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**Using Picture Books in Drama Therapy with Children: A Therapeutic Model and
Annotated Bibliography**

Leigh Bulmer

A Research Paper

In

The Department

Of

The Creative Arts Therapies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Using Picture Books in Drama Therapy with Children: A Therapeutic Model and Annotated Bibliography

Leigh Bulmer

In this paper, I combine the methodologies of picture book story response and drama therapeutic exploration. Inspired by Alida Gersie's Therapeutic Storymaking model, I have created a drama therapeutic model that is designed to offer children a sense of belonging through dramatic expression and creativity. Part I of the paper addresses the therapeutic potential of picture books and explains how picture books can be used drama therapeutically with children. The application of my Drama Therapeutic Story Exploration method is described, with reference to therapeutic picture book themes, as well as the dramatic story exploration process, and guidelines for the facilitator. In Part II, I offer fifteen picture books accompanied by suggestions for drama therapeutic exploration. The books are collated according to five themes which encourage children to (1) explore the potentials of their bodies, (2) discover the safety of homes and relationships, (3) negotiate conflicts, (4) celebrate their achievements, and (4) address issues of loss and separation.

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INTRODUCTION

“Close your eyes,” said Frederick,
as he climbed on a big stone.
“Now I send you the rays of the sun.
Do you feel how their golden glow....”
And as Frederick spoke of the sun
The four little mice
began to feel warmer.
Was it Frederick’s voice?
Was it magic?

In Frederick by Leo Lionni

In this modern age, stories are shared in a variety of ways. The first stories most of us encounter in print are ones accompanied by magical illustrations within picture books. They were probably available in our schools, libraries, and homes. These books became our quiet time companions. Although the majority of these stories have faded from our memories, some of those familiar images or scenes still manage to flicker into our lives to guide and comfort us. These books intrigued us and became an integral part of our earliest experiences.

Picture books are little story gems. Children engage in picture books as their stories have surprise elements and comforting refrains (Gillespie & Conner, 1975). Their illustrations do more than just decorate the page; they delight the reader and engage them further into the story experience. Although children can and do look at picture books alone, they know from their first experiences that picture books are designed to be shared. Spitz (1999), in *Inside Picture Books*, describes the process of reading aloud as “quintessentially relational” for both children and adults and this is how most children first experience books. Hence, for a young child who has not yet learned

to read, picture books become a sensational world to co-explore in the company of the caring adults in their lives.

In our society's haste to get children reading and thinking, we underestimate the wonder of how children can enter and benefit from stories. Picture books place their messages and adventures within a wondrous multi-sensory world; a world that children engage in and one that has remained relatively unexplored. I whole-heartedly believe, and have witnessed, the ease with which children can literally step into the picture and dramatically explore and alter their understanding of a story. The purpose of this paper is to welcome drama therapists and other mental health professionals to acquire a deeper appreciation of the value of picture books and their potential in personal development.

Since picture books mainly fall under the authority of parents, teachers and librarians, most of the insights regarding these illustrated stories emanate from an educational perspective (Beaty, 1994; Siks, 1954; Paley, 1990; 1997). Many child psychologists have also employed the playful format of telling stories to assess and guide their young clientele (Runberg, 1993; Bettelheim; 1975). The specific technique of using books in treatment is defined as bibliotherapy. In their book *Bibliotherapy: Clinical Approaches for Helping Children*, Paradeck and Paradeck (1993) use story books to offer children a sequenced structure and permit them to explore difficult situations.

Various drama therapists have also remarked on the advantages of using stories with children (Cattanach, 1992, 1994, 1996; Gersie, 1990, 1991, 1992; Jennings, 1993, 1999; Jones, 1996). Within drama therapy picture books are used in a similar manner as

in bibliotherapy, but their main benefits are to provide a validating metaphor and a stimulus for dramatic play (Cattanach, 1994).

Some authors have mentioned a few of their favourite books, but a more extended list of picture books and corresponding drama therapeutic exploration activities does not exist. Alida Gersie (1997) uses traditional stories to explore emotional themes, providing her adult participants with a sense of community and belonging. With inspiration from Gersie's Therapeutic Storymaking (TSM) method, I have created a drama therapeutic method to explore picture books with children between the ages of four and seven years. Similar to the TSM method, the goal of sharing these picture books and exploration activities is to help children grow as individuals and gain a sense of belonging with others.

This paper is organized into two sections. Part I illustrates the dynamics of picture books, over-viewing their aesthetic, social and therapeutic aspects and describes the picture book exploration method using insights from child professionals. In Part II, I offer an annotated bibliography of fifteen picture books and suggestions for drama therapeutic exploration. These picture book titles are equally divided into five thematic chapters exploring movement and sensory experiences, safety, conflict, self-awareness, and loss. I have developed these themes from my drama therapy experience with children. I believe that they address basic situations which children must manage in order to understand their lives and relationships. By organizing the titles within these themes, the picture books and drama therapeutic activities can target specific physical, emotional, social and creative needs of young children.

In the following chapter, I will elaborate on the different roles picture books play in the lives of children and families. I will then describe the different perspectives and motives for the use of stories in therapy derived from accounts of educationalists, psychologists, bibliotherapists, play therapists, and drama therapists. As an additional perspective, I will also include a description of my own experiences using stories in therapy.

