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3.1 What Literature Can Do Assignment

Lets us see other lives through other eyes. *Mountains of Tibet*, Mordecai Gerstein

Being able to understand that there are people and things in this world that are different from you is a very important concept for children, and anyone, to grasp. In order to understand other people's life situations, it is important to be able to put yourself in their shoes and understand their circumstances. I see this book doing a good job of this. The character, both as a young boy and older man, is always wishing about and wondering what life is like in other parts of the world. On top of that, this man ultimately ends up choosing to return to his valley in Tibet. The reader can infer that his new life, this time as a girl, will be quite similar, culturally, to his previous life. I think this teaches another very important lesson of being content with who you are and not always wishing for more. This man had the opportunity to live again as something completely different, in a completely different world, and his choices took him back to what was familiar to him. This circular plot provides opportunities to think about how the reader might answer "The Voice's" questions as they are asked.

For this book in particular, it makes readers question the existence of a higher power and what happens after you die. What came to my mind was that God has a plan laid out for everyone and no matter how we try to change it, we will end up on the path he has chosen. I think that this book could spark some great conversations about religion and even the scope of our universe. This book does leave the reader with many questions and also things to think about. I can definitely see how this piece of literature could change (or influence) a reader's perspective on life and religion.

Develops imagination. *Come Away from the Water Shirley*, John Burningham

Being able to imagine worlds that are nothing like the one we live in is very important to kids, especially those who are struggling readers. If a child has a good imagination, their ability to comprehend complex stories is increased. I loved reading this book because you get two totally different perspectives on a day at the beach. On one side of the pages, you have the real world events. Mom and dad are relaxing and telling Shirley to stop doing various things. On the other side, it shows Shirley's adventures with pirates and finding buried treasure. It is an interesting contrast to be able to see the perspectives of both the adults and the children. This can spark great conversations about who looks like they are having more fun. Kids can connect with Shirley if they have had similar experiences, perhaps not at a beach, but in other places. If students are not familiar with using imaginations this book can really help to show how to do that. I like how the parents tell Shirley to go play with the other kids, but she doesn't. She chooses the dog that was roaming the beach. I also liked how they chose the setting as a beach. Most people would think going to the beach is fun and no one

would get bored. However, when it is too cold to swim, what else do you do? Shirley shows us that if you use your imagination, you can create your own adventures.

Helps us solve problems. *The Kissing Hand*, Audrey Penn

Solving problems in a positive and appropriate manner is a very important skill for all people to have. Kids have different problems than adults and sometimes they seem small and trivial. However, as adults, we need to provide tools and tips for young children to use so they can understand how to solve a problem. In this story, a raccoon mother does that for her child. Young kids will be able to relate to Chester because each of them has had to leave their parents to go to school. Chester's problem was that he was afraid to leave his mom. A surface level reading of this book would still get readers to understand that Mrs. Raccoon's secret kiss was able to help Chester get over his fear. Chester also even learned a lesson that he can use these tools to help other people who might have the same problem, thus his giving a "Kissing Hand" to his own mother. Something that I liked that drew me in to believe the story was the author's choice of words, especially the way she describes the kiss on Chester's hand.

"Chester felt his mother's kiss rush from his hand, up his arm, and into his heart. Even his silky, black mask tingled with a special warmth."

"Press your hand to your cheek and think, 'Mommy loves you, Mommy loves you.' And that very kiss will jump to your face and fill you with toasty warm thoughts."

This whole book gives the reader a sense of love and warmth because of the words the author used. It makes the story believable and draws the reader in.

Gives us a sense of history. *Martin's Big Words*, Doreen Rappaport

It is important for kids to have an idea of what we have gone through as a nation and what things have got us to the place where we are now. Black history is one of these things that is taught in every school in the nation. I believe, however, that many times, it is a dull and boring subject. Kids are read several cold, lifeless, non-fiction accounts of what happened. While there is a time and a place for non-fiction readings, it is difficult to gain a true sense of what life was like during this time. Martin's Big Words does a fantastic job of incorporating history and facts with a captivating story. The plot is a simple linear one that is easy to follow. The style of this story that the author chose is what makes the reader truly feel the history. I love how the events and basic facts are written as the main text but in black and quite small font. The real quotes spoken by Martin Luther King Jr. are what pulls the reader into the southern towns. They are bright and bold and they stick out. It is almost like the readers can hear him saying those exact words. The intent of this book is to teach us about Martin Luther

King Jr.'s life, but we get more than that. We get to live it along with him though the use of his "big words".

Transmits cultural literacy. *The Frog Prince Continued*, Jon Scieszka

It is important for young children to be exposed to many different cultures and one way we do that is through fairy tales. These are universal stories that almost every child in almost every country knows. It is important for adults to make sure the children understand where each fairy tale comes from and what the message is behind them. I like this book because the author blends all sorts of fairy tales into one. This author helps to transmit cultural literacy through the use of his creative plot. The reader must know the story of the frog prince to understand the basic story. Then the reader must also understand several other fairy tales which include witches who cast spells and which fairy tale they come in. Reading this story can cause a child to think about a fairy tale they already knew in a different way or want to read more fairy tales to be able to hear more of the story about the witches. It makes kids become interested in fairy tales as well as understand that all of them follow similar story lines.

