: Were you surprised the way the story ended?
- Kay: No.
- DL: Have you heard the story before?
- Amy: No, none of us.
- DL: None of you heard the story before. What other things happened in the story?
- Amy: It was funny. It was funny at the end when he brought bread crumbs to the parrot.

## Data on Kindergarten Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: The Accident)

## Sequence of Story Session 2

- DL: When my sister and I hear a story, we usually share it with each other. Would you like to tell me about the story?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Randy: It was funny when they rode in the canoe.
- DL: Is there something else you would like to tell me about the story?
- Randy: It was sad when the dog died.
- Kay: It was sad because the dog died. We used to have a dog, but we gave it to another person.
- DL: You used to have a dog but you gave it away. Do you miss the dog?
- Kay: Yes.
- Sharon: I had a cat and it died after a dog fight. I gave it to a friend and he left the cage open and the cat got out. He got in a fight with a dog and he died. He died.
- DL: Your cat died after a fight with a dog.
- Sharon: The dog bite my cat.
- DL: What did you do with the cat?
- Sharon: My dad buried it.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Bob: I had a dog and its name was Flasher. It got into a fight with Che-Ching and he died.
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Bob: Sad.



DL: Sad.

Bob: My grandpa died too from being sick. Grandpa was sick for a long time and died a few years ago.

DL: Can you tell me more?

Bob: No.

Sharon: My grandpa, he was sick.

DL: He was sick.

Sharon: My dog jumped on my cat.

Sam: We've got two cats.

DL: Let's get back to the story. What other things happened in the story?

Randy: The truck hit the dog. We used to have a dog up at the lake and he died.

DL: What do you think Christopher was thinking about the man who hit his dog?

Randy: He felt rotten.

DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

Bob: His dad buried Grover. He was mad.

DL: He was mad?

Amy: Because his dad buried Grover.

Kay: Because he wanted to be there when he buried him.

DL: Would you have wanted to be there if you were Christopher?

Kay: Yes.

Randy: I would want to be there.

Bob: I would. To care for my dog.

DL: To care for your dog. What was the story really about?

Amy: His father wanted a happy ending.

DL: Do you suppose it took Christopher a long time to find the right stone?

Children: Yes.

## Data on Kindergarten Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: Why Did Grandma Die?)

## Sequence of Story Session 3

- DL: I remember you guys. The last time we talked I asked you some questions. What did you think about the story?
- Sam: I like the story.
- Bob: I like the story too.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Sharon: It had a happy ending.
- DL: Could you tell me a little more about the happy ending?
- Sharon: It was happy.
- DL: What is the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Sharon: They were able to ride the pony.
- Bob: Her grandma died.
- DL: What does it mean when someone dies?
- Sharon: Dying is like when you go to sleep and you can't wake up.
- Sam: My grandpa died too. Just like Heidi's grandma.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Sharon: My grandmother is about 100 years old. She almost died of a heart attack.
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Amy: Sad.
- Kay: Sad. My grandmother died because she was old.
- DL: What happens when someone dies?
- Kay: She died by a tree.



DL: Were you going to say something?

Amy: The heart stop. Those who die go to heaven.

Sharon: You stop breathing.

Kay: When you die you don't come back for a week.

DL: Randy, you were going to say something?

Randy: I forgot.

DL: If you remember, please tell me. What were you saying, Amy?

Amy: Nothing.

DL: What other things happened in the story?

Children: Total silence.

DL: What was the story really about?

Children: Total silence.

## Data on Kindergarten Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Bill Scott)

## Sequence of Story Session 1

- DL: I have a little boy and a little girl. They like for me to read stories to them. We then talk about the story and they tell me all kinds of things they found interesting about the story. Can you tell me about the story?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Tom: I like fishing. My dad caught a 26-pound fish.
- DL: Were there fish in the story?
- Herman: No. Bullwinkle and Rocky is an old cartoon; but it comes on Saturdays.
- DL: What was the story really about?
- Ted: He died.
- DL: Who died?
- Ted: The producer of Bullwinkle and Rocky.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Linda: Really sad.
- DL: Really sad? What other things happened in the story?
- Children: Total silence.
- DL: What was the most important part of the story to you?
- Tom: Sad.
- DL: Sad. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Linda: Yes. He died as a producer.
- Herman: I can't remember the question.

DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

Herman: When the producer died.

DL: The producer died.

Herman: My dad watches it when he was little and my mom thought it was totally sick.