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

THE AESTHETIC, SOCIAL AND THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF PICTURE BOOKS

Picture books are unique works of art that tell stories through words and images. The blending of written texts and the illustrations creates a rich, sensuous and engaging world that a child can fill with meaning. It is not surprising that some mental health professionals working with young children have incorporated picture books into their practice. In order to address this practice, I will first explore picture books and the role they play.

The Aesthetic Role of Picture Books

Picture books are books that rely on the use of vivid illustrations to enhance and even tell the story. We delight in picture books as their images transport us directly to the setting of the story. When I was young, I recall being fascinated by *Small Pig* (Lobel, 1969). The story is about a small pig that runs away from home in search of mud but eventually finds himself stuck in some cement in a section of a city sidewalk. The story ends with his owners (the farmer and his wife) calling the fire department to rescue him and they all go back home. It was not enough for me to imagine this little pig's predicament of being stuck in the sidewalk; I *had* to see it. The image of that poor sad little pig stuck in the cement has stayed with me into adulthood.

When I read picture books to children, I sense that they share this hunger to see the images. Children often stop me and comment, "Let me see! I didn't get to see it!" Illustrators create these "must see" images by using a variety of media to illuminate their stories. Included in these are collages, pencil drawings, paintings, pastels, etchings, and photographs. The harmony of the artwork, the text, and the overall design of the book

serve to help the author and the illustrator express their interpretation of the emotional mood and tempo of the story (Marantz, 1992).

Sylvia Marantz (1992) points out that many picture book artists and critics believe that the illustrations in the picture books should do more than simply mirror the words of the story. They should add to the story, give it new dimensions, and tell an additional story. She describes how some picture books have few words or none at all, and the pictures even tell the entire story. Roger Duvoisin (1980) also explains that illustrations can tell the story without the help of the text; he calls these images a form of pictorial literature.

I feel that picture books capitalize on our hunger not only to hear a story, but also to witness or experience it. I consider it a basic human need that becomes stronger if the image is personally and emotionally significant. For example, it isn't enough for me to hear migrating geese flying overhead, I have to go outside and 'see' the wonderful, black dotted arrow making its way across the sky. The image confirms my experience and even offers me a sense of closure on the season. Stuart Marriot (1998) reveals that picture books are inescapably plural as they play with this tension between the telling of stories and the seeing of their images. He claims that reading a picture book is to engage in a highly creative process that involves the reader filling the gaps between what the text seems to say and what the pictures appear to say.

Unfortunately, the important role that the illustrations play in telling the story is often literally 'overlooked'. Marriot (1998) notes that picture books are often considered only useful for early 'incompetent' or beginning readers. He observes that in time the child's increasing expertise in decoding the text with the use of the picture will

allow him or her to dispense with them. Goodman (1998) points out the fact that teachers tend to draw children's attention towards the written words and away from the illustrations. Children sense this pressure to move on and will reject picture books as being "too babyish" once they are able to read on their own (Marriot, 1998).

In his book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Bruno Bettelheim (1975) asserts that illustrated storybooks do not serve the child's best interests. He claims that the illustrations divert the learning process and direct the child away from how he, on his own, would experience the story (p. 59). Bettelheim denounces that adults and children alike are content to let an illustrator do the difficult task of imagining the scene, and warns that, without imagining the images of the story ourselves, the story loses much of its personal significance. Later in his book, Bettelheim suggests that we need to help our children build creative imaginations, but without the inspiration from our traditional fairy tales, they will not be able to invent stories on their own (p. 121). I believe the same process can apply to images. Picture books provide children with the opportunity to participate in shared images that can be discussed and examined. Hence, the need to see the illustrations is not laziness, as Bettelheim interprets it, but a desire to confirm an image socially. By exposing children to rich visual experiences, following Bettelheim's own reasoning, they will be better able to create representations of their own.

Picture books offer children a great sense of power; the children can call forth or dismiss an entire fantasy world by simply opening and closing the cover. According to Yetta Goodman (1998), picture books acknowledge that the world we come to know is made up of shapes, images, smells, colours and feelings. She believes that we

underestimate the potential of picture books as a way of learning. The danger of only focusing on the oral or written story means we ignore our responses to the whole text including its illustrations, rhythms, and its appearance. Goodman recognizes the importance of responses to the art in books as they assist children to extend and enhance how meaning is constructed.

The Social Role of Picture Books

Picture books are designed to be experienced socially. *In Becoming a Reader: Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* (1990), J.A. Appleyard describes this earliest reading experience. He first calls attention to the notion that children at young ages do not read; they are read to. This usually occurs before bedtime, when the child is nestled in the arms of an adult. The adult who reads using a special voice, attends to pictures and words pointed to by the child, and adds life to the characters by using inflections and gestures. The reading is usually accompanied by a running exchange of questions and answers, comments about the story, and associations the story calls forth from outside experiences that the adult and the child share. At this young age children occupy a world where the boundaries between self, the factual, and fantasy are not fixed. When sharing a picture book, the child can begin to confidently separate fact from fiction with support from the adult. Appleyard (1990) sums it up by acknowledging the importance of the older reader:

“ ... whatever experiences children have of books will be in the company of adults or older brothers and sisters who mediate the experience for them. Thus, long before children can read a page of print by themselves, reading is apt to be an intensely participatory initiation into a world beyond their own immediate experience, with the most trusted persons in their lives as guides and interpreters.