Lets us experience the beauty of language. *Owl Moon*, Jane Yolen

It is through language that we communicate. The way words read on a page is one way a reader gets pulled into a story. This book does a great job with this. The author uses several different techniques to play around with the words and style of writing in this book. For example, similes and metaphors are used to describe the setting of the story. Examples include "The trees stood still as giant statues." "It was as quiet as a dream." "But I was a shadow as we walked home." Tons of descriptive words are used throughout the entire book. Phrases like "crunched through the leaves," and "my short, round shadow bumped after me," are just a few examples of how the description helps us see and experience the story. This author uses the human senses to draw the reader in and helps us realize the beauty of words. For example, she says, "I could feel the cold, as if someone's icy hand was palm-down on my back. And my nose and the tops of my cheeks felt cold and hot at the same time." Readers can stop to think about the feelings these words leave with them as well take time to explore just the words themselves.

Let us experience the play of language. *Seven Silly Eaters*, Mary Ann Hoberman

Being able to play around with words and make them into various sentences is a critical skill in young readers. It is through the use of rhyming words that this author captures the fun that language can be. Adding another child who only eats a certain food would have been silly and fun to read about on it's own. The use of making the lines rhyme adds a new dimension to the book. It is a great tool to use with students who are just learning how to read and figure out how words are spelled and put together. With the surprise birthday cake for mom, the story just keeps getting more

and more ridiculous, but somehow the author finds ways to make the words rhyme, which enhances the story and makes it an interesting read. By reading this, children might want to go find other books that rhyme or write their own.

Teaches information. *Quest for the Tree Kangaroo*, by Sy Montgomery and Nic Bishop

Part of an adult's job is to teach young readers that books are a resource to new information. We also need to instill a love of learning in young children so they want to open some nonfiction text and learn about a new topic. This book really captures the audience and pulls them into the search for knowledge. I was captivated by the style of writing this nonfiction book had, particularly the point of view in which it was written. The beginning reads almost like a biography of explorer Lisa's quest to learn about the tree kangaroo. As you keep reading, you really become involved in this journey. You are reading Sy Montgomery real field journal and feel like you are actually taking the trip with them. The way that Montgomery combines the story with the facts about the area as well as the animals is so effortless. It almost reads as if she is just telling us all the information she knows about the subject. It definitely draws the reader in and makes them want to learn more about these unique animals in this area of the world.

Helps develop reading skills. *Z was Zapped*, Chris Van Allsburg

Obviously learning to read is a critical skill for every young child. It begins with the concepts of print: how to hold the book, how to read the words and turn pages. It also begins with the understanding of letters, the alphabet, the sounds each letter makes and the fact that letters can be put together to make words. This book puts it all together. The simple text structure helps a child learn his or her ABCs as well as words that make the same sound as the letters. There is not much to read, however, the words are complicated and complex. For example, "The O was rapidly Overgrown" might be a hard concept for early readers to understand or read. The same goes for the words evaporated, quartered, and warped. This can be a great introduction to vocabulary and reading for meaning. If children do not understand what they read, they should not just keep reading. They need to enlist strategies to help themselves figure it out. The picture on the previous page can also help with this. I think that it was interesting that the photo comes before the words for that letter. This is a unique style that I think young readers will enjoy reading.

Overall, reading is a very personal experience. Any person, adult or child, brings their own life experiences to any story that they read. Each person chooses to read a particular text for a different reason, including the reasons described above. Books can be read for pure entertainment, allowing us to use our imagination and laugh at the silliness of the words. Other times, books can be read to experience a life that is not how we are used to living. We can learn new information about cultures, historical events, animals, and basically anything we can dream of. Through reading, we get to

experience the world at it's best, in all it's beauty. If it had to be put down in a sentence or two, I would say that the purpose of bring books to children is to have them experience and learn lessons about life. All of this is done through the author's choice of how to present his or her work.

The use of literary elements has a tremendous impact on how the reader experiences the text. An author can draw a reader in by the words they choose to use to describe event, character, or object. The perspective of who is telling the story can be a way to present an experience that a reader might never have had. A plot that can take a reader to another world can be a window into different cultures and people. Though careful character development, a person might find themselves identifying with a character in a book who helps them over come a personal struggle or teaches them a valuable lesson. A well thought out theme or message could influence several young children's lives and set them onto a path that was never thought possible. It is hard to say what a book will and can do for us in general. The possibilities are endless.

When thinking about how the purposes for reading fit into our classroom choices for reading I find myself conflicted. While teachers do strive to put books that will change lives into the hands of children, I wonder if we try too hard. Many books that are chosen as class read alouds or to be put into classroom libraries are chosen because they have a good message, strong themes, beautiful language, and are overall well written. We want our children to experience these books because they teach the reader something.

However, I feel that us teachers might be working too hard. I strongly believe that reading is a personal experience and the past life events that a reader brings into the text have a huge influence on how the text is perceived. For example, the only reason I really enjoyed reading the entire book, Quest for the Tree Kangaroo, is because I have an interest in science, animals, and the outdoors. If the book was about robots, even if it was written in a similar style, I do not think I would have been able to finish the entire book. Perhaps us teachers spend too much effort in telling students what they should be getting out of a particular book and less asking students to tell us what they think. Our children do have their own minds, and often times we try to guide them to the typical response, but I wonder what would change if teachers stopped trying to plan everything and just let their students lead the discussion and learning.