DL: Totally sick.

Herman: My father would wake up at 6:00 AM and every Saturday and watch it.

DL: What does the story mean to you?

Ted: Happy.

DL: What made you happy?

Dick: Because they are still on.

Denise: It made me laugh a lot.



## Data on Kindergarten Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Home Run King Roger Maris Dies)

## Sequence of Story Session 2

- DL: When my sister and I hear a story, we usually share it with each other. Would you like to share with me some of your thoughts about the story?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Tom: It was funny.
- Herman: He was a great baseball player.
- DL: He was a great baseball player.
- Denise: He was a nice guy.
- DL: He was a nice guy.
- Denise: Um-hum.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Herman: He had 61 home runs in a year and he got the last one during the last game of the year.
- Ted: He got married.
- DL: He got married.
- Herman and Ted: He died. He got some kind of a disease.
- DL: He died.
- Tom: He had cancer.
- DL: He was a great baseball player who died from cancer. What other things happened in the story?
- Herman: Grand Forks is where he is from. And they named a baseball tournament or a golf tournament after him.
- DL: What was the story really about?

- Linda: He died and he was famous.
- Is that the kind of thing that we do when someone dies?
- Yes.
- When my grandpa died, I was named after him.
- DL: You were named after your grandfather! How does that make you feel?
- Ted: Fine.
- Dick: Washington was named after George Washington day.
- DL: Do we do that for every person?
- Dick: No, only some people.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Denise: When my grandpa died, my brother was named after him.
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Children: Total silence.

## Data on Kindergarten Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Air Crash Kills Girl Who Wrote Andropov)

## Sequence of Story Session 3

- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Dick: Somebody died.
- DL: Somebody died.
- Dick: That girl Samantha.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Dick: It was sad.
- DL: Denise, you were going to say something?
- Denise: Sad.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Denise: I am not sure; but it is a good story.
- Ted: The plane crash.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Ted: She died.
- DL: What does it mean when someone dies?
- Denise: Sad.
- DL: Anything else?
- Denise: I am not sure.
- Linda: Sad!
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Herman: Sad.
- Ted: You don't have to feel sad all the time.
- DL: What does it mean to you when somebody dies?



Tom: Sad.

DL: Sad.

Ted: I will go to his grave every time.

DL: You will?

Ted: Great grandma died and I went to the grave.

DL: What was that like?

Ted: Sad.

Linda: When my great grandpa died I felt very bad too. I even said prayers.

DL: What happens when someone dies?

Ted: My grandpa got shot by a king in World War IV.

Linda: There is no such World War.

DL: You know you said you were sad and you cried. What does it mean when someone dies?

Linda: It is kind of hard to explain.

DL: What was the story really about?

Children: Total silence.

## Data on Second Grade Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: The Loss of Magic)

## Sequence of Story Session I

- DL: I have a little boy and a little girl. So we sit down and I read them a story. After I've read them the story, I usually ask them a couple of questions; because sometimes I can learn so much from what they have to say about a story. Can I ask you guys some questions?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Jane: The magical man.
- DL: The magical man.
- Kevin: He died.
- DL: He died. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Kevin: It was a sad story. Because he was sick.
- DL: Sad.
- Jane: Because the magical man died and all the boys and girls didn't believe him, you know.
- DL: Oh! What do you think about the story?
- Sherri: I thought it was pretty good.
- DL: What did you like about it?
- Sherri: I like about it when the kids made their wish.
- Larry: The same thing.
- DL: Oh, I've heard a bunch of things. . . . That there was magic in it and the kids got their wishes.
- Larry: The wishes.
- DL: Oh, the wishes.
- Jane: I thought that maybe he went to another school.

DL: Maybe he went to another school.

Kevin: I can't think of anything.

Sherri: I felt pretty sad about it.

DL: What was the most important part of the story?

Sherri: That the kids care about the magical man.

Kevin: That the magical man was dead.

DL: You said earlier that one important part was that some of the kids did not believe the magical man was magical.

Kevin: Yes.

DL: What was the most important part of the story?

Larry: The same as Kevin said.

DL: Is this the kind of story that you think you will remember for a long time?

Children: Nod in agreement.

DL: What is in the story that you think you won't forget?

Sherri: The death of the magical man.

DL: Hmmm, that's very important.

Kevin: If the children got their wishes.

DL: What other things happened in the story?

Jane: The man died. Everybody has the same choice.