(p. 21-22)

The choice of which picture book a child reads depends on the adults in their lives (Spitz, 1999). Thus, picture books must appeal not only to the children, but also to the parents, teachers, and other adults in their lives. Adults will usually choose books that are consistent with their own beliefs. Therefore, picture books must extend their meanings cross-generationally in order to be successfully received. This leads to another aspect, that picture books are laden with socially constructed values aimed at children.

The advent of books created especially for children started in the mid-eighteenth century with the publication of books which instructed children in proper manners and taught religious precepts (Gillespie and Conner, 1975). The books of this era did not hide their didactic intent, as they prescribed that good children were rewarded and bad ones were punished. By the mid-nineteenth century, books expressly for recreation and pleasure were introduced, and today a multitude of picture books on a variety of subjects are available. These modern picture books possess a network of beliefs, values and social practices which can be expressed directly or hidden within the story events (Marriot, 1998).

In their commentary, Considine, Haley and Lacy (1994) claim that to understand children's books thoroughly requires an awareness of their dual nature as both an art form and an industry. In my search for children's books for this annotated bibliography, I couldn't help but notice the marketing of certain titles and the use of picture books to publicize products and other media. As a teacher and a therapist, I am exposed to a variety of promotional literature that encourages me to buy and use certain picture books. The educational catalogues indicate how the books will encourage children to

read and the therapeutic brochures direct me towards books they believe address the needs of my clients.

Picture books reflect and support the values that adults attempt to instill in children. An example of this influence was demonstrated during an interview with Maurice Sendak, a well known author and illustrator of *Where the Wild Things Are*. In response to the question “What elements make up a good children’s book?”, Sendak insisted that the basic ground-floor element was honesty.

“Whatever you’re doing – a realistic story or fantasy for far-out science fiction – must begin with a basis of honesty. You must tell the truth about the subject to the child as well as you are able without any mitigating of that truth. You must allow that children are small, courageous people who have to deal every day with a multitude of problems, just as we adults do, and that they are unprepared for most things, and what they yearn for is a bit of truth somewhere.”

(Lorraine, 1980; p. 335)

Maurice Sendak is probably alluding to the tendency of adults to protect children from difficult subjects such as death, anger, and sexuality. I wonder, however, if the “truth” that Maurice Sendak is expressing here is a general truth or a reflection of *his* own beliefs of what childhood is and what children need to know. Truths are dependent on circumstances and points of view that shape them. I agree with Sendak that adults should be genuine with children, but to communicate ‘our truths’ or knowledge more meaningfully, we should consider expanding upon how *we* arrived at our conclusions and how they influence our lives.

“Children have to be helped to understand that “all knowledge is socially constructed... all knowing is political” (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991; p. 67) The knowledge contained in children’s books represents a slice of life – it is part of the picture, but not the whole picture.”

(Considene, Haley, and Lacy, 1994; p. 10)

Encouraging children to be critical readers affords them the awareness that stories present points of view and not general truths. Hence, to appreciate how picture books are integrated into any practice, it is important to take into account how facilitators view their social purpose and their style of sharing them. When considering specific books for use in therapy, it is important to bear in mind how their content and style of presentation will influence the young clients.

The Therapeutic Uses of Picture Books with Children

The use of picture books to guide children in therapy is not a recent development (Paradeck and Paradeck, 1993; Dwivedi, 1997). The simple relationship between the child, the book, and the therapist can be beneficial to the therapeutic process. I have read picture books to invite children to reflect on the story's message and the illustrations, to inspire a play scene, and to create a cozy atmosphere at the end of the therapy session. One little boy I worked with regularly requested to see *Borka* by John Burningham (1963) that tells a story about a goose born without feathers. The boy was not concerned with the author's version of the story, as he would protest if I read the words. He always guided me closely to one illustration of a lonely goose sobbing into a handkerchief, and would say, "Look, he's crying". My mind would race with questions. Is this boy sad or hurt as well? What was he trying to tell me?

I realized sharing these picture books sometimes could make it easier for a child and I to understand each other, but how I would use them raised my curiosity. How can I use picture books to help or provide emotional relief for the child? What is the child communicating to me through the stories and illustrations they select? What influence will I have as we experience this book together? In this section, I will attempt to address

these questions through the experiences of other practitioners including psychoanalysts, bibliotherapists, educationalists, play therapists and drama therapists who have used stories with children.

Although some therapists do actually use picture books, the majority of the literature seems to address how 'storytelling' is beneficial. Since most picture books contain stories, much of the wisdom that these 'storytelling' authors describe is also relevant for illustrated storybooks. Many therapists explore stories with children individually; therefore, I will use the term 'child' to describe the client and 'therapist' to describe the mental health practitioner. I will interchange both feminine and masculine pronouns to acknowledge both of the sexes.

Psychoanalytic theory's impact on child therapy has been considerable. In psychoanalysis, it is thought that symptoms and behaviour represent derivatives of unconscious conflicts (Arlow, 1984). Individuals are encouraged to examine the motives behind their behaviours as most practitioners believe that these 'insights' will offer some relief to the patient's difficulties (Kirmayer, 1993). For these therapists, stories are a rich source of symbols that represent unconscious desires (Jones, 1996). As a result, psychoanalysts analyze the symbols in these stories to gain insight into the personal traumas of their clients. Many therapists and bibliotherapists base their style of story intervention on the above-mentioned beliefs and will also employ stories to help children express and explain their underlying conflicts.

