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Magic, monsters, and Merlin: an exploration of the fantasy genre in a fifth grade setting

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MAGIC, MONSTERS, AND MERLIN: AN EXPLORATION OF THE FANTASY
GENRE IN A FIFTH GRADE SETTING

by
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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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of
The Graduate School
at
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Thesis Chair: Marjorie E. Madden, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

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MAGIC, MONSTERS, AND MERLIN: AN EXPLORATION OF THE FANTASY
GENRE IN A FIFTH GRADE SETTING
2009/10
Marjorie E. Madden, Ph.D.
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The purposes of this exploratory investigation were to determine how fantasy literature

helps children explore, process, and discuss real world issues and topics and what other

applications the genre had in the classroom. This study was conducted by implementing a

genre study in a fifth grade classroom. Seventeen students participated in the research

model. Data collected included audiotaped discussions, student projects and artifacts, and

my personal teacher research journal. The data was analyzed recursively across all data

sets to determine patterns and themes. Data was coded according to the four main

patterns and counted across data sets. If the pattern was found to be prevalent across all

data sets and with the majority of the students it was found to be conclusive.

Disconfirming data was also analyzed and included under the pattern that it disconfirmed.

Implications of the genre are discussed including its facilitation as it pertains to

identification of themes, text-to-self connections, discussion of real world issues, and

enthusiasm and autonomy over learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is dedicated to my mother and father, who have made it possible for me to become the first person in my family with a Master's degree. Without their support and guidance, my education would not have been possible. Thank you for always reading to me. It is because of you that I have a love for learning and education. And to the memory of my grandfather, Robert Bagatta, who always worked hard so one day his family would have the opportunities to accomplish great things.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

"The fantasy novel speaks many times to the listener. Once in the ear, and again and

again and again in the echo chamber that is the heart."

-Jane Yolen (2000)

To start, I have always been a fan of fantasy literature. For as long as I can

remember it has been my favorite genre. I can still remember a particular day in fifth

grade. I had just moved to New Jersey from New York City and I was feeling lost. I was

in the library with my new class when I noticed a new book on the shelf with a colorful

purple cover. The book was titled <u>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</u>. Once I opened

the cover of that book my life was never the same. I had read hundreds of books before

Harry Potter, and I have read hundreds since and none have ever compared. Never in my

life had any of the books I read engrossed me like Harry Potter. It was able to do what all

books promise to do but fail: it transported me to another world. I was hooked. I found

myself lost in the imaginary world of witches and wizards and I found a new friend in

Harry, one who understood me and how I felt. Although Harry had been accepted into a

new school of witchcraft and wizardry, he had been accepted to a new school all the

same, and so had I. He was feeling lost and lonely in a new environment, and so was I. I

found something I identified with myself in Harry Potter, and I immediately loved the

books. The Harry Potter books have been by my side since that year in fifth grade and I

suspect they always will be.

I was one of the readers lucky enough to grow with Harry. Each time a book came out Harry was a year older and so we were always a year or two apart. Because of this the experience was so much more personal for me. I was immediately attracted to the idea of using fantasy literature in my research simply because I wanted other children to find what I found. I would love to expose more students to the magic of fantasy literature and help them find allies in the rich and imaginative characters that this genre provides.

Purpose Statement

Standardized test scores hold more weight in our current educational environments and these measures of academic performance may be responsible for the lack of certain genres in the classroom. Genres that once filled classrooms are disappearing. Only those that have practical application are being used. More often than not, leveled readers, with a major focus on sight vocabulary and spelling words are all that are being used in elementary classrooms. In some classrooms it is rare for students to even interact with books aside from their literature text books. The stories in these anthologies are often quick, short, and simple in plot and point. I feel that it is crucial that students explore all kinds of texts in order to find their own love of reading in the genres they enjoy. This is what first drew me to the use of fantasy literature in the classroom. I think it is important to make reading fun. If students do not genuinely enjoy reading they will not choose to read outside of school. The review of the literature shows that fantasy is not one of the primary genres used in classrooms and there has been very little research done with the genre in the form of studies.

My thought process evolved into something more concrete when I first read Cruz and Pollock's (2003) article on a fantasy genre study. The study implemented by

elementary school teachers came across some amazing uses for fantasy literature. After reading this article I realize that there are so many practical applications for fantasy in the classroom and it should no longer be considered a genre only practical for leisure reading. Cruz and Pollock (2003) collected hundreds of fantasy books and immersed their students in them. Students defined the genre, explored what the genre entailed and completed projects across several subject areas on the books they read.

Fantasy was easily incorporated into subject areas including social studies, science and art. In art specifically, Cruz and Pollock (2003) found fantasy literature inspired student's work. Students were motivated, excited and perhaps the biggest discovery of the study was that fantasy literature provided an excellent starting point for discussion of larger, real life issues. Because fantasy literature is removed from the students' everyday lives and experiences, they felt safer and more at ease talking about deeper issues. The quality of discussion generated during the genre study was of a higher caliber than they had seen before, especially with texts which directly addressed tough issues in a realistic setting (Cruz and Pollock, 2003).

Nina Mikkelson's 2005 study on children's response to literature found fantasy built a great platform for reflection and personal writing. In particular, when coupled with discussion, students responded to the idea of transformations. Mikkelson (2005) feels that this is because students in an elementary setting are experiencing many important transformations of their own. Overall it seems fantasy evokes rich and powerful connections and discussions which have not been seen with the use of other genres. While other genres may seem more direct and students may make connections, it may

feel contrived or forced. Fantasy seems to provide a more natural and easy environment for these kinds of discussions.

Smith and Weitz (2003) found fantasy can be easily differentiated and adapted for all types of learners. There are so many different texts of all levels which can be used, but within the fantasy genre it was very easy for them to adapt a wide range of activities for all students. Fantasy lends itself to many different writing, discussion, and reading activities for students of all levels.

Researchers such as Cruz and Pollock (2006) and Chappell (2008) hypothesized that because fantasy literature addresses issues in a way far removed from student's lives, they relate more easily to characters and themes in this genre than characters who are living a more direct parallel to their lives. Unfortunately, there is little research done on these intriguing phenomena. I hope to further expand on this during my research. By implementing a genre study on fantasy over a three week period in an elementary setting I hope to add to the body of work on the subject. I hope to explore the different applications for fantasy in the classroom, although it is becoming a non-traditional genre. I would like to see how fantasy provides a platform for discussion in a kindergarten through fifth grade setting. I am interested in applying different texts to these discussions and seeing which work best. Finally, I would like to see how children feel about fantasy literature and discussion, compared to other genres in the field. This is an area that could greatly benefit from more research as there is little out there. I feel educators could also benefit from new models of implementation for these studies in the classroom.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The question being presented is: How does fantasy literature help children explore, process, and discuss real world issues and topics; and what other applications does the genre have in the classroom?

Story of the Question

During the summer of 2009 I had the opportunity to work as a creative writing instructor at a YMCA in Manhattan. The creative writing course was an elective in a summer arts program. Students came to the YMCA and experienced dance, theater, music, visual art and creative writing. Before I started the job I was really nervous. I wondered how writing could ever compare to the more visual, lively forms of art being offered. I feared students would not come to my classes. I thought they would hate writing; especially over the summer. One thing I did not realize was although many students do not love writing, their attitudes can change if you add one thing: fun. I tried my best to bring creative writing to the students in new and interesting ways. The response was tremendous. By incorporating fun into the curriculum student participation and excitement grew. Without pressure and pre-selected writing themes, students demonstrated greater responsiveness.

Fun is noticeably absent in the classroom and while there may be several reasons, including the drive for higher test scores my educational philosophy incorporates fun and I believe that one can infuse fun into any curriculum and achieve the desired goals. Since my favorite topic was literacy I naturally gravitated toward implementing a study which incorporated reading. I wanted to replicate the enthusiasm and passion my students had

this summer in creative writing, but in their discussions and writing about books. I

selected my favorite genre, fantasy, which I believe is best suited for this study.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two provides a review of the literature on the subject of genre and fantasy

literature. Chapter three explains the context of the study and describes the research

methodology. It also gives a detailed account of how the study was implemented in the

classroom. Chapter four presents the findings of the study. Finally, chapter five provides

conclusions of the study and implications for students and teachers in the elementary

classroom.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

"Fantasy feeds a hunger we didn't know we had."

-Jane Langton (1973)

"Fantasy, more than any other genre, is closer to children's emotional reality. When children read about a fantastical world, far removed from their real lives, it is much safer to think about issues of loss, betrayal and change."

-Laurence Yep (2001)

The idea of a genre study in the classroom is not a new concept, but most of the previous studies typically focused on the more conventional, and traditional genres. A genre that has seen only limited exploration, but holds worlds of classroom potential is fantasy literature. Fantasy literature is a widely popular genre that is often overlooked by its more "serious" counterparts. Fantasy literature is usually dismissed as fluff and fun, but can be an extremely valuable asset to the classroom. This literature review explores the genre and its applications and values in a kindergarten through fifth grade setting.