DL: Gee, everybody has the same choice. What does the story mean to you?

Sherri: The kids got their wishes to come true.

DL: The kids got their wishes to come true.

Jane: One time my wish came true. I wished for a hamster for birthday and I got it. And I stuck my hand outside a window and a raindrop hit it. And my wish came true.



- DL: So, the important parts of the story you said were (a) there was a magical man, (b) people cared about the magical man, (c) children had their wishes come true, and (d) the magical man died. Overall, what was the story really about?
- Kevin: That the magical man died.
- DL: That the magical man died. Any other ideas about the story?
- Children: No.

## Data on Second Grade Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: The Accident)

## Sequence of Story Session 2

- DL: My sister and I, after we hear a good story, we share the story with each other. Can you do that?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Jane: The boy's dog on the road. A truck hit the dog.
- Sherri: They buried the dog. They found a stone and put it in the grave.
- DL: Can you tell me a little bit more about this?
- Sherri: No.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Larry: When they tried to find the stone.
- Jane: It was a special stone.
- DL: Okay, can you tell me a little bit more about this special stone?
- Jane: I can't think.
- DL: Okay, take your time.
- Sherri: Because it was white with black strips.
- Larry: Because it was for his pet grave. Christopher wanted a perfect stone.
- Larry: Because he had the dog a long time.
- DL: For a long time. How do you think Christopher felt about Grover?
- Kevin: Sad.
- DL: Can you tell me more?

Kevin: He didn't want any other pet, he just wanted Grover.

DL: He just wanted Grover.

Sherri: Because it was his pet.

DL: Pet. What else might be a good reason?

Jane: Because it was special to him.

DL: Christopher's pet, Grover, died, "and he was really sad," you said. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?

Sherri: He felt kind of angry.

DL: He felt angry.

Sherri: Because the guy ran the dog over.

DL: How would you feel if you were Christopher?

Jane: Sad and mad.

DL: Jane, you felt sad and mad.

Jane: Because it died and he had it for a long time and he was special to you.

DL: He would be sad. Can you tell me more about being mad?

Jane: Because the man ran over him.

DL: How do you feel when someone dies?

Kevin: Sad.

Sherri: I can't think of anything to say.

DL: How many of you have pets?

Kevin: Two rabbits, one dog.

DL: Have you ever had an experience like this?

Larry: When we had two cats and we could not take care of them, we had to get rid of them. So we took them to the pound.

DL: So you had to take them to the pound. Is there anything else you want to talk about?



Larry: No.

DL: Okay.

Sherri: Last July, my dog was an Irish setter. It got wounded and it died.

DL: What happened?

Sherri: While we were on vacation somebody put poison in her water.

DL: What did you do?

Sherri: We took it to the vet; because he lived down the street and the vet said that it was going to die.

DL: How did that make you feel?

Sherri: Sad.

DL: How many years did you have your pet?

Sherri: Five and a half years.

DL: That's a long time! Is there something else you want to tell me about your pet?

Sherri: No.

DL: Jane, did you want to talk about your pet?

Jane: My aunt, she calls her cat "blackie" and it fell down the step and they took it to the vet to cure it and they had to bury it.

Larry: One time we had a cat that was killed by a car. The cat got in the engine of the car and someone started it up.

DL: What did you do?

Larry: Nothing really, I wasn't born yet. The owner was not at home. The owner was in California.

DL: What did the story mean to you?

Sherri: The dog died and the boy cared that he died.

DL: What was the story really about?

Sherri: The boy whose dog died really cared about it. He loved his dog.

DL: Any other comments?

Kevin: He had to pick out a special stone.

## Data on Second Grade Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: Why Did Grandma Die?)

## Sequence of Story Session 3

- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Sherri: That she cared for her grandma.
- Jane: Heidi grandma died.
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Jane: The person who dies makes others feel bad especially when others are very close to the person who dies.
- DL: What does it mean to you when someone dies?
- Sherri: A lot.
- DL: Can you give me a little more about that?
- Sherri: I can't.
- DL: Can you tell me what it means to you when someone dies?
- Larry: I can't think of anything. It makes me feel sad.
- DL: What was the story really about?
- Children: Total silence.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Children: Total silence.
- DL: What happens when someone dies?
- Kevin: That person never comes back again. That person must be buried.
- Sherri: They have to be put in a coffin because they won't be back.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?



Kevin: Her grandma died and could not take her to the park.