Bruno Bettelheim's (1975) style of psychoanalytic story intervention is to tell children a variety of fairy tales and carefully observe their reactions. According to Bettelheim, the benefits of fairy tales lie in their diversity of characters, scenarios, and

events. This variety welcomes the child to find story dilemmas that might be similar to his own personal challenges. The child then uses these one-dimensional good and evil characters to classify and sort out his conflicts in order to create some sensible order within his inner experiences.

The therapists can identify these conflicts by referring to psychoanalytic or Jungian interpretations of the fairy tales, which are found in the writings of various authors (Bettelheim, 1975; Runberg, 1993; von Franz, 1987). Whereas some psychoanalysts might tell children about their interpretations (Kritzenberg, 1975), Bettelheim notes that expecting children to recognize their conflicts through stories could be a delicate process. He does not recommend that the therapist share the insights based on the psychoanalytic paradigm with the child.

“A child who is made aware of what the figures in fairy tales stand for in his own psychology will be robbed of a much needed outlet, and devastated by having to realize the desires, anxieties, and vengeful feelings that are ravaging him”

(Bettelheim, 1975; p. 25)

If the therapist indicates that he or she knows the child's inner thoughts, the child might lose the opportunity to share what until then was secret and private and put the therapeutic potential of the story at risk.

Bibliotherapy uses picture books, novels and poetry to treat troubled children. The first task of the bibliotherapist is to select books that will match the emotional experiences of the children (Paradeck and Paradeck, 1993). There are many lists of books that have been created for a variety of emotional difficulties such as death, addiction, suicide, and abuse (Paradeck and Paradeck, 1993; Doll and Doll, 1991). The main goal of bibliotherapy is to encourage children to connect the events in their lives to

those in the book. The advantage of this intervention is that the books can be explored with a counselor and also given to a child to read and consider on her own.

According to Sarah Borders and Alice Naylor (1993), the bibliotherapeutic model consists of three steps:

- (1) *Identification*: The children enter the story and are able to associate with the characters.
- (2) *Catharsis*: The children experience similar emotions as the characters, such as sadness, anger, or pride.
- (3) *Insight*: The children begin to develop an understanding or achieve new knowledge regarding their lives.

Paradeck and Paradeck (1993) claim that identifying with a story in this manner provides children with information, insight, new values and attitudes, an awareness that others have dealt with similar problems, and solutions to those problems. They explain that very young children do not move into the stages of catharsis and insight, but still benefit from the process of identification.

In her book *Windows to Our Children*, Violet Oaklander (1978) expresses that her goal when working with children is to help them become aware of themselves and their existence in the world. She often invites children to read picture books as a part of their therapy. After describing the story, Oaklander encourages the children to identify or “own” their personal connection to the story. For example, she will ask, “Do you ever feel that way?” Depending on the children’s answer, she will then leave the picture book and work on the children’s life situations. Oaklander does not expect that children will always be comfortable with this process.

“Children do not always have to “own” things. Sometimes children will pull in and are very frightened to do so. Sometimes they are not ready. Sometimes it just seems to be enough that they’ve gotten something out in the open through the story even

if they don't own it for themselves. They can tell that I've heard what they had to say. They've expressed what they needed to or wanted to at the time, in their own way."

(Oaklander, 1978; p. 55)

In most of the approaches mentioned, stories are used to help children access and understand their personal problems from a variety of perspectives. These intervention styles adhere to the notion that there is a certain benefit regarding the connections from the story to the child's inner conflicts. According to Jones (1996), the issue of story to real life connections is also addressed in drama therapy.

Drama therapy follows the notion that creativity fosters a self-healing process (Jones, 1996). By telling a fairy tale, reading a picture book, or by suggesting a theatrical script, drama therapists can provide a client with a useful focus or framework to explore their dilemmas. In his book *Drama as Therapy: Theatre as Living*, Phil Jones (1996) describes how stories can be therapeutic. When the client hears a story, she projects or externalizes her inner conflicts onto the story characters or events (projection). With the guidance of the therapist, the client dramatically explores and alters the story characters or events then simultaneously modifies her inner conflicts (transformation). The client can explore a story character or event by using role-play, puppetry, movement, dance, mime and storytelling (Landy, 1986).

Paul Jones mainly works with adult clients, but I feel the process of his story intervention applies to children. He explains the therapeutic use of stories as a three-step process. The drama therapist first tells the client a story to stimulate her with a rich world of images. This step helps the client define and organize her problem by representing it with characters, scenes or story events. Using puppets, role-play, or toys, the client enacts the story to explore a dilemma and to try out various solutions. Finally,

she is encouraged to assimilate the story's relevance to her life through discussions with the therapist.

Jones illustrates this process with the following case study. By using illustrated story cards, Jones told stories to a group of developmentally delayed clients and then encouraged them to create their own stories. One client, named Thomas, created a story about a prince whose brother would leave on long voyages and return for short visits. Jones believed that Thomas was projecting his inner conflict regarding his real brother leaving home. Thomas was not able to discuss the situation with his brother directly, so he used the dilemma in his story to express his inner frustrations and to experiment with possible solutions. Thomas' story allowed him to express his anxiety regarding his brother's departure, let him experiment with letting his brother go, and permitted him to consider that the brother would come back for visits.