The question being presented is: How does fantasy literature help children explore, process, and discuss real world issues and topics; and what other applications does the genre have in the classroom? The first section of the literature review defines genre and genre studies. The second section explores the concept of genre and how it is applied in the classroom. This section also explores the benefits and

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procedures for using genre in the classroom. The third section of this review explores the

fantasy genre in great detail. It begins with the definition of fantasy and explores several

forerunners of the genre. This is followed by a discussion of studies that have been done

with fantasy and the outcomes of these studies. The final section contains the rationale

for the topic and explores the list of issues that lend themselves to the use of fantasy,

citing real text examples which explore those very themes and issues.

What is Genre and Genre Study?

Genre is a French word meaning type or kind. Genres are an organizational

method of classifying different types of text by their characteristics (Fountas and Pinnell,

2001, p. 392). According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001) literature can be divided into two

types: poetry and prose. Prose is then divided into either fiction or non-fiction and these

are further divided to the subsequent genres that are used throughout the curriculum.

Fiction is divided into three categories: traditional, fantasy and realism. The traditional

genres are: folktales, fables, myths, legends and epics. Fantasy genres include: fantasy

and science fiction. And under realism the genres are: realistic fiction and historical

fiction. Nonfiction texts are divided into two sections: informational and biographical.

Under informational are the genres: science, social studies, mathematics, health,

language, arts and recreation. Sub-genres of biography include authentic biography,

fictionalized biography, autobiography and memoir (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

A *genre study* is an instructional unit in which students immerse themselves in

one particular genre. This is done by creating text sets, or extensive collections of texts of

the specific genre. Students read various texts in the genre, and define the elements which

categorize the genre. Once students have a working definition of the genre they can begin

reading and exploring the texts. Students should be exposed to all kinds of materials in that genre such as movies, books, and plays. The study should conclude with students writing their own pieces in the genre (Shechter, 1987).

<div align="center">Why Genre?</div>

Differentiating between genres is crucial for students to make observations and learn about different types of literature (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Students must be able to tell the difference between fact and fiction. Different genres have different applications in an academic setting and distinguishing between these is something all students must be able to do. Students must explore and define the genres on their own before they can distinguish the relative differences between the genres. Students cannot internalize genres if they have not yet been exposed to them and so it is important that knowledge and understanding of the genres is acquired. Students must discover genres and the corresponding differences on their own before they are able to fully understand them (Shechter, 1987). Working with the genre will help students especially in areas of writing. If students can distinguish between genres they can effectively incorporate crucial elements into the genres of their choosing. For example, if a student is writing an autobiography he/she must first have basic knowledge of what an autobiography entails, before they would know how to proceed (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

The editors of Language Arts Journal (v. 81, 2004) write: "Children naturally use genre within their reading and writing lives to pen up new spaces for connections as well as interactions" (Language Arts, 2003, p. 183). Genres can open doors for students to write about themselves, fictional places, or moments in history. However, the

possibilities only exist once a student fully understands the genres that are available to them (Shechter, 1987).

Studying and distinguishing between genres helps students develop an understanding of different texts while expanding their knowledge of the world past and present. One cannot garner a full understanding of something by reading only one piece of literature on that subject. It is only by exploring all different types of writing that students may begin to see the full picture (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001). Exploring genre also helps students increase their vocabulary and develop their own tastes as readers that they will take with them into adulthood. Along with learning the genres that interest them, students will learn to make informed opinions on certain authors and types of writing; students can learn how to read with a more critical eye and learn to select appropriate, interesting texts for their independent reading. Using genre in the primary grades will help students later in life when navigating the library in search of certain types of texts (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, p.390). Students will also learn several strategies for reading different types of texts. There is a significant difference between reading fiction for pleasure and reading nonfiction texts to find information. Students must learn to distinguish and navigate texts to get the information that they need and apply it to an academic setting (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).

What is Fantasy Literature?

According to Fountas and Pinnell (2001), the definition of fantasy literature is:

"...fiction that contains unrealistic or unworldly elements such as magic. Writers of fantasy make an unreal world seem believable; readers willingly suspend their disbelief, entering another world with characteristics that may be quite different

from their own view of reality. In the process, they learn about truths that transcend everyday reality. The blending of fantastic and realistic detail is a hallmark of fantasy. While the events and settings are fantastic, the characters seem real" (Fountas and Pinnell 394).

Typical elements of fantasy include "magic, use of special character types, fantastic objects, time shifts, the supernatural, imaginary worlds, and the hero's quest" (Kurkjian, Livingston, Young, 2006, p. 492). Newberry Award winning children's author Avi (2006) states: "...although successful fantasy takes place in a different, fantastical world, the world is in a "parallel universe." For fantasy to be successful it must feel real" (Avi, 2006, p. 496).

According to Kurkjian, Livingston and Young (2006) there are two sub-genres of fantasy literature; modern fantasy and traditional fantasy. Both sub-genres of fantasy include other worlds, magic, a hero's journey, good versus evil, and other trademarks of fantasy. Traditional fantasies are more ambiguous and the characters are usually symbolic. Throughout the story they usually do not grow or change. Modern fantasy is usually about the character's journey. On this journey the character learns, grows and changes (Kurkjian, Livingston, Young, 2006, p. 494). Traditional fantasy usually exemplifies extremes cut clearly into two sides such as good vs. evil or right vs. wrong. In traditional fantasies such as "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" or the "Wizard of Oz" the path is clear and so are the objectives. In modern fantasy the lines between extremes are much more ambiguous, and the answers aren't often as easy. Modern fantasy leaves more space for the reader to think creatively, critically and to make individual judgments of the texts (Chappell, 2008).

The primary component of almost all fantasies is the presence of a hero. This hero is typically an orphan or a marginalized character of some kind. This hero is sent on a life-altering quest that will make a great difference in the world. The hero typically encounters an enemy who represents evil. They also typically encounter a mentor who guides the hero throughout the story (Thomas, 2003). Perhaps one of the first fantasy authors was Lewis Caroll who wrote "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "through the Looking Glass" (Matthews, 2009). This story was a classic example of traditional fantasy in that the main characters did not grow or change throughout the story but were symbols and social commentaries. Another example of classic fantasy literature was written by Lyman Frank Baum. "The Wizard of Oz" and the other stories in the series have characters such as a "wicked witch" and a "good witch." Lines are clearly drawn and the objective is clear. The main protagonist, Dorothy does not grow or mature on her quest, but simply completes it and fulfills her destiny of restoring peace to Oz (Thomas, 2003).

The world of fantasy changed drastically with the coming of J.R.R. Tolkien who authored the classic The Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings Trilogy. These books were the first steps taken into modern fantasy. Tolkien's main character, Frodo, goes on a life-changing quest that has drastic consequences for the fate of the planet. Along the journey Frodo grows, matures and changes. The book uses a parallel universe to make comments on the issues of the human condition such as growing up, the effects of war, and social indifference" (Thomas, 2003).

The genre was historically dominated by men but this is no longer the case. The biggest powerhouse fantasy author (and author of any genre) is J.K. Rowling, author of

the Harry Potter series. These books have once again put the spotlight on fantasy and opened new and old readers' eyes to the potential the genre holds. Although the protagonist Harry Potter follows the same patterns of generic fantasy heroes that started with Dorothy and continues with Frodo, his journey and messages are different. Harry Potter has become one of the forerunners of the new postmodern children of contemporary fantasy literature. The protagonists of modern fantasy do not have the clear cut objectives of their predecessors and must make their own way, using critical thinking and decision making (Chappell, 2008).

Fantasy has now become a staple in most classrooms and a favorite for students' independent and leisure reading. The genre is increasing in popularity and in the sections below the literature review will detail the studies which have been implemented using the genre in a kindergarten through fifth grade setting.

Fantasy in the Classroom

Fantasy genre studies are not implemented very often in the classroom and unfortunately there exist a limited number of studies. Most studies that have been conducted are fairly new, although they have had extremely positive outcomes across many different subject areas, not just reading and writing (Cruz and Pollock, 2003). The most comprehensive study was the 2003 study conducted by Cruz and Pollock in their fourth grade class at P.S. 321 School in Brooklyn New York. Cruz and Pollock (2003) spent three weeks researching the genre from an adult's perspective before introducing it to the classroom. They not only read books, they took notes, discussed fantasy with each other, talked to fans of the genre and attended conferences. They collected fantasy literature to compile "text sets" of the genre. Cruz and Pollock (2003) combined many

teaching strategies in the implementation of their unit. They used literacy centers, book clubs, read alouds, independent reading, writing activities, charts and graphic organizers to implement the study over several weeks. Eventually students were completely immersed in the fantasy genre and garnered a proficient understanding of the definition and elements of fantasy.

Results suggested that despite the fun and light nature of fantasy reading, the genre had incredible potential in the classroom setting. The results were so startling and impressive that both Cruz and Pollock felt that they could easily continue the genre study for the remainder of the school year and still provide high quality education. They commented: "In this place where the fantastical blends with reality in our students' lives, powerful teaching opportunities await" (Cruz and Pollock, 2003, 185).

Fantasy contained themes and plot lines that were easily incorporated into lessons in "history, religion, science, and the classic literary cannon" (Cruz and Pollock, 2003, p. 193). Students became well versed in symbolism. Fantasy genre studies were extremely inspirational to the artists in the classroom and helped to generate ideas for future art projects. Perhaps the biggest discovery of the study was that fantasy literature provided an excellent starting point for discussion of larger, heavier issues such as death, betrayal and loss. Because fantasy literature takes place so far from students' everyday lives and experiences, they felt safer talking about deeper issues. The quality of discussion generated during the genre study was of a much higher caliber than had been seen before, especially with texts that directly address tough issues in a realistic setting (Cruz and Pollock, 2003).