DL: So her grandma died and could not do that. What other things happened in the story?

Children: Total silence.

## Data on Second Grade Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Bill Scott)

## Sequence of Story Session 1

- DL: I have a little boy and a little girl. After I've read them a story, we usually sit down and talk about the story. Can you tell me about the story?
- Artis: He died.
- DL: What about it?
- Artis: When he died at 65.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important part of the story?
- Children: Total silence.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important part of the story?
- Kim: Total silence.
- DL: Betty.
- Betty: Total silence.
- DL: What was the story really about?
- Betty: When he died.
- DL: He died.
- Kim: Ahhh, I forgot.
- DL: That's okay. What does the story mean to you?
- Artis: Pretty sad.
- DL: Pretty sad. And what was that?
- Artis: He died.
- DL: He died.
- Brenda: Funny.

DL: Funny. What was funny for you?

Kim: Because he was funny.

DL: Who was funny?

Kim: Bullwinkle.

DL: Kim.

Kim: Kind of sad.

DL: Kind of sad. What was it about the story that made you sad?

Kim: When he died.

DL: Would you be able to tell the story to someone else?

Kim: Yes.

DL: Would you remember the story?

Kim: Because he died.

DL: Oh, that's pretty important!

Artis: Because I know all about the cartoons.

DL: You know all about the cartoons. What other things happened in the story?

Janice: The cartoons.

DL: The cartoons. Would you forget the story or is it a story you would probably remember?

Janice: I would probably remember the cartoons.

DL: Is there anything else that happened in the story?

Artis: He was the one who worked on the cartoons.

DL: What do you think that means now?

Artis: There isn't anymore. None.



## Data on Second Grade Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Home Run King Roger Maris Dies)

## Sequence of Story Session 2

- DL: One of the things my sister and I do after we hear a story is talk about the story by sharing our thoughts. I was wondering if you would like to do that with me?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Kim: He died at the age of 51.
- Artis: He had cancer.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember?
- Kim: He played baseball.
- Artis: He had 61 home runs.
- Janice: He had cancer for five years.
- Artis: He hit his last home run at the end of the last game.
- Artis: He was born in Grand Forks.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Artis: They had a picture painted of him in the state capitol building.
- DL: What else can you tell me about the story?
- Artis: A golf course was named after him; I mean also a golf tournament was named after him.
- DL: A golf tournament was named after Roger.
- Artis: Because he was an important person or important man.
- DL: Can you tell me more about him being important?

Artis: He won so many trophies and he married his wife from Fargo.

DL: How do you suppose the people here in Grand Forks thought of him, to name a tournament after him?

Brenda: Good, very popular.

Artis: Happy.

DL: How do you think the people felt about Roger's death?

Artis: Sad.

DL: They felt sad. Is feeling sad the reason they named the tournament after Roger?

Kim: No. Because maybe they were his friends.

DL: How do you feel when someone dies?

Janice: Happy and sad.

DL: Happy and sad.

Janice: I don't know why I was happy; but I was sad because he died.

DL: How did the story make you feel?

Brenda: Sad.

Betty: Sad.

DL: Can you tell me more about being sad?

Betty: Because he died.

DL: Feel sad when someone dies. Is that what you mean?

Brenda: Yes.

DL: What does the story mean to you?

Artis: Sort of happy when he got those trophies.

DL: So, I guess Roger was a very important person.

Janice and Kim: Yes.

Artis: They felt sad. Because maybe he was very important.

DL: What made him important?

Artis: He played for a major baseball team.

DL: What was the story really about?

Artis: He died and he was a famous player.



## Data on Second Grade Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Air Crash Kills Girl Who Wrote Andropov)

## Sequence of Story Session 3

- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Artis: She was wondering why two countries could not live in peace.
- Kim: The same thing.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Kim: She died in a plane crash when she was 13. She was 13 years old today.
- DL: What does it mean when someone dies?
- Kim: It means that one is very special and everybody will go to the funeral.
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Janice: Sad.
- Brenda: Sad. She is important.
- DL: What happens when someone dies?
- Janice: No more life.
- Artis: You go up to heaven.
- DL: What does it mean when someone dies?
- Kim: It means that you have no more life and that everybody cherish you when you die.
- Brenda: If you die in an accident you'll be okay. Others will be sad, but they'll be cared for.
- DL: What happens when someone dies?
- Letty: They have a funeral their heart stop.
- DL: Can you tell me more?