Jones (1996) identifies this process as creating a *metaphoric* connection because the story represented Thomas' real life concern about his brother. He states that a story can become a metaphor that joins important connections between the world of the story and that of the real world. When the client processes and resolves a challenging story, they simultaneously loosen or unravel a real life issue. At the end of a session, Jones believes that the client should be offered the opportunity to verbally discuss the connection between the metaphor and its real life significance. However, he also recognizes that some individuals are unable to discuss these connections and the issue should not be forced. In the above example, Thomas used his enacted stories with the group to express and release his repressed feelings about his brother that he could not express verbally.

The therapeutic potential of the dramatic metaphor is that it creates 'distance' from the actual real-life identity of the problem. Often the story, characters, or events that the therapist shares are similar to the client's life events, but since the story and characters are fictional, they are indirect and emotionally safe (Gersie, 1997). Landy (1986) notes that if the story is appropriately distanced from the client, she will be able to release emotion and recognize that certain aspects of her life are similar to those of the character. Since the character or story event is a metaphor, it can represent a variety of meanings and can be easily altered by the client. In this way, the metaphor also allows exploration from different and more creative perspectives, which can simultaneously alter the client's relationship with her issues.

Sue Jennings (1999), a drama therapist, firmly believes that inviting children to make real-life connections to a story can close down exploration rather than encourage it. She does not expect children to relate the story material to their lives, but continues to explore the stories by asking them about the characters and possible story events. Jennings states that children can achieve a deeper engagement if they remain in the story and will share deeper disclosures at a symbolic level.

When a fourteen year old girl named Mary revealed that she identified with Little Red Riding Hood, Jennings did not attempt to interpret the fairy tale symbol. She followed Mary's process to discover that Little Red Riding Hood represented Mary's failure or her muddled feeling about 'trying to be good' ever since her father had confided to her that he had a mistress. Jennings suggests that therapists must be especially vigilant at this point and not change the frame of reference by expecting the child to reflect verbally or analyze the story. If the therapist makes this shift the child

may become confused and disengage from the process. Thus, according to Jennings (1999), the Golden rule is “don’t try and force order on what might seem chaotic; or stay with the chaos and the meaning will emerge.”(p. 146).

I appreciate how Jennings’s indirect style provides the child with the freedom to explore his metaphor without the pressure to apply meaning to it prematurely. Although she does not insist on the disclosure of insights by the children, she still believes that they exist and searches for them. In her book *Introduction to Developmental Playtherapy* (1999), she describes her reaction to a child’s story about a garden:

“What multiple metaphoric expression is in this brief description – and the therapist is being told quite explicitly how to proceed. Don’t open the gate – don’t go into the garden – keep it safe and special. The garden is herself and also her past self when there were parents and life was secure – and maybe it is also linked to their graves – the healing metaphor at this point is the garden which is secure – not the garden to be invaded, spoiled or destroyed.”

(Jennings, 1999; p. 158)

The process of gaining insight is not straightforward. Whether the meaning is discovered in the story metaphor or connected to real life issues – it is still being interpreted from the therapist’s own point of view and understanding. The therapist uses theories and personal experiences to guide her understanding; therefore, she might direct the child to only one particular alternative to interpret the story’s significance. In most cases, the therapist and the child are able to find a common understanding, and the therapist helps the child to clarify the connections between the story and her life.

Ann Cattanach (1992, 1994, 1997, and 1999), a drama therapist and a play therapist, shares children’s stories, fairytales, and picture books. She uses her stories to validate the children’s experiences and as a springboard to creative exploration using role-play or other dramatic methods. Frequently, children from trying situations lose

hope, hence she will tell them a story to afford a sense of consolation. These stories show children that they are not alone in their circumstances. In her books *Play Therapy: Where the Sky Meets the Underworld* (1994) and *Play Therapy with Abused Children* (1992), Cattanach recommends a variety of useful picture books for troubled children.

“Stories like these are containers which help the child explore the pain of their past through the form and structure of the stories and illustrations. My pain yet not my pain. It must happen to other people so I am not alone”.

(Cattanach, 1994; p. 36)

Cattanach (1997) often encourages her young clients to create their own stories using toys. She believes the role of therapists is to help children clarify their point of view. By listening, questioning and recording the child’s story, Ann Cattanach attempts to help the child discover his own understanding. She continues that each story has many potential meanings and, consequentially, the one that the child chooses should be the one that is explored. Ann Cattanach does this by asking questions so the child can make his own decisions about the story. In this example, Cattanach negotiates the meaning of unsafe places within the context of a young girl’s created story, but the same negotiation could take place to explore the child’s understanding of a picture book.

“Crocodile monster eats people and cars and sand.

What happens to the people?

All the people get dead.

What happens to the monsters?

The snake and the crocodile monster just go on making the place bad.

What happens when they have eaten everyone?

When they have everything they just wait until other people come along and then they will eat them.

This is not a nice place to live

We decided that there was no appeasing these monsters. Their world was just not a place to inhabit.”

(Cattanach, 1997; 87-88)

In the final chapter of her book, *Children's Stories in Play Therapy* (1997), Cattanach lists stories, fairytales, and some picture books. She likes to read or tell children different versions of the same story, so that the child realizes that there is more than one way to tell and hear a story. Cattanach suggests that the therapist and the child consider various interpretations of the story until they reach one that is both satisfactory and agreeable with their present beliefs and life experiences (Cattanach, 1999; p. 80). In this respect, if the therapist and the child arrive at conclusions about the meaning of the story, they are aware that these conclusions are shaped by each other's perceptions. Hence, the 'insights' about the story and its possible connections to the child are not dictated or final, but are co-created and continuously being shaped by the therapist and the child.