Nina Mikkelson's 2005 study on children's response to literature helped discover that transformations in fantasy novels are a popular topic in student's written responses. She feels this is because students in kindergarten through fifth grade settings are going through many powerful transformations themselves. Reading about someone going through something similar is both reassuring and inspiring. The fantasy setting and the use of magic empowers readers on their own quests and trials. She found that when children are responding to fantasy they respond easy and naturally. Their responses are "full and rich" and from which she could "glean more about their ways of reading the world and the world of literature" (Mikkelson, 2005, p. 3). Ultimately Mikkelson (2005) felt that fantasy produced such rich responses in the classroom because it "takes them (students) to places far from their own worlds, giving them freedom to explore and create, and it releases their imagination in full and expressive ways" (Mikkelson, 2005, p. 3)

An older study conducted by Myriam Shechter (1987) with thirty children in a diverse inner-city fifth grade class over a period of one year studied the interactions children had with the genres of science fiction and fantasy. By comparing the two similar genres she was able to create a very thorough definition of what was and what was not considered fantasy literature. The study began by allowing students to watch the movie "The Last Unicorn." The teacher read a fantasy text aloud; the students listened to another at a listening station and then picked a book in the genre for independent reading. Finally, students wrote their own fantasy stories (Shechter, 1987). Students participated in book talks and conferences with their teachers about the literature they were reading. The results of the study were that fantasy literature definitely has a practical application

in the classroom. In this study it was primarily used to help students learn to distinguish between genre and make appropriate selections on text for personal reading. Students learned how to conference and book talk, as well as explore different authors and their styles of writing (Shechter, 1987).

In a final study conducted by Smith and Weitz (2003) in a fifth grade gifted education setting, students were given a differentiated literacy unit in fantasy where they worked in small groups to explore and define the genre. Students were given books based on ability level, and assignments were more complex based on aptitude in reading and writing. Following this, students used what they learned to answer open-ended problems on the genre (Smith and Weitz, 2003). The results of this study found that fantasy literature can be used with classrooms that contained wide ability ranges and learning styles. There are so many applications for these texts that they can be adapted and modified across the curriculum to be valuable to all learners. More complex and difficult genres may be limited to certain ability groups, where fantasy can be easily adapted for readers and writers of all levels (Smith and Weitz, 2003).

Rationale: Why Fantasy?

Perhaps the most basic reason for using fantasy in the classroom is simply that "students like it" (Thomas, 2003, p.60). It is fun and garners student interest. If students are interested in something they are likely to be more attentive and ultimately have a more satisfying and comprehensive learning experience (Cruz and Pollock, 2003). The studies discussed in the previous section have outlined the numerous benefits to teaching fantasy but the most prevalent and common theme was that it provides a safe connection to the real world and serious issues. Real world issues are not a new subject in the

classroom but more often than not students are exposed to texts that deal with serious issues in a very realistic, straightforward sense. These texts can be threatening to the students due to the closeness of the issues to their personal lives. Or on the other hand, the settings and events are so literal that students cannot make a connection to the issues involved. Students do not need to be treated as "mini adults" to be able to discuss and understand serious life issues (Baghban, 2000).

"Identification with reality-based stories may give readers their own reality back to them, but they are too close to what is real. The characters are too often victims. They must wait for adults to save them. Such contexts unnerve readers of any age with their dreariness and despair" (Baghban, 2000, p.11). It is very difficult for students to have enthusiasm for stories like these because the stories are lacking in hope and inspiration that motivates students to engage with the text. Baghban (2000) argues that fantasy, on the other hand helps empower readers and assure them that obstacles can be overcome and problems can be solved. Baghban (2000) says that: "While the obstacles faced may resemble their own, the obstacles appear in contexts different from their own. This identification at a distance makes readers feel safe while dealing with the obstacles" (Baghban, 2000, p.11). For example, Claire Isaac (2005) writes that most fantasy books follow the traditional path of the fantasy hero. The quests are often for the good of the world but are simultaneously a personal journey for the main characters. These journeys usually end in self discovery and maturity but not before being faced with all of the challenges. "These themes have immense significance to young people, who often feel powerless in their own lives, and must undertake a similar journey, fraught with self-doubt and challenge, to achieve adulthood" (Isaac, 2005, p.15).

Contributing to this is the modern fantasy genre which blurs the lines between good and evil, making problems more ambiguous. Readers are now asked to think critically and creatively when looking at the protagonists and their problems. Answers may not always be easy to see, and they may not always be happy ones. This can engage readers to discuss the contemporary world and how many problems do not have easy solutions, while some do not have solutions at all. Readers can make connections to the real world and some of the complex problems they are facing today (Chappell, 2008).

A popular example of a contemporary character in fantasy literature is Harry Potter. He is part of the fantasy world created by J.K. Rowling, but still deals with "crises of faith and depression, tests of endurance, bravery, community and greed (Chappell, 283, 2008) as well as loss, love, betrayal, friendship, differences in class, race and issues of untraditional families (Black, 2003). Phillip Pullman's modern fantasy trilogy "His Dark Materials" most well known for the first in the series "The Golden Compass" deals with issues of death, mortality and the human ability to deal with grief. "Pullman's fantasy portrays young protagonists transcending the dualism of good and evil and learning to live creatively in the face of life's contradictions, complexities, and most potently, their own mortality" (Lenz, 2003). All of this is done within the confines of the fantastical world of "the far north" meant to be the North Pole, where animals talk and humans are never without the physical manifestations of their souls, their daemons, who take the forms of various animals. The world is far removed enough that it is not realistic, but close enough that all the issues will strike a chord with students, and spark discussion. Studies show that students will draw parallels with characters dealing with these themes,

and in turn, they can become discussion topics in the classroom for book clubs, writing, or free discussion.

Fantasy literature often uses the concept of "otherness" to explore themes of racial and social differences. A common theme in fantasy literature is that there is some sort of magical race, other than humans who come into play. These races have their own cultures, abilities, and beliefs. They must interact and work with the characters of the novel to overcome problems. These relationships can often be used to discuss human nature and relationships (Yamazaki, 2008). Yamazaki (2008) argues that the idea of "otherness" is a pretext. These stories take place far away in a land different than our own but parallel to our modern multi-cultural society. They explore themes and issues of this society without ever directly referencing it.

Conclusion

As the review of the literature suggests, fantasy literature holds great potential in a classroom setting across many ability levels, and subject areas. It fosters creative thinking, critical reasoning, the arts, written response and reflection. Most of all, fantasy literature creates a safe environment for discussion. I hope to further the exploration of the application of fantasy literature in the classroom through my research and expound on the work that has been done before. I would like to further understand the true potential and impact of fantasy literature on the classroom experience. In chapter three I discuss the research design and model used in the study.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter begins by examining the research paradigm used in this study and
the methods of data collection and analysis. It concludes with a description of the context
and participants of the study.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to teacher research in the
classroom. I chose to incorporate qualitative data in my study because it allowed me to
conduct teacher research in an unrestricted way. It allowed me to use authentic work
samples from my students and my own interpretive notes as a basis for understanding and
answering my research questions: How does fantasy literature help children explore,
process, and discuss real world issues and topics; and what other applications does the
genre have in the classroom?

A qualitative research method uses flexible questioning. (Wimmer and Dominick,
2006). "Qualitative research involves several methods of data collection, such as focus
groups, field observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies" (Wimmer and Dominick,
2006, p. 48). The researcher enters the study with a specific set of questions but follow up
questions and focus can change as the study progresses and as the researcher deems
that changes are needed. The approach for qualitative research is often varied based on
the study and researcher. (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). "The variables in qualitative
research may or may not be measured or quantified" (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006,
p. 49).

Teacher research is an inquiry by teachers in their schools and natural classroom settings. It is often conducted by teachers who wish to expand their own education and professional development. Teachers who have an active interest in their classrooms and an ability to reflect and improve upon their teaching often take part in this type of qualitative research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2006).

"Teacher research involves collecting and analyzing data as well as presenting it to others in a systematic way. But this research process involves the kinds of skills and classroom activities that are already a part of the classroom environment" (Hubbard and Power, 1999, p. 3). Good teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching used to solve a question and enrich the classroom environment. Teacher research is typically conducted through qualitative research such as anecdotes and personal observations by the teacher. (Hubbard and Power, 1999).

This study fits the teacher research methodology of qualitative research because it was implemented in a classroom setting as a natural extension to learning. The study was implemented with an interest in the learning environment and how it was affected. Teacher research allowed me to take a less traditional approach to research, and allowed me freedom to collect many different types of data. Teacher research allowed me to enrich both the student environment and my own professional learning as a teacher while simultaneously conducting the study.

Procedure of the Study

The first step in conducting the study was submitting my application to the Institutional Research Board at Rowan University to get approval to conduct my research. Once approved I sent home permission slips outlining the study and asking for

parent permission (Appendix A). Those students who returned the permission slip would be included. All research was conducted in Ms. Capone's fifth grade classroom setting. All nineteen students participated in the activities regardless of having returned permission slips but only those who obtained signed consent were included in this study. All other student work was discarded. The data was gathered during March of 2010.