Betty: They stop breathing and they cannot wake up. They can't talk, and they can't hear, they can't have another chance, and they can't do anything.

DL: What other things happened in the story?

Artis: They are buried, it's dark.

DL: What was the story really about?

Betty: She was coming to land when she died.

DL: What does the story mean to you?

Artis: That she was special. That people really cared for her.

## Data on Fourth Grade Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: The Loss of Magic)

## Sequence of Story Session 1

- DL: I have a little boy and a little girl and they always say "read me a story dad, read me a story." From the story, I usually asked them some questions. Can I ask you guys some questions?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Gloria: The magical man gave the children their favorite wishes like they wanted.
- Tara: A magical man who granted others wishes.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Gloria: It made me have feelings. The kids were sad that he died and that he didn't lie to them.
- Tara: First of all, I felt I was happy at the beginning; then he died and I was sad because he was so nice to the kids.
- Ivan: I was just going to say you could tell how sad all the children felt when this magical man died.
- DL: Sad.
- Steve: Kind of sad.
- Ivan: Kind of funny when he died.
- Steve: Weird, because I pictured him in my mind as being kind of young and he died.
- Angela: I felt sad when he got sick, but he did not tell the children that he was sick and all of a sudden he died.
- DL: Do you think he should have told the children that he was ill?
- Angela: No. Sort of yes, and sort of no, so they would not worry that much.



- DL: Tell me, you said "sort of yes and sort of no."  
I am a little confused. Go ahead.
- Angela: I think he should have told them, so they would  
be more gentle with him. And he shouldn't have  
told them so that the children wouldn't worry  
about him.
- DL: Okay.
- Angela: When he died, I kind of felt shock because I did  
not think that he was going to die. Because we  
were not expecting him to die.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Tara: Well, I got kind of confused because he was so  
nice to the kids; they were kind of mean to him.  
They said, "You are not a magical man." Maybe he  
felt hurt too.
- Angela: Then he would looked at them with a sad eye.
- DL: Oh, so you think that there are lots of mixed up  
feelings between him and the kids?
- Gloria: Yes, it was kind of sad because when he died . . .  
you know like Angela said that he was sad because  
it did not work out like he wanted to. I know he  
should have told them; because if he was sick the  
children would have felt sad and worry about him.
- DL: Umm, huh.
- Gloria: Let's say, if he did, he would not have felt right  
because they would have been so sad and worried  
about him and if he didn't tell them they would  
feel sad that he did not tell them.
- DL: He should but he shouldn't. What would you want  
him to do?
- Angela: I think he should tell them so they would be more  
gentle with him.
- DL: To be more gentle.
- Gloria: That would not hurt them the way it hurt me if  
they knew. I would not want them to be gentle  
with me if they don't want to be.
- DL: They should be the way they feel like being.

- Gloria: I would just go some place and think why they are doing this.
- Tara: I think they were treating him so mean that the kids might have felt hurt too. Maybe he got nervous and they thought it was their fault.
- Gloria: Maybe he wasn't really magical but he wanted the children to be nice to him. Maybe he is not magical, but he can be magical in a way that he can be nice.
- DL: So he may not really be magical; but he was magical in the way he was with people.
- Gloria: Nice in the way he wanted to be. Cause I know some kinds, they're not nice.
- Steve: I don't think he should have told them maybe he didn't want them to worry about him.
- Ivan: I think he should have been smart enough to tell them. I just don't want to worry.
- DL: Would you want someone to tell you or would you feel more comfortable if someone not talk to you?
- Ivan: Not to tell me or to talk to me.
- Gloria: Sometimes you don't understand why people die and why they'll tell them. But I think it's okay. . . . I rather died right away than to suffer.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Angela: It was sad.
- Gloria: My grandmother and uncle died like the magical man. It seems like the older they got the nicer they become.
- Tara: How old was the magical man?
- DL: I don't know.
- Gloria: Is it a true story?
- DL: I don't know. What was the story really about?
- Gloria: The magic.
- Ivan: The death.

- DL: The death.
- Steve: The story was alright but it was sad at the end.
- Tara: I bet some of the kids--those who got their wish will go to the funeral and those who tease him won't go to the funeral. They might think it was their fault because they teased him.
- DL: I see.
- Angela: They found out that he was really magical because he had given them their choice.
- Gloria: It's always when you don't like somebody at first.