It appears that the main goal of using stories in therapy is to encourage the child to understand previously unknown personal information, which could help reorganize or reconcile her problems. The child's personal understanding seems to be gained by the therapist negotiating the connections to the story characters and events with the child. Sharing a picture book also builds upon the strength and creativity of each participant, as the story and the magical illustrations call forth other stories, emotions, memories, and wonderful discoveries. This style of sharing permits the child to experience being genuinely appreciated for her opinions and contributions. When picture books are explored verbally, much of their creative energy is channeled mentally. In drama therapy, the stories' personal connections are negotiated through creative exercises such as role-play, masks, and storytelling. In this way, sharing picture books offers children the story's wisdom, an opportunity for creative expression and a sense of community.

In my previous research paper I reviewed Alida Gersie's Therapeutic Storymaking (TSM) method (Bulmer, 1998). Gersie (1990, 1991, 1992, and 1997) believes that traditional stories function as prompts to encourage individuals to explore selected issues or themes in an emotionally safe manner. In her TSM method, traditional stories are accompanied by storymaking structures. These structures invite group members to explore a story theme by responding with the use of art, drama, music, movement, and storymaking, either individually, in a pair, or with the entire group. These explorations are often preceded by exercises invoking theme-related memories and are followed by group discussions fostering the creation of links between the metaphoric exploration and actual life experiences.

At its essence, the success of Gersie's TSM method lies in its ability to foster a sense of belonging and safety through its creative group explorations. Alida Gersie (1997) states that her method can be used with young children, but claims that they enter the story differently. I have attempted to use Gersie's method with children, but found that many of her tasks were too challenging. I felt that the children were simply complying with my directions instead of honouring their own processes. I discovered that children prefer to listen to stories with familiar themes, to engage in physical movements associated with the story, and to enact any characters that they find interesting.

For the past twenty years Vivian Gussin Paley has written a variety of books sensitively describing the wondrous journeys she and her students have experienced by sharing stories and playing (1981, 1990, 1992, 1998, and 2000). For Paley, the power of stories resides in their ability to bring an otherwise distracted group of people together

for the purpose of being “lifted up and carried away on wings of imagery and language” (1998, p. 65). In order to describe the benefits of story and story play in my model, I will combine the experiences and insights of Vivian Gussin Paley and the theories and techniques of drama therapy. With this in mind, I invite you to consider, in the next chapter, the potential of using drama to explore picture books with children.

CHAPTER TWO

DRAMA THERAPEUTIC STORY EXPLORATION WITH CHILDREN USING PICTURE BOOKS

Exploring picture books through drama provides children with the opportunity to use their imaginations and to share in a group story experience. In the following chapters, I have assembled an annotated bibliography of fifteen picture books and have followed each title with suggestions for dramatic exploration. These picture book response activities are intended to be used with young children, ages four to seven, in educational, recreational or therapeutic settings.

Guided by drama therapy theories and techniques, I have chosen picture book titles and have created dramatic structures that provide safety and containment. The goal of this chapter is to describe how I selected my picture books and to offer guidelines regarding story discussions and dramatic explorations. I have also made some recommendations for the facilitator that will help the children benefit from the stories and the drama explorations. The information in this paper does not assume to train facilitators how to work with groups of children; it has been created to supplement other professional skills. Exploring stories and drama with children can be very rewarding, but it is necessary to appreciate the levels of safety that are required for the process of growth to occur. Therefore, I would recommend that this chapter be read before using any of the stories.

Drama Therapeutic Story Exploration

Picture Book Themes

In my experience of working with abused children, I noticed that their 'unguided' play mainly concentrated on creating homes, battling monsters, and being

nurtured as baby characters or having pretend meals. The circumstances in their lives have required that they cope with uncertainty, endure the separation and loss of significant relationships, and attempt to play and develop in stressful environments. I felt that these children needed to explore story and play themes that respected their natural play interests yet provided them with the wisdom they would need to adjust to their circumstances.

Many picture books address issues regarding abuse, divorce, and abandonment, which are oriented towards adult interpretations of the child's circumstances. I wanted to offer children some simple themes, so they could adapt and build resilience to their circumstances in terms they could easily understand. These play themes include nurturing and celebrating the physical abilities of their bodies, finding safety, sorting through conflicts, celebrating their resilience, and saying good-bye. Although I selected these themes following my experience with abused children, I find that they respect the needs and experiences of all children. Hence, the fifteen picture books presented in this paper are evenly divided into the following five thematic chapters.

(1) Playing and Feeling Good: Sensory and Movement Stories

(2) I'm Safe: Stories about Finding a Safe Place

(3) Here Comes Trouble: Stories about Conflict

(4) Hooray For Me: Stories of Self-Awareness

(5) I'll Miss You: Stories of Loss and Separation

Children seem to be drawn to stories or clues in their environment that might help them resolve the challenges in their lives. Keith Sawyer (1997) observed pre-school children while they played and found that their themes were inspired by TV,

movies, and children's books. He noticed that children combined different symbols from the culture to co-create a unique, improvised performance that included themes such as rescues, fires, explosions, earthquakes, bad guys and good guys, spaceships and families of animals. My goal, as a drama therapist, was to capitalize on the idea that children are influenced by the themes presented in picture books. Hence, my interest was to find picture book stories that would validate the children's concerns, build their resilience and help them to consider other points of view. The criteria for my picture book selection are as follows:

- (1) The book has to be a children's literary work.
- (2) The book has to be in the form of a story or metaphor to provide the children with aesthetic distance in order to safely explore and respond to the themes. These criteria will eliminate books that explicitly direct the story at a real life experience of the child (i.e. a story of a little boy whose parents get divorced).
- (3) The story must address the preoccupations of children.
- (4) The story must lend itself to being explored using the creative arts.
- (5) To facilitate dramatic exploration, the story events need to involve characters engaged in a variety of concrete movements which young children can readily imitate.