The study began by introducing the students to the fantasy genre in a general way. Although the goal of the study was to analyze the classroom discussion and written responses of real world issues generated by the genre, I first had to introduce the genre to the class in a way that naturally facilitated discussion. Using pieces of the model developed by Cruz and Pollock (2003) I had the students write their definition of the fantasy genre, as they knew it. Students charted this definition and it was displayed in the classroom. Students were then introduced to an extensive library of books and were asked to see if they could determine which of those could be classified as fantasy. Students were also asked to search around their homes and school libraries for books that they thought might be fantasy and bring them to school. After students had selected books they thought were fantasy we discussed in groups and with the whole class why we thought they were fantasy books and categorized them accordingly. Although the class contained a wide range of reading abilities I collected texts of all levels to make sure that all readers were included in the study (Appendix B).

Each time students read a new book we discussed what elements made the book fantasy, and compared it to our working definition. Through this process, our definition became something which constantly evolved and grew as we defined fantasy. Students were reminded that earlier in the year we had read "The Spiderwick Chronicles: The

Field Guide" which was fantasy. This was a book the class had really enjoyed and I referred them back to it to generate enthusiasm for the project. I felt the students needed to be strongly engaged in the study for it to yield any genuine discussion. Since most of the class liked the book this also helped to quiet the inevitable students who complained at the idea of fantasy literature.

Eventually we compiled many books and these were the text sets that students could refer to any time we were working with fantasy. This particular class had never worked in reading groups before and it was something we needed to work up to. For the beginning of the study we did several read alouds accompanied by mini lessons on the themes of the books. I read a fantasy to students and guided them through a basic class discussion. After each story we consulted our definition of fantasy and revised it if we felt it was needed. We spent several days on each read aloud story.

Students were also given response notebooks where they were asked to respond to specific prompts about the story they had just heard. The questions were mostly critical thinking questions to start generating student thoughts on the story. The goal of the study was to see how students could use the stories to draw parallels to their own lives. Written responses were one of the main forms of data I used in my study. Read alouds with oral and written responses continued throughout the course of the study. Eventually I switched from shorter stories to more complex stories, ending in a read aloud of "Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief."

The second part of the study included literature circles. The literature circles were conducted more like a book club in that they were more informal and students did not have assigned roles. The purpose of the book clubs was to facilitate natural discussion

and it was my opinion that assigning roles would have inhibited this. Students were allowed to vote on which book they would like to read for their book club. They were given five choices: <u>The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</u> by C.S. Lewis <u>The Castle in the Attic</u> by Elizabeth Winthrop <u>The Tail of Emily Windsnap</u> by Liz Kessler <u>How to Train Your Dragon</u> by Cressidia Cowell or <u>Jeremy Thatcher Dragon Hatcher</u> by Bruce Coville.

Students had nightly reading assignments in which they were told to chronicle their thought processes with post-it notes. Students were called to the back table of the room in book groups for twenty minute discussion periods. Discussion was mostly student directed and was tape recorded. Students were grouped based on their personal selections, reading levels, and teacher discretion. All students got one of their top three choices for book clubs. Each group contained about five students. I hoped that the familiar and friendly setting of the small groups would provide a safe forum for student discussion and give an opportunity for all students' voices to be heard.

The final stage of the research model was student writing. Students had response journals for both the read aloud text and the book club texts. Students wrote in these daily so they could document their more personal thoughts about the texts on paper. Other activities included watching fantasy videos and immersing the students in the text by allowing them time to read and draw fantasy figures during free time. Students were able to check out books from the extensive fantasy library we had compiled.

Data Collection

Data was collected from three main sources. The first source was tape recorded student discussions. All book club discussions and some whole class discussions were

audiotaped. Book club groups were comprised of no more than five students to encourage and facilitate a safe environment for discussion. The group discussions were often student directed and the teacher was only there to provide guidance and keep discussion on track. I would occasionally ask questions to guide the discussion if I felt it was getting off course and then leave it to the students to discuss their thoughts. The students met every day for twenty minute periods over three weeks.

The second source of data was student artifacts and projects. This included several writing samples and response journals from the students. After reading a story or portion of a chapter, students were always assigned a project or writing activity. These were all collected at the end of the study and were used to review student thoughts and ideas as they pertained to the research question.

The third and final source of data was my own personal teacher journal in which I recorded anecdotes, quotes, questions, thoughts and personal reflections on the lessons. This journal chronicled my thought process as an educator throughout the genre study. I used both "in the midst" and "after the fact" methods of note taking (Hubbard & Power 1999). During activities I would jot quick thoughts, observations and main ideas that stood out for me and would later sit and write longer reflections on my teaching, charting questions and looking for meaning. My notes became an important resource as I charted the themes and topics students began to bring up in our group sessions. I also documented student responses, both verbal and ones I gathered through observation. Do I see a change in this student? I am I hearing their voice more or less than is usual for this student?

Data Analysis

The audiotaped discussions, student artifacts and projects, and teacher research journal were used to draw conclusions about the implications of a fantasy genre study in the classroom as it pertains to facilitating and creating a platform for discussion, expression, and its effects on the overall learning environment. The qualitative data was analyzed by looking first at individual sets: the audiotapes, student artifacts, and teacher research journal. Data analysis was recursive in that data was analyzed multiple times across all platforms to gain more detailed and accurate conclusions.

The data was carefully examined and coded for patterns. These patterns were each assigned a code and the number of times each code appeared across all data sets was recorded. The data was triangulated by using "multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, or theories (at least three) to confirm findings" (Hubbard & Power, 1999). The data was then analyzed based on the prevalence of the codes across the research. Empirical assertions were made based on evidence from the three data sets. Disconfirming evidence was also described and addressed. Disconfirming evidence was present in my study and has raised several questions about my procedure that will be discussed further in chapters four and five.

Context

District

Barrington is a borough in Camden County, New Jersey. As of the 2000 United States Census the population was around 7,000 residents. Barrington school district is home to two schools: Avon Elementary School and Woodland Middle School. The superintendent of the district, Anthony Arcodia, is also the principal of Avon school.

Many teachers and aides are shared between the two schools. The district has an average of 800 students. Most families come from a middle class socioeconomic status and about 90% of residents are Caucasian.

School

Avon Elementary School is located in Barrington, New Jersey and is part of the district of Barrington. Avon is the only elementary school in the district. It is accompanied by Woodland Middle School. Avon is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school with a rapidly increasing class population. Because of this the school is changing to a pre-kindergarten through fourth grade school in the fall of 2010 and all current fourth and fifth grade students will be transitioning to Woodland Middle School.

The principal of Avon Elementary School is Anthony Arcodia who is also the superintendant in Barrington. Because of Mr. Arcodia's two positions, teachers are often left on their own to make decisions. He is often away from the school building because he has many other duties as a superintendant. When he is in the school building his door is always open and he is always working extremely hard for the benefit of the school.

According to the *New Jersey Department of Education 2008-2009 School Report Card,* there are about 373 students enrolled in the school with 98.2% of them speaking English as their first language. 11% of these students are students with disabilities who have their own individualized education plans. The average class size at Avon elementary school is 19.6 and there is an average of 1-2 computers per classroom, all with internet connectivity. The school day lasts from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. There are 373 students per administrator and a ratio of 13.1 students per faculty member. 77.4% of faculty's highest obtained degrees are a bachelor's degree and 22.6% have obtained their master's degree.

Classroom

Ms. Capone is a fifth grade general education teacher at Avon Elementary. She has over twenty years of teaching experience. The class contains nineteen students, none of whom are classified with individualized education plans. There are however, several students who have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, some of whom are on medications and some who are not. There is one English Language learner who recently moved from El Salvador. The class contains twelve male students and seven female students. The predominance of male students, several of whom have strong, outgoing personalities made it difficult for quieter students to engage in meaningful discussion. I observed the girls in the class were not as vocal as their male peers. The class contains many strong, male personalities and it is hard for quieter students to play an active role in classroom discussion. The day is divided into eight periods two to three are specials and lunch depending on the day.

Programs used are Everyday Mathematics, Foss Science and Harcourt reading. There is currently no writing program in place and writing is usually only incorporated during tests and for special assignments. All subjects are taught using whole class instruction and follow a very strict routine that varies little from unit to unit. Although Ms. Capone does intersperse fun activities and learning examples, especially through the use of internet resources projected to the front of the classroom, most of the lessons follow the text book format and plan. Literacy is conducted daily over an 80 minute period. These 80 minutes are broken up across several different class periods. Within this literacy block three areas are covered: spelling, grammar, and reading.

Participants

        The nineteen students in Ms. Capone's fifth grade general education classroom were asked to participate in this study. Only those students who returned a signed permission slip from their parents were able to participate. Seventeen students total were involved in the study. Students were both male and female and ranged from age ten to thirteen years old. Approximately 98% of the students were Caucasian while 2% were African American or Hispanic. Approximately 5% of the students received extra help in basic reading skills. About 50% of students came from two-parent families in the middle socioeconomic category, while 50% came from single parent homes in the lower-middle socioeconomic category.