## Data on Fourth Grade Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: The Accident)

## Sequence of Story Session 2

- DL: When my sister and I read a good story we like to share it with each other. Can we do that?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Gloria: A guy hit Grover with a truck in the street. And this guy probably didn't see Grover.
- Steve: He was waiting for his mom and dad.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Gloria: His mom told him that the guy didn't mean to hit Grover. The boy wanted Grover back and he was mad. He did not have his puppy, which he had for a long time. I would get mad too!
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Gloria: There was a house right here. This lady was coming this way. There's the sidewalk, you know. My sister was riding my bike and the dog ran out in the street and this lady hit him and we took him to the emergency room.
- Angela: We had two of our puppies which we left at our aunt and we found out that the dogs died.
- DL: How did this make you feel?
- Angela: Sad. I (sort of) did not get involved; but I allowed her to take them.
- Tara: We had kittens and they were gone. One day I heard noise and I told my mom about it. We checked behind the icebox. They were behind the icebox.
- Gloria: Our dog, we were taking it for a walk in first grade and when it was crossing the street a car ran over it and it died. And a little girl was walking in the street and the car hit her. My mom told me this about the girl later on.

- Gloria: My mom was crying.
- Ivan: I walked our dog across the street. There was also this big German shepherd which always barked at our tiny, little dog. This dog used to scare our little dog. One time when we were not too attentive, the big dog came close to our dog. We then had to rescue our little dog in a fight, because it would have been killed by the big dog.
- Tara: When I lived in Fargo we met this guy and I didn't have my brother yet and we got this dog.
- DL: You had a dog once.
- Tara: Yes.
- Gloria: My sister and I were left at home. My sister and my cousin was riding a bike by the police station. My cousin was in front and my sister was behind. They were going across the street and my cousin got hit. My cousin found herself right in front of the tire.
- DL: Now let's get back to the story. After Christopher found out that his dog, Grover, was hit, how did he feel?
- Children: He felt sad and mad.
- DL: Sad and mad?
- Steve: Because he lived with it for a long time; so he got really mad.
- Gloria: My grandmother used to tease me when I was a little girl and I used to hide under the table and when she died I felt sad.
- Angela: When my grandpa died, my aunt said to him, "Freddie, wake up?" He then died a few days after. When he died my grandmother called and said, "Why did it have to happen to our family?" It reminds me of Christopher, because he kept on pretending.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Angela: He did not want to bring himself to realize that his dog was dead.



- DL: Christopher was angry because his father buried Grover. Would you want to be there?
- Some of the Children: Yes.
- Angela: No, I wouldn't really. Because, it is sad seeing him being put to the ground.
- Ivan: It is sad to know that you won't ever get to see him again.
- Steve: No, it is usually sad; just watching him being put to the ground.
- Angela: We had a death in our family when I was just a little girl. I asked my mom if I could stay there to watch when the body was being lowered into the grave. She said no because that was against the law.
- Gloria: About seven years ago my Grandpa fell and died. Since I was there when he fell, I tried to help him and I also call others to come to his aid. But, he died, prevented me from being happy for awhile. Sometimes I even cried; especially when my cousin blamed me for the death. My cousin claimed that I was chasing Grandpa around the place.
- DL: Let's go back to the story. Christopher was looking for a stone to place on Grover's grave. Can you tell me more?
- Ivan: He was along the shore; therefore it took a long time to find a stone.
- Steve: Because the location was one of the best. It was a good choice.
- Ivan: I was walking by a house and I came along a big stone where a dog was buried underneath.
- Angela: I saw the picture of a girl on a tombstone and another time, at my grandma's funeral, I saw a little baby's coffin.
- Gloria: I had a cat which came close to being run over by a fire truck.
- DL: What was the story really about?
- Children: Total silence.



DL: How do you feel when someone dies?

Children: Sad.

## Data on Fourth Grade Responses:

Group I (Contextual Story: Why Did Grandma Die?)

## Sequence of Story Session 3

- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Steve: It was a good story.
- DL: What was good about it?
- Children: Total silence.
- DL: What was the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Steve: She came right after her grandma died.
- DL: Ivan?
- Ivan: I was going to say I think the best main part of the story was her grandma died and how she was nice.
- Steve: I thought it was really bad.
- DL: What happens when someone dies?
- Tara: When somebody dies they never come back.
- Gloria: When somebody dies, they're here but really not here.
- Steve: When somebody dies the body stops working.
- Tara: I don't know. Sad, maybe.
- DL: What does it mean when someone dies?
- Ivan: The soul goes to heaven. The heart becomes still.
- DL: How do you feel when someone dies?
- Gloria: Really sad.
- Ivan: The stuff the dead person is made up is still with you.
- DL: Can you tell me more?