The three picture book titles for each chapter are presented in alphabetical order according to the author's name, followed by the illustrator, the year of publication, and the publisher. Each entry includes a brief synopsis of the picture book, a look at its therapeutic value, and a suggestion as to how the story could be explored using drama.

Every chapter also begins with an introductory section that discusses how the theme presented might benefit children. Some of the books can be considered for more than one theme. The final interpretation of the book may vary according to the facilitator and the children who share it.

Sharing the Picture Book

The first step is to read the picture book to the children. How a picture book is initially presented and shared can influence how it is received. In her book *Picture Book Storytelling*, Janice Beaty (1994) recommends that the storyteller could “liven up” certain characters to enhance the story experience for the children. When I read a picture book, some children might ask questions or make comments about the story or the illustrations. I find that these ‘interruptions’ can either engage or distract the children, so whether I welcome or limit them depends on the group’s ability to maintain focus.

Once the picture book is read, the children might want to share their impressions of the story. Vivain Gussin Paley (1997) often leads and then becomes the follower of intense discussions with her young groups. She questions in a way that allows the children to embellish, explain, judge, deny, or support the story. She observes that talking about the picture book makes the discussion safe and accessible, since it provides a frame of reference for the children to share their feelings and observations. The picture book discussions can help the facilitator to select play themes during the dramatic story explorations.

Dramatic Story Explorations

I began to shape my drama story explorations in light of Sue Jennings’s (1999) ‘Embodied Stories’. Her activities involved a group of children using body movements

to enact a simple story. For my first picture book exploration, I read Eric Carle's (1969) *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to a group of kindergarten children. The story follows the adventures of a caterpillar as it eats, creates a cocoon and finally turns into a beautiful butterfly. The children enthusiastically performed all the events in the story. To close the activity, I guided the children to rest on an imaginary flower, count to three and return to being children. My drama therapeutic explorations incorporate a variety of dramatic activities, such as movement, puppetry, and role-play. To describe and explain all of the dramatic activities is not possible within the scope of this paper. In this section, I will limit my discussion to specific applications of drama in my picture book story explorations.

The drama explorations that I have suggested were adapted to respect the needs of young children. It is difficult to offer a specific recipe for dramatic exploration, as the dramatic possibilities can vary depending on the picture book and the intended group of children's and the facilitator's imaginations. My intention is for my drama examples to be used not as strict directions, but as suggestions that can be adapted or altered to fit the needs of any child or group of children. I will, however, offer four guidelines that I keep in mind as I plan my exploration activities. These are (1) using the story's temporal and spatial structures to contain the play, (2) basing the exploration mainly on physical and sensory experiences, (3) acknowledging the potential of using fantasy for personal expression, and (4) providing the children with an opportunity to disengage and reflect on their play.

In her book, Geraldine Brain Siks (1958) describes the general needs of young children. These identified needs are helpful in understanding the basic design of my

drama therapeutic explorations. Physically, Siks says, children are active, but prefer energetic movements followed by quiet and restful interludes. Mentally, she describes young children as independent thinkers who need opportunities to express their own thoughts and ideas. Socially, children want to associate with other children and need guidance in learning to take turns, to listen when someone else speaks, and to appreciate others. Emotionally, children often experience strong feelings including happiness, sadness, fear and anger and need opportunities to release these feelings in positive ways. She claims that young children live close to their environment and take interest in the relationships with which they are familiar, such as their families and peers.

My structures are designed to create a contained environment for children to physically and emotionally explore the picture books. The containment is achieved by arranging the children's physical actions and creative contributions within spatial and temporal limits. For example, in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* exploration, the children were free to be hungry caterpillars until the story led them to make their cocoons. I like to organize the children into a circle when they perform their activities, as the circle provides containment, assures that every child has enough space and allows all the group members to see each other. The ability to see and imitate other members encourages children to experiment and learn within the anonymity of the group. Sue Jennings (1999) repeats sequences of small ritualized moves, such as "stop, look, and listen", which help the children to predict and easily manage the activity. Many of my story explorations start in a basic position, guide the children through the story and play space, and return the group to the original starting position.

The use of basic physical movements, such as rolling, digging, flying and stretching allows children to expend their energy positively during the story explorations. According to Jennings, once children master these repetitive movements, they feel self-assured and begin to explore other types of play. The children also discover and gain confidence from new ranges of touch and playful relationships (Jones, 1996). Many of the explorations also encourage children to focus on sensory experiences, such as pretending to eat, drink, take a bath and feel the wind and warm sun. As children explore their senses, they nurture themselves, which gives them the energy to trust and connect to others (Jennings, 1999; Cattanach, 1994). I find that items like long flowing, colourful scarves, musical instruments, and play doh offer children delightful sensory experiences and calming breaks between physically exerting activities.