<div align="center">Looking Ahead</div>

        Chapter four discusses the findings of the study and data analysis. Chapter five presents a summary of the findings, conclusions of the study as well as implications of the study and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter four discusses and analyzes the findings of my study as it pertains to the research question: How does fantasy literature help children explore, process, and discuss real world issues and topics and what other applications does the genre have in the classroom? This chapter discusses the limitations of the study, data analysis and four major themes which resulted from the study. The four major themes that emerged from the study were: how fantasy literature affects making text to self connections, how fantasy literature impacts discussion of major themes in a story, how fantasy literature creates a platform for discussion of real life issues and how fantasy literature influences enthusiasm and ownership of learning.

Limitations of the Study

Time constraints were a large limiting factor in the study. All of the models I had seen and discussed in my review of literature involved several months of study. I was working with a much shorter time period to start and my goal was to conduct the study over a four or five week period. Due to the hectic schedule of the class and the close timing with the NJ ASK tests I was only allotted three weeks to conduct my study. During this three week period I usually had the majority of the language arts block to conduct the study but that varied day to day. The language arts period is very disjointed, often broken up by multiple periods and specials. Because of this I felt that lessons were

often choppy and lacking continuity. Overall, the lack of time was extremely frustrating to me. Toward the end of the study I felt I was just beginning to make significant ground and see a real change in my students. I feel I could have conducted the genre study for the remainder of the year and easily continued seeing growth in the students.

The aim of the genre study is to expose the students to several texts in the genre and because of this time limit we had to pick and choose. A lot of short stories I would have liked to use were cut from the study as well as movies and mini lessons. I decided the students needed to hear at least two novels in the genre which was why I chose to read one aloud and have the other read in book club. The book club schedule was very fast paced. Students had to read chapters every night for homework and complete assignments from my cooperating teacher as well. This pace was not conducive to some of my students and I feel that they got left behind. Not all of my students were was able to keep up with the high demand of the book club groups. I believe the majority of my disconfirming data is due to the work load, which was too high and too difficult for those students who were not connecting with their books.

Overall, in the very short and rushed amount of time in which the study was conducted I began to see the many possibilities of fantasy. I do not feel the study was compromised because of the restrictions, just cut short. I think that if I had continued and paced the study to better meet the needs of my students, even more positive examples of fantasy's impact on learning would be seen.

Text-to-Self Connections

During one of our writing prompts I asked students to write a letter to Percy

Jackson and pretend they were pen pals. I asked them to think about what they would say

to him. I was impressed with what I received.

"Dear Percy,

Hi. My mom and dad are divorced and my mom has a boyfriend too. Not like

Smelly Gabe your stepdad, mine's nice but it's still hard.

Lots of Love,

Michelle"

"Dear Percy,

My aunt just died and here's some advice. You don't think about it and you try to

go to your happy place. Mine's sports.

From,

Nate"

"Dear Percy,

I know you're having a hard time at camp and that the kids don't know you or

don't like you. I remember I went to my friend's camp….but when I got there and met

her friend, let's just say she didn't like me. Don't worry though it all worked out ok in the

end.

Love,

Maddie"

I was surprised to find how open and honest their responses were. Students were

telling Percy things that I had never heard them mention in my classroom, things that

were very important to them. I had no idea that Nate's aunt had died. Was that why he got in a fight on the playground? I didn't know Michelle was struggling with her parents' divorce. She seemed like such a carefree, happy student. I knew immediately there was something different going on with these kinds of books.

By coincidence, all of the novels we read had protagonists around the age of the students in my class. This may have been one of the reasons the students could relate so well. Both Percy and Emily were kids who discovered they had a supernatural ability or power. Percy, the son of Poseidon had powers over the sea, and Emily, realized she transformed into a mermaid when fully submerged in water. Jeremy and Hiccup, the main characters of the other two books both found themselves unexpectedly with pet dragons and these dragons take them through a life-changing journey. The final character William, receives a magical castle from his nanny and it transports him to another world. All of the characters were different, but the students related to them all the same.

Before implementing the study I had read Gary Paulson's Hatchet with the class. Although it was extremely popular, the students never made connections to the main character, Brian. He was in an extraordinary situation and put through many trials that changed who he was, not unlike the characters in our fantasy books. But for some reason the students just didn't connect. I think it was as Baghban (2001) said in her article on children's literature: it is hope and inspiration that motivate a student to interact with text, not having their own reality served back to them. Students do not react well to stark, bleak contexts. They unnerve readers rather than engage them (Baghban, 2001). With fantasy the students seemed to feel the hopeful, colorful atmosphere of the texts, and this helped them process and analyze the themes of the book in a safer, more accessible way.

From the first meeting when we sat down I was bombarded with personal vignettes about the students' lives, triggered by events in the stories. I was hearing from students who never raised their hands in class, and I was hearing very personal things. Fantasy had struck a chord with these students and they were talking. I went into this study with the idea that even though we were short on time if a student was making a connection to the book I would honor what they were saying and see it through to the end. Everything students said in relation to the story was valuable, even if the connection was hard to see. Sometimes a scene in a book would spark a story from a student which seemed unrelated but once I heard it through to the end I realized how important it really was.

I wrote in my teacher research journal: *"I am getting to know my students in a totally different way. I almost feel guilty having taught them so long without knowing all of the issues and thoughts they keep inside. Sometimes I read things they have written and I am troubled by them. How do they learn at all with so much happening in their own lives? How did I not notice this student was getting bullied? How did I not realize his aunt had just died? How do I reply to Michelle's confession that she gets bullied because of her older brother with autism and his behavior issues? I am glad they are telling me now but they are telling me so much."*

Sometimes the connections they would made would be small, for example: "When I listen to rock music if I'm just like sad or something and I listen to it it'll make me happy again and I'll want to go out and do something. I think that's why William's music was able to help him keep going through the forest."

But very often the themes were big and hard to discuss like when my one student Nick told the group: "I wrote on my post-it note that I know how William feels with his parents not listening to him. My grandmother is just like that! She's so mean! There's eight people living in our house, well, her house. We're not going through the best of times right now so we live with my grandmother. And if there's just one little thing wrong she automatically assumes it's me. I really don't think she likes me. She always blames me and searches my room for things she thinks I've stolen even though they're usually right under her nose. It's her, my grandpa, my mom, my aunts and uncles and a lot of cats. It makes me feel bad."

Such a huge and heavy response came from a tiny little gripe a character made about his parents in the novel. The quote was something I read over without a second thought, since the boy's parents are barely even in the story, but it was something that struck a chord with Nick. Something about these books made it suddenly alright for students to open up about things like this to their peers and to me.

In response to this particular moment I wrote in my teacher research journal *"Could it be the books that are making the students open up? Or is it the setting with the small groups? I had done group work before. I always acknowledge and encourage making connections. I tried so hard to have them connect to* Hatchet *and it didn't happen. This time I'm not even trying and they are pouring out so many connections we barely have time to fit them in. At this point, I have to attribute it to the genre. The characters aren't throwing heavy issues in their faces, they're just ordinary kids. It is safer for them to discuss these things. It's a friendlier, more relaxed environment to think about issues and understand their own lives."* I wasn't the first person to find these

results. In my literature review several of the teachers found that fantasy facilitated discussion. Students felt safe talking about things and they really began to open up and connect to the characters.

During my time in Ms. Capone's classroom I rarely heard the voices of my female students. The strong male personalities dominated almost all of the classroom discussion. I purposely put the majority of the girls together in one group so I could finally hear what they had to say. I was expecting a shy, quiet group and instead they were my most talkative. It was almost as if our book club groups became a therapy session for the girls. Classroom issues I didn't even know we were having were brought to the table. Sometimes seemingly unrelated topics inspired large scale conversations. For example our group was talking about friendships and how the main character Emily has no best friend. "Like when Rachael hated me." Sophia replied, referring to Rachael who was sitting across from her at the table.

"I thought she was weird you've gotta admit she seems that way sometimes" Rachael replied.

"Well I was the opposite because I didn't like Rachael at first. I thought she was mean!" said Michelle. I didn't realize that the quiet group of girls had the same problems most girls their age have. They had friend drama, and they were telling me about it. They were also openly talking to each other about it and working through it. This is something I don't think would have happened outside of our discussion group. The students were finally saying things that were on their minds; things that may seem small but are a really big deal when you're in fifth grade.

Through the stories I learned new things about my students. Some were fascinating and others troubling. When I asked students to respond to the statement "The best people have the worst luck" from The Lightning Thief and write if they agree, one student wrote "I agree. The best people have the worst luck and the worst people have the best luck. I know this because they get you in trouble and pick on you. They never get in trouble for it." In his next response to a chapter where we talked about Percy Jackson's summer camp where older campers were hazing the younger ones, he wrote "The reason I get bullied is because of my grades. And I kind of get out of hand. Sometimes people bully me cause they feel like it. I think the reason they bully me is cause they got bullied when they were young." I asked the students to write about whether they think older kids bullying younger students was a problem in real life, not just Percy's camp and what I got was a personal story about how Austin felt victimized in his school. So often students would respond to the writing prompts and in conversation in such startlingly personal ways that it was hard to deny the text-to-self connections that were present.

Disconfirming Data

Although I saw an increase in text-to-self connections in all book club groups some had far less than others. The groups that had less were those where I feel the students could not keep up with the reading of their books. It was hard for students to participate in discussion if they had not read the text. I think if there been more time some of the struggling students would have been able to keep up with the work load and their level and number of connections would have increased. Towards the end of group meetings when disconfirming students had gotten a good picture from the discussion about what happened in the chapters they began to open up more. For example, near the

end of one meeting one of my struggling students suddenly made a very profound

statement about the characters in How to Train Your Dragon. "I think Hiccup's friend

Fishlegs is a really important character even though he's not in the book that much. It

really helps to have a friend. If you get picked on with someone else it's not so bad

because you're not alone. If Hiccup was alone I think things would have been a lot worse

for him."