- Tara: The things she taught me are still important.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Ivan: I would change the story if I were the one writing it.
- DL: How would you change the story if you were writing it?
- Ivan: The story is good but the story did not say how her mom and dad took her death. It did not say whether they cried or whether their eyes were red.
- DL: What happens when someone dies?
- Gloria: I know a girl whose name is Tarsha. She has a black and white kitten which was recently bought. Well, it was run over.
- Angela: Don't tell him that.
- Gloria: The head was crushed and the eyes were rolling off its sockets. It was somewhat gross. But they put it in a box and buried it. They had flowers and everything. There was this dog that I had from the time it was a puppy. It was ran over by a vehicle and died. I did feel sad. In fact, there is a girlfriend of mine whose dog had a broken leg from an unknown source; and she too felt sad about her dog.
- Ivan: My brother had a bird which became ill. We gave it medicine but it still died. He was so sad about the loss of the bird that my parents had to buy him another bird.
- Angela: My grandma died of cancer in an old folks home. She used to tell me stories and play with me quite a lot. We were very close; in fact, I was sad when I realized that she was gone.
- Gloria: My grandma and my grandpa used to live across the street from us. She died. Up today, I do not like to look at their rooms. Even though I close my eyes when I am near their place I still remember. My grandpa is still living and my grandma is dead. I don't like it; for it is too sad an existence for my grandpa.
- DL: What was the story really about?
- Children: Total silence.



Steve: A week before I was born my grandpa died of his fifth heart attack.

DL: So you never got to know your grandpa?

Steve: No.

DL: Tara.

Tara: I had a horse and one day it bit my hand.

DL: What other things happened in the story?

Children: Total silence.

## Data on Fourth Grade Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Bill Scott)

## Sequence of Story Session 1

- DL: I read stories to my kids and after I've read them the story, we usually talk about it. Can you tell me about the story?
- Rachon: That he died.
- DL: That he died.
- Rachon: Scott died.
- DL: Can you tell me more?
- Rachon: Because that's what this story is about.
- DL: What does the story mean to you?
- Rachon: A sad story.
- Reggie: Kind of sad.
- Doris: Sad.
- Spencer: Sad.
- Aaron: Sad.
- Doris: Shocked. Terrible.
- DL: Shocked. Terrible. Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Rachon: Scott, the person who wrote Rocky. That he died.
- Aaron: The same thing he said.
- DL: Tell me in your own words what he said.
- Aaron: That he died.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Doris: A man died, he wrote, he produced.
- Rachon: He made all the voices. He made up all the characters.

Reggie: It means a lot to the boys and girls who watch cartoons on Saturday morning. I still watch Rocky and Bullwinkle.

DL: The next time you watch Rocky and Bullwinkle, what do you think will come to your mind?

Rachon: The Scott guy.

Aaron: The story.

Spencer: The story and his death.

DL: What was the story really about?

Children: Total silence.



## Data on Fourth Grade Responses:

Group II (Media Story: Home Run King Roger Maris Dies)

## Sequence of Story Session 2

- DL: When my sister and I hear a story, we usually share it with each other. Can you do that for me?
- Children: Yes.
- DL: Can you tell me about the story?
- Reggie: The guy Roger played baseball and he got ill from cancer. And the doctors said he had it for five years without knowing it.
- Aaron: I liked the story because one of my favorite sports is baseball.
- DL: Can you tell me the most important thing you remember about the story?
- Rachon: He died.
- Doris: He was really famous because he got all the home runs and stuff like that.
- DL: What other things happened in the story?
- Aaron: Named a golf tournament after him.
- Doris: They probably lost more games than usually when he died.
- Spencer: Silence.
- Reggie: He won lots of awards in high school when he played football and some other sports.
- DL: Other sports.
- Aaron: They called him the Roughrider and they named a hockey team after him in Grand Forks. The hockey team was called Red River Roughrider.
- DL: He died and named a golf tournament after him.
- Reggie: Well, it was held every year to raise money to help people with cancer.

Table 11

Data on Second-Grade Children's Responses to Question 7: What Does  
It Mean When Someone Dies?