Another issue was I was overly concerned with giving students a book they would

be excited to read and sometimes I did not make the best decision on which students

would be in each group. As a result, some groups had a harder time focusing than others.

Some groups needed more guidance than others. In my most challenging group we

needed to institute some strict ground rules. We had a ball we passed around and only the

person holding the ball could speak. We had to establish that things we discussed in our

groups could not leave the groups and that laughing at another student at any time was

not permitted.

Teachers should be advised that the dynamics in each group will be different and

the group's management must change accordingly. The group dynamics shift and often

determine how productive group discussions can be. With one group in particular I felt

much of our meeting time was spent trying to manage the behavior of the group and in

turn we did not get as much accomplished as some of the others.

Discussion of Themes

Our class used a Harcourt reading text book for the majority of the year. The

curriculum had provided the students little opportunity to explore stories for deeper

meaning because in many cases, they didn't have deeper meaning to explore. The tests

relied heavily on text-based questions and very rarely on inference or critical thinking questions. When it came to answering the hard questions about a text and the motivations of the author the students had a difficult time. One of the books I read aloud to the class in the very beginning of the study was "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak. I read the class the story and asked them to write their interpretation of the story. Almost all of the students' responses indicated this was the story of a boy who went to a land where the wild things lived. He put on his wolf pajamas and danced with the wild things and then went home for supper. According to them, Max actually went to the land of the wild things and roared and danced with the monsters. And maybe he did. Their analysis of the story was very literal. Despite their interpretations, I would argue that "Where the Wild Things Are" is certainly not just a book about a boy who goes on an adventure.

The students were certainly good at writing summaries but it was not a natural process for them to think deeper. There were a few students who theorized that Max didn't actually go to the land of the wild things, but rather travelled there in his imagination. While this demonstrated an expanded thought process, I still felt they were missing the big picture. The point of the story was not whether or not Max went to the island or imagined it in his head. The story was about something more. And then among all the written responses two stood alone. Madison wrote "The story is about a little boy that's very wild and goes to a land where everything is wild. He thought he would like it but gets tired of it and wants someone that really loves him and goes home. This story is trying to tell you don't run away from your problems."

And Nick wrote "This story is about a kid in his imagination. He wants to go to his happy place because he got sent up to his room. He was really mad and needed a way

to stop feeling so mad." These students were really onto something. The rest of the class was absolutely right that this was a fantasy story with wild monsters and an exciting adventure but it was about more than that. Where the Wild Things Are is a story about being angry. It is a story about finding an outlet for dealing with your emotions and learning when to come back after those feelings are gone. The story is so universally popular because it has a theme that resonates with all people. Everyone feels angry sometimes. Everyone has to "gnash their terrible teeth and roar their terrible roars" (Sendak, 1988) sometimes. This is a theme that is especially popular with children. They love the character of Max and relate to him because he, like them, feels angry sometimes, and gets sent to his room. Nick and Madison began to understand and see that.

I specifically had Nick and Madison share and had the students tell us if their opinions had changed. Many children now raised their hands. One of my students, Ryan exclaimed "Wow I see it now! It's interesting to read these little kid books again! Do they all have different meanings now?" It was one of our first lessons but it stood out to me because I could see their thought processes changing. They were beginning to examine texts with more critical lenses. Their reflections were becoming more mature and they were beginning to examine the real themes of the story. I give the example of this day to demonstrate where the students were in their thinking in the beginning of the study. They were not thinking critically and they were not thinking deeply about the texts they were reading. As the weeks went on, I saw a deepening perspective.

Fantasy in particular is a difficult genre for students to use when examining themes. There are so many other exciting plot elements involved that it is hard to determine what story the author is really trying to tell. For example, Harry Potter is

absolutely a story about a boy wizard who goes to a school for magic and defeats an evil wizard, but it is about so much more. The story J.K. Rowling is trying to tell is one of friendship, differences in race, class, trust, betrayal and any number of themes (Black, 2003). But when asked what Harry Potter is about it may be a student's first instinct to talk about quidditch and magic wands. I found this in the beginning of the study but as it progressed my students began to think more deeply and see things more clearly. Our group discussions really helped this process along.

I think all of the text to self connections students were making and the issues we discussed helped them see that there was more to the stories than met the eye, and they started to look more carefully. I reflected in my teacher research journal *"I see them progressing every day. Now they know exactly what to do when they come to the back table for book discussions. They are brimming with all of these things they need to say. Our twenty minute sessions barely cover three topics."*

By the conclusion of the study my students were eagerly discussing their various books and the major themes. "I think it's (Castle in the Attic) about selfishness because William was really selfish when he shrunk his nanny so she wouldn't leave him. And now that I think about it Allastor was really selfish too. One character learned from it in the end and one didn't."

"I think Hiccup (from How to Train Your Dragon) did things his own way in the story and that was important. I think this author is trying to say there are different ways to do different things and there isn't just one right way."

I concluded by giving my students a single request. I had begun the study with my prompt for Where the Wild Things Are. Now, at the end, I asked the students to write

what their book club novels were really about. I was astounded. These students who began by taking all stories at face value were now enlightening me with discussions of values, morals and very sophisticated concepts they pulled from their book club novels. The Tail of Emily Windsnap was not just a book about mermaids but a story about friendship, true friendship, family and love. Castle in the Attic was a story about selfishness, revenge, friendship and courage. How to Train Your Dragon was a story about patience, and standing up for your beliefs. And Jeremy Thatcher Dragon Hatcher was a story about giving everyone a chance, and courage; courage to stand up for who you are and what you believe in; courage to make new friends, stand for your convictions, and how to say goodbye to those we love.

I could hardly believe the rich and superb explanations of stories that I was reading at the culmination of my study. Not only did they touch upon the themes of the books, they went even farther than I had. I had read these books multiple times on my own, discussed them in college level courses, and my fifth grade students were showing me themes and ideas that I had not even realized were in the books. But there they were.

Disconfirming Data

There were those students who still were unable to pull major themes from the story but by the end of the study they were in the minority. Asking students to get to the real meaning of a story is a higher level task. Due to the fast paced nature of the study and the time restrictions there were high expectations of students and some of the struggling readers did not get to spend the time with the text that was required for them to get to the deeper issues. I also think some students may have been in groups with books that were slightly above their reading levels. I was very eager to accommodate their first

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choices for books so I put some students in groups even though I knew they would have a harder time reading the book. Overall, I thought that having the students feel like they had control over what they read, and capturing their enthusiasm would balance out the slight challenge of the books. I feel that teachers should consider the reading levels very carefully when grouping students because higher level thinking can only occur if they completely comprehend the text they are reading.

Discussion of Real World Issues

Along with text to self connections I found that our book club discussions sparked discussion of real issues that students and people everywhere face. It was not uncommon for students to openly and casually discuss death and loss without any prompting to do so. Students displayed high levels of empathy for the characters because they recognized the universal issues they were experiencing.

The books created a great springboard for these kinds of tough discussions. One day that stands out in my mind was when I was meeting with my groups of girls to discuss the book The Tail of Emily Windsnap. In the story, Emily and her best friend end up having a fight and soon after become enemies. She is frequently bullied by a girl who was once her best friend. This really meant something to the girls. They kept talking about how bad Emily must feel. They started giving me individual stories about times that they had lost friends and how strange things were without them. The issue of loss, in all forms was one that came up often in our groups. Pain of losing a friend is just as intense in elementary school as it is in adult life and it was very important for the students to talk about it.

Themes of racism and discrimination were brought to light when the girls read that mermaid and human relationships were illegal in Emily's world. "Why wouldn't they be allowed to get married?" Sophia asked.

"Yeah, love is love and anyone should be allowed to marry whoever they want!" Maddie replied. The girls were encountering themes prevalent in society today, but the far removed world of Emily Windsnap set the tone for safe discussion of these issues.

In How to Train Your Dragon, conforming to society or standing up for what you believe in was something we discussed on almost a daily basis. The main character, Hiccup, lives in a Viking society where it is normal to get what you want by screaming and yelling. Being brave and tough are the only character traits that are valued. Children are cast out of the society by their own parents if they do not live up to their expectations. Hiccup, bravely stands up for who he really is and in the end, enlightens his people to new ways of doing things.

This simple fantasy story helped the students discuss issues of government and rules they think are wrong. We discussed authority in all areas, even in the classroom, and talked about teachers and how they can make students feel. Students admitted that sometimes school staff can make them feel isolated and even bullied. "If I wasn't doing my homework and got something wrong my teacher would always yell at me and say I wasn't paying attention but I was. She would always single me out," one student replied.

"Aren't we supposed to be talking about the book?" one girl interjected.

"We ARE talking about the book because Hiccup could be anyone in the world. His problems are our problems, just different," another student answered.

I wrote in my teacher research journal "*A prevailing theme with the students is change. All of the characters are going through a change in their lives and are changing as people as well. I think that my students can really relate to this because they are going through many changes as well, be it moving to middle school next year, dealing with changing families and divorce, dealing with a new school and new friends or any other area. Change is something that we all deal with in our lives, and the characters in these stories are really helping the students talk about those changes. I think they help show them that change can be OK. There is always hope.*"

Disconfirming Data

Although I saw great levels of discussion there were several students who just could not bridge the gap between fantasy and reality. I think for readers who are on a lower level, it is hard to make the connection that the book is not just fantasy. I had one student in particular who was an English Language learner. I think this really inhibited his readings of the book. With his language ability he could only garner a very basic understanding of the plot. Again, I think it is really challenging, but important to make sure books are on the students' independent reading levels; in this way they can read the story without issue and use their time to think about the deeper meaning. If a book is too challenging, decoding and processing the plot takes up too much of their time to see deeper connections and engage in higher level discussions.

Enthusiasm and Ownership of Learning

When I began the study I tried to increase the excitement level as much as I possibly could. I knew that if I was going to yield results the students had to be invested in what they were learning. To do this I gave them choices. The students voted on the

books they read in their book clubs and the students voted on our big read aloud book. I started the day by bringing in shiny new copies of all of the book club books. I held the five books up one at a time and read the descriptions. Along with the descriptions I gave my own personal thoughts on the books. I liked them all equally and tried to make each sound as intriguing as I could. I made sure to tell them if a book was very funny, exciting, or suspenseful. I knew there would be some more popular books and others which were less popular, but I did my best to give students their top book choices. It worked out that all students got one of their top three choices out of the five books. I eliminated the least popular book: <u>The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe.</u>

The next day to everyone's excitement I passed out the books. I couldn't keep the students from peeking at them all day. That was the same day that I started reading <u>Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief</u> to the class. As the study continued the students were always excited to work with fantasy. Repeatedly throughout the day I would hear the inevitable request "Will you read us more Percy Jackson?" "Are we meeting in groups today?" "Can you meet with our book club first?" and my favorite "Can we do fun things now?" I wrote in my journal the first time I heard this quote :

"Today Nick asked during math if we could do "fun things" now. When I asked him what fun things he was referring to, that I thought what we were doing in math was fun he replied "you know, the fantasy stuff!" I couldn't help but smile at this enthusiasm.. I have seen such growth and change with the class as a whole. Students who wanted nothing to do with reading and the stories in their text books, are now asking me daily to work on reading. I really think there is something to this fantasy thing. The books are fun. I can't help looking forward to it myself."

I found that the students were not only enthusiastic during reading but during free time as well. Students were often seen reading each other's book club books and checking books out of my fantasy library. Students became so enamored with the Percy Jackson series that several students bought their own copies and finished the series before we even got through the first book. I saw an incredible increase in the amount of time students were reading independently. Students began to take ownership of their own learning. They began to examine and inspect the science behind their stories and the mythology and lore. Where students would be talking they were now exploring books of Greek mythology and debating whether or not the movie they went to see did justice to the novel they read. The best example of this learning came in the form of two students: Nate and Rachel. After I began the study I saw a complete transformation in these students and I can only attribute it to the fantasy genre.

Nate

Nate is a student who was new to Avon this year. He was expelled from his old school due to behavior issues and was having some of the same problems at Avon. Despite an extremely supportive mother, he was still struggling. If I had to use one word to describe Nate it would be disengaged. I could tell that he was an extremely bright student but could not get him to focus or care enough about the learning material for it to absorb. Nate's mother shed some light on the situation when she told us Nate's father had left them. She had recently met someone else and had another child. Her new boyfriend also left them and now she was on her own with Nate and the baby. They lived together in a one bedroom apartment where Nate was often kept awake by the crying baby. Nate struggled with feelings of abandonment and loss. Additionally, he was not getting enough

sleep and as a result, he had a very hard time in school. He often acted out by behaving inappropriately in class or getting in fights on the playground. Because of his high intelligence Nate still received passing grades in school, usually in the form of C's. I knew Nate was really an A student inside, but I did not know how to get through.

I gave Nate his first choice in the book club groups. He chose the book Jeremy Thatcher Dragon Hatcher. Nate became completely engrossed in the novel. Within the first week Nate had finished the entire thing. During other lessons and classes Nate would try to pull out the book and read. During free time when he would normally be out of his seat, Nate was sitting, and reading quietly. His enthusiasm was contagious. The other boys in his reading group began trying to catch up to him and read ahead as well. Our book club moved quicker than the others and the boys were always willing to discuss the story. For whatever reason, this book captured Nate. I believe he related to the misunderstood protagonist, Jeremy, who was often bullied by his teachers and peers. I think he wished he had a secret friend who understood him and knew all of his secrets, like Jeremy's dragon.

I saw a change in Nate after I implemented the study. He was more attentive, more engaged, and he gained more confidence. Nate became the expert on the book, happily informing the group about how far along he was in the readings. "I'm already at the epilogue," Nate informed the group at the beginning of one meeting. "I'm not going to ruin the ending or anything but it's kind of sad, at least before the epilogue, but still I feel sad for Jeremy." This was more than I had gotten out of Nate the entire time I had been in the class.

"Tiamat, the dragon," I said one day in class "was a new friend in Jeremy's life…" I was suddenly interrupted by Nate.

"It's pronounced Ty-a-mat, not Ti-a-mat!" he informed me. I played to Nate's "expertise" in the novel and tried my best to boost his confidence. I looked to him as the authority on the book and in return I received some of his best work. I can only attribute this sudden change in Nate to the magic of fantasy literature. It brings something out in students. It is fun to read and in a context that doesn't seem academic. Students don't realize how much they are learning.

Nate was not only more involved with this book but with all of the other books, and continued reading fantasy in his spare time. The genre study helped Nate become an advocate for his own education. He became motivated and actively engaged in the activities. Classroom discussions became student directed and Nate was a large part of that. By the end of the study, Nate's grades had improved as well as his overall demeanor in the classroom. Nate went from being the class clown who did not care to a teacher's helper who could always be counted on to have his hand raised and an answer ready.

Rachel

Rachel is a daydreamer. She is very bright but very disorganized. She never has her homework and would rather spend her class time playing with a bottle of glue than pay attention to the lesson. Despite this she is a great conversationalist and debater. The book club discussions were right up her alley and she did well with them. I suspected this early on, and the discussions just helped facilitate her emergence. I was concerned that Rachel might not be able to keep up with the class work and reading involved in the

genre study. Instead I saw the opposite happen. As soon as we started reading the books Rachel was hooked on fantasy. Not only did she read her book club book, but read two of the other books as well and sat in on all book club conversations. Her work was always done and well written.

Rachel became a student who cared about learning. Her work was organized and her thoughts were clear. When we were reading or working on an activity her attention was always focused on me. Rachel really took to the Percy Jackson book in particular, becoming extremely interested in Greek mythology. She pursued this interest on her own time becoming the class expert on Greek mythology. When Percy fought a Minotaur we would look to Rachel to tell the class the story of Theseus and the Minotaur's maze. A girl who used to get lost in the crowd was now speaking before the entire class. In her spare time Rachel would pour over all of the fantasy books in the class library including those on mythological creatures. I also included one book in my library on how to draw mythological creatures which was extremely popular. Rachel was just one of the many students who began to draw. It was more than just the regular doodles students do in class. She was creating art and so were several of my other students. They were inspired by the fantastical creatures and places in our novels and they were recreating them in amazing ways. Words do not adequately cover the transformation I saw in Rachel. She really came out of her shell.

Summary of Data Analysis

I noticed several things when implementing the genre study. I noticed first that there was a large increase in text to self connections. Students became much better at reading between the lines and distinguishing major themes of the stories. Students began

discussing real world issues and ideas openly in class and I saw a large increase in enthusiasm and motivation for independent learning. Students were inspired in both the areas of writing and visual art. The last entry in my teacher research journal summed up how I feel about the genre the most: *"I have seen a change in my students. They are motivated and engaged learners. They teach me every single day. They help me run the class. They set the course for where they would like to go in their learning, and they learn more from it. They are inspired and awake. I feel that through this study I got to know them in a way not possible before. There is some magic to the fantasy genre, different than any other."*

Looking Ahead

Chapter four discussed the data analysis and findings. Chapter five discusses a summary of the findings, conclusions of the study, implications of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

As discussed in chapter four, my study was implemented in a fifth grade setting over a three week period. I have found that fantasy literature, implemented through a genre study can have a positive impact on a classroom setting. By cross referencing and checking my teacher research journal, tape recorded conversations, and student artifacts I found the fantasy genre impacts reading in several ways. I saw an increase in the amount and quality of text-to-self connections students were making. Where my students were not connecting with texts at all I found that they were pouring out information about their lives and how they related to the characters in their books. Students were making deep and meaningful connections that went past the normal responses of "He likes baseball and so do I." Students were talking about the protagonists of their novels as if they were old friends, people they knew and understood. They felt they, better than anyone could describe the motivations and feelings of the characters, because they themselves had much in common with them.

I found an increase in comprehension of themes. Where students once could only recite major plot points and summarize they were now telling me what the stories they were reading were *really* about. Stories were no longer black and white narratives where characters move from point A to point B. They were stories rich in meaning. My students, for the first time were reading into stories deeper than I had and discovering themes I had not even noticed. The students were somehow reading through the mystical

fantasy elements of the story and realizing that they were just a means to tell an even richer, more powerful story.