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Group I - Second Grade  
Contextual Story

Session 3: Why Did Grandma Die?

Session 3: Children's Responses

- A lot.
- I can't.
- I can't think of anything. It makes me feel sad.

Group II - Second Grade  
Media Story

Session 3: Air Crash Kills Girl  
Who Wrote Andropov

Session 3: Children's Responses

- It means that one is very special and everybody will go to the funeral.
  - It means that you have no more life and that everybody cherish you when you die.
  - If you die in an accident you'll be okay. Others will be sad, but they'll be cared for.
-

Table 12

Data on Fourth-Grade Children's Responses to Question 7: What Does  
It Mean When Someone Dies?

---

Group I - Fourth Grade  
Contextual Story

Session 3: Why Did Grandma Die?

Session 3: Children's Responses  
-The soul goes to heaven. The  
heart becomes still.

Group II - Fourth Grade  
Media Story

Session 3: Air Crash Kills Girl  
Who Wrote Andropov

Session 3: Children's Responses  
-I do not know how to say it.  
-Like when people die inside.

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Table 13

Data on Kindergarten Children's Responses to Question 8: What  
Happens When Someone Dies?

---

Group I - Kindergarten  
Contextual Story

Session 3: Why Did Grandma Die?

Session 3: Children's Responses

- She died by a tree.
  - Her heart stop. Those who die go to heaven.
  - You stop breathing.
  - When you die you don't come back for a week.
  - I forgot.
  - Nothing.
- 

Group II - Kindergarten  
Media Story

Session 3: Air Crash Kills Girl  
Who Wrote Andropov

Session 3: Children's Responses

- My grandpa got shot by a king in World War IV.
- There is no such World War.

Table 14

Data on Second-Grade Children's Responses to Question 8: What  
Happens When Someone Dies?

---

Group I - Second Grade  
Contextual Story

Session 3: Why Did Grandma Die?

Session 3: Children's Responses

- That person never comes back again. That person must be buried.
- They have to be put in a coffin because they won't be back.

Group II - Second Grade  
Media Story

Session 3: Air Crash Kills Girl  
Who Wrote Andropov

Session 3: Children's Responses

- No more life.
  - You go up to heaven.
  - They have a funeral, their heart stop.
  - They stop breathing and they cannot wake up. They can't talk, they can't hear, they can't have another chance, and they can't do anything.
-

Table 15

Data on Fourth-Grade Children's Responses to Question 8: What  
Happens When Someone Dies?

Group I - Fourth Grade  
Contextual Story

Session 3: Why Did Grandma Die?

Session 3: Children's Responses

- When somebody dies they never come back.
- When somebody dies, they're here but really not here.
- When somebody dies the body stops working.
- I don't know. Sad, maybe.
- I know a girl whose name is Tarsha. She has a black and white kitten which was recently bought. Well, it was run over.
- Don't tell him that.
- The head was crushed and the eyes were rolling off its sockets. It was somewhat gross. But they put it in a box and buried it. They had flowers and everything. There was this dog that I had from the time it was a puppy. It was ran over by a vehicle and died. I did feel sad. In fact, there is a girlfriend of mine whose dog had a broken leg from an unknown source; and she too felt sad about her dog.
- My brother had a bird which became ill. We gave it medicine but it still died. He was so sad about the loss of the bird that my parents had to buy him another bird.
- My grandma died of cancer in an old folks home. She used to tell me stories and play with me

Group II - Fourth Grade  
Media Story

Session 3: Air Crash Kills Girl  
Who Wrote Andropov

Session 3: Children's Responses

- Sometimes you die of old age, that's because the organs inside your body have worked so hard and a simple accident could result in you having a heart attack. Or you could break your neck and you could die as a consequence. These are just a few examples.
- It is like a long sleep from which you never wake up.
- It hurts as you die.
- It is like you don't want to say heaven is real, I suppose.
- It's kind of sad to die; and you don't have to worry because you are going to a good place.



## Table 15 (Cont.)

Data on Fourth-Grade Children's Responses to Question 8: What  
Happens When Someone Dies?

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quite a lot. We were very close; in fact, I was sad when I realized that she was gone.

-My grandma and grandpa used to live across the street from us. She died. Up today, I do not like to look at their rooms. Even though I close my eyes when I am near their place I still remember. My grandpa is still living and my grandma is dead. I don't like it; for it is too sad an existence for my grandpa.

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