The study resulted in an increase in discussion of world and life issues parallel to the texts such as inequality, friendship, loss, change, and conformity. Students were more willing to discuss the tough issues prevalent in our world today. Fantasy provided them with solid ground to begin conversation. Students were able to see how issues in the stories related to the broader issues of the world.

Finally, I saw an increase in enthusiasm and a more autonomous learning environment. Students began pursuing academic areas of interest in their leisure time. Students were beginning to be inspired to write, create art, and discuss. Students were extremely excited and enthusiastic about exploring and working with the genre and would often request that we study reading because they were really enjoying it.

Conclusions

The research I conducted prior to the study and my findings from the research model have taught me a great deal about fantasy literature and its implications in the classroom. Genre studies can be used as a substitute to the reading textbook as long as curriculum goals and standards are met. Students benefit greatly from exploring and understanding different genres. The majority of my findings were supported by the research I conducted.

Kurkjian, Livingston & Young (2006) state that the fantastic nature of the characters and the settings in fantasy literature give readers emotional distance that allows them to consider parallels to their own lives in a more objective way. My research affirmed these findings as I saw a large increase in text-to-self connections. I believe that

the fantasy literature used in the study provided the students with the space needed to make parallels. As Baghban (2000) states in her paper "Too Serious Too Soon: Where is the Childishness in Children's Fiction?" children can close up at books with serious emotional and social themes. If themes are presented to students in a stark, realistic fashion students either find it to difficult to relate to characters, or feel threatened by the hopeless nature of texts and choose not to respond. I believe the fantastical nature of the texts used in my study allowed students to make parallels and connections in a safe learning environment. Often the protagonists of modern fantasy are contemporary young adults with lives very similar to those of their readers, with the addition of magical elements. When it came to characters like Percy Jackson and Emily Windsnap, students had a very easy time relating to them and making connections.

Cruz and Pollock (2006) found that fantasy inspired inquiry within students. Because of this they were more likely to discuss and analyze the books they were reading. My study confirmed their findings. I feel that this was the main contributor to the deeper comprehension of themes which emerged throughout the course of my study. Students spent so much time connecting and discovering the texts that they began to find it easier to read between the lines and explore the authors' true messages. The fantasy genre gave my students the types of protagonists and plots needed to easily analyze the meanings of the stories. This is directly related to the fact that fantasy provides a safe platform for discussion.

I saw a large increase in discussion of deeper world issues and topics. Several of the studies explored in chapter two had the same results but Cruz and Pollock (2006) in particular saw a large increase in the quality of topics discussed because of the fantasy

texts. T.A. Barron (2001) said that good fantasy has, underneath it, an idea of weight. All of the books that we read had underlying themes and issues that came up during classroom discussion. Fantasy literature provides an intricate storyline, intertwining imaginary elements with reality. Many fantasy books provide a magical setting, mythical elements, and extraordinary adventure, but they also tell a story about some very real universal truths. The fun and safe context of fantasy allows students to see through the supernatural and explore what is real. Discussing racism as it pertains to Emily Windsnap is much easier than discussing racism as it pertains directly to oneself. Fantasy begins to bridge this gap and get students talking about the tough issues.

As Melissa Thomas (2003) says about fantasy and why it is perfect classroom fodder, "Students like it." Modern fantasy is an extremely popular genre among students of all ages. This can be seen in the large amount of children's movies being made based on popular children's fantasy novels. On average seven out of ten novels on the *New York Times Bestseller* list for children's chapter books are modern fantasy. Despite its popularity it extremely under utilized in the classroom. In Avon Elementary school the fifth grade list of novels included only one fantasy title. Cruz and Pollock (2006) realized their students would be more motivated to learn because of their passion for the genre. My study confirms this as I saw a largely increased level of enthusiasm in my students for fantasy literature. Students began to read independently more frequently, pursue interests sparked from the texts such as Greek mythology, other works by the authors, and new art techniques. Students began to take ownership over their own learning and I began to see them steer themselves in the directions that interested them. For a group of students that used to spend their free time chatting, it was a tremendous improvement.

Implications for the Field

In a time where standardized test scores are the focus of education it is easy to lose sight of the fun and excitement learning should embrace. The trend is shifting back to text books and standardized test prep curriculum. Students are allowed less and less time to be creative. Novels are being replaced by text books and test prep passages. It is my hope that the conclusions drawn from this study will show that learning and fun can coexist. Students do not have to read a textbook to learn about story elements. Students can learn about these things using any kinds of books, so why not a genre that they are enthusiastic about?

Often times teaching to the test does not teach our students how to think and act on their own. It is so important to foster an environment that encourages and cultivates a lifetime love for reading. I hope that this study will demonstrate the effects that fantasy literature can have in the classroom.

I hope that my research will inspire teachers to look closely at the books they are using in the classroom. I think reading material should be tailored to students' interests and will yield an increase in enthusiasm. In my study I allowed students the choice of what books to use and the results were marvelous. If students are ever going to be responsive, independent learners we need to teach them to love learning. If we do not, school will become a place to just go through the motions and then forget. It is the goal of educators to create life-long learners with a passion for exploration and discovery. This is something I found the fantasy genre was able to begin to do. It is my hope that teachers will use the genre to continue this in their classrooms.

Suggestions for Further Research

Due to the limitations on this study particularly the time limits it is crucial that continued research be conducted on the fantasy genre. I was extremely restricted by the short amount of time I was given to conduct the study. I am very curious to see what the impact would have been had I more time to continue the study. It is my personal belief that the study could have continued for the rest of the school year and still yielded new results and continued learning.

I am interested in seeing how the study would look in another grade level. I think that this study in particular has extreme potential for older grade levels going well into high school. The fantasy genre has some fantastic books with older themes I was unable to use in my study. It was my cooperating teacher's opinion that such powerhouses such as the Harry Potter Series and The Golden Compass were too dark and advanced for a fifth grade setting. Because of this I was unable to use these texts. I would argue that they are grade appropriate, but I also think they would be very well suited for middle or high school settings as well. They hold great potential for facilitating discussions and exploring deeper themes.

I also believe this study holds potential for the younger grades as well. There were a large number of short stories and picture books I was unable to include in my study because of my limited timeframe. I believe fantasy has the power to help students in younger grades explore the deeper meaning of texts and unlock themes. I saw great success in this area in my study and I wonder if the same would hold true in a younger setting.

I would like to see how the discussion groups work in other classroom settings. I was just one teacher in one class following an informal model of discussion groups. I would like to see the groups using different models and see if it yields different results. I wonder if a more traditional literature circle approach would have helped or hindered discussion. I also wonder how group pairing affects discussion. Did my group of girls have such great outcomes because they were separated by gender? I wonder how academic levels would facilitate discussion had they been paired differently.

I began to see the creative side of my students inspired by what they were reading. My research question focused more on the discussion element of the results but I am interested to see how a continued study could affect students artistically and creatively.

Something I had really hoped to do was give students the opportunity to write their own fantasy at the end of the study. Because of my severe time restrictions I was unable to do this. I am very interested in seeing how the use of fantasy affects student writing especially as it pertains to creative writing and story telling.

And finally, I am interested in seeing how my study would affect students with special needs. My classroom setting contained no students with individualized education plans. I would like to see my study implemented in a special education classroom and see what the outcomes were.

Closing Thoughts

Overall I feel further exploration needs to be done with the fantasy genre. For such a short amount of time I saw extraordinary results that confirmed the research I had conducted prior to the study. My results connected to the work of Cruz and Pollock (2006) and added to the limited body of work on the genre. I feel fantasy can be used to

supplement and even replace parts of the traditional reading curriculum. Fantasy can transport students to another world, and it is in that world that they can truly gain the insight and courage to explore their own. The high popularity, excitement, and fun of the genre naturally draw children to the books and increases enthusiasm. Allowing students to read something they enjoy can secure their engagement and commitment to the subject matter. It is this engagement and commitment to one's own educational journey that we as teachers seek to inspire in students. Fantasy works that magic for us, and I plan to embrace and expand on this for years to come in partnership with my future students.

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PERMISSION FORM

Dear Parent/Guardian:
My name is Traci Bowles and I am student teaching at Avon school with Ms. Capone until May 2010. I am very excited to have the opportunity to work with Ms. Capone's class. I am a graduate student in the Collaborative Education (Co-Teach) Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Marjorie Madden as part of my master's thesis concerning the practical application of the fantasy genre in the classroom. I am requesting permission for your child to participate in this research. The goal of the study is to determine how the use of fantasy literature fosters exploration and discussion of real world issues and topics in the classroom.

Each student will be exposed to a multitude of texts in the fantasy genre. In small groups and individually in response notebooks students will be given the opportunity to use the themes of the different fantasy texts to draw parallels to their own lives. Students will be invited to share their discussions and responses with each other. The data collected in this study will be based on audiotaped discussions with groups of students, students' projects and artifacts and anecdotal notes, and observations. To preserve each child's confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used for each student's name. All data will be reported in terms of group results. Individual results will not be recorded.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. Participation is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the group results will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at (201) 602-4806 or you may contact Dr. Marjorie Madden at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3834. Thank you.

Sincerely
Traci Bowles

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher by Feb.10.
__ I grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.
__ I do not grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

_____
Parent Guardian Signature   Date

APPENDIX B

LIST OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS USED IN THE STUDY

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