The introduction of fantasy play shifts children out of the realm of reality and into an arena where they can mutually explore new experiences (Jones, 1996). Fantasy play with children will often involve animal characterizations. Norma Livo (1994), a storyteller and author of the book *Whose Afraid ...? Facing Children's Fears with Folktales*, claims that some children prefer animal characters as they are cute, neuter, and fun to play. The animal characters are also different from the children. Therefore, they offer distance from dramatic events and make them easier to handle. She also comments that animals can symbolize various character traits that children like to explore, such as a clever fox, powerful bear, a mother owl or a small frightened mouse. By performing these roles, children can discover how it feels to be sneaky, strong, protective, nurturing or vulnerable. In my experience, I have observed that children are

extremely proud of their expert knowledge regarding animal habits and become completely absorbed in their portrayals.

Fantasy play can also provide creative opportunities for the facilitator to engage and build a community spirit within a group. When I take on a dramatic role or character during a story structure with the group, I may question, explore and guide the children's experience "in role" from within the drama. In this way, I can help the children connect to each other through their different interpretations of the drama. For example, while my group and I were all pretending to be butterflies, one boy told me that the tree we had landed in was being shaken by a big bear. I alerted the other children and we decided to all yell at the bear "Go Away!" Cowley (1998) states that these types of moments allow group members to "come together" in a shared experience that acknowledges differences and similarities, and fosters "belonging".

At the end or closure of the dramatic exploration, it is important to have the children revert to their own identities. Jones (1996) describes 'de-roling' as an activity that assists all members in the group to move out of the dramatic engagement. This activity enables the children to say 'good-bye' to their characters, as well as indicating to the children that the play-time has ended. I usually prepare the children for the end by telling them "After I count to three, you will turn around and be you again". Jones explains that de-roling might also include a 'cooling off' from the energy of the dramatic work. I find that offering the children an opportunity to draw is a nice way to settle their energy. It also provides material for further connections between the story and the group's interpretation of the story.

The presence of a caring adult who guides the children through the stories, asks them questions, and encourages them is essential. According to Cowley (1998), 'the facilitator doesn't simply assist others to embark on a journey, but journeys with them, not necessarily within the context of the metaphor but certainly through the process' (p. 12). In the next section, I will address guidelines to assist the facilitator.

Guidelines for the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is paramount. They choose the stories and guide the children through the drama structures, create and maintain the group contract, and carefully assess the needs of each child and the group.

The Contract

Ann Cattanach (1994) states that if children are going to use play to understand, the facilitator must structure the activity so that the children are clear about the purpose of the play, know the rules and want to participate. During the first few sessions, I discuss and establish the contract with the group and will refer back to it when the rules need to be re-addressed. In her book, *Wings to Fly: Bringing Theatre Arts to Students with Special Needs*, Sally Bailey (1993) keeps her rules brief and concrete; for example, listen to whoever is talking, respect the ideas of others and follow directions. The task of maintaining safety in the group yet respecting each child's individuality has been the most challenging aspect of my work. If a particular child has difficulty following a rule, I clearly explain to her which rule she has broken and the consequences, but then discuss the progress she has made and her value to the group.

Alida Gersie and Nancy King (1990) state that the facilitator's responsibilities are: to introduce and instruct in ways that help the group members respond; create an

environment that is free of judgement; encourage and support the development of each person's unique voice; help members connect, and ensure that each person's contribution is heard and acknowledged with respect to content and context. I integrate many of these responsibilities into my facilitation of the drama structures. For example, I often request that the children each express how their character is unique or describe what they see in their imaginations. In addition, the characters and events within the picture book stories often encounter themes related to fairness, being unique and respecting others. Therefore, the children can explore and comment on these themes firsthand in the safety of the drama explorations.

Assessment and Evaluation

As a drama therapist, I am constantly gathering information from my observations of children's play, responding to it and adjusting my interventions accordingly. Vivian Gussin Paley (1990) also acknowledges that the 'learning' contract with her students is always expanding and shifting. She studies children at play and attempts to figure out how their play helps them solve their problems. I likewise pay attention to how the children respond to the stories and where their energy is focused during the dramatic exploration. These observations could indicate which emotional themes the children feel safe exploring, lead into a particular lesson, or provide the facilitator with clues to the children's interests.

Within my story explorations, the children are free to experience a variety of physical movements, social relationships, roles, artwork, and storytelling. I monitor these activities by taking notes, using scales, or checklists. Phil Jones (1996) provides a variety of assessment and evaluation measures in his book. These include facial

expressions, body gestures, movement through space, and mimetic abilities. Sue Jennings (1999) also provides a variety of play check lists that monitor the child's play styles and the number of risks they are taking to explore new play.

Assessment and evaluation can be effectively achieved within the story explorations. In Eric Carle's (1969), *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* example, the teacher was thrilled to hear the children name flowers, as these were a part of her current vocabulary lesson. A way to use Eric Carle's story for evaluation is to invite the children to suggest what they "ate" during their group experience, which helped transform them into butterflies. The facilitator could provide them with a list of "food" items such as making a new friend, destroying a monster, creating an art project, and any other group accomplishments. Within the pleasure of the story, the children can playfully reflect on their experiences and appreciate their achievements.

The Children's Journey

The path that the group decides to follow depends on a variety of shifting factors: the children's individual personalities, experiences, preferences, and their level of energy. Paley (1998) says that she cannot find her direction as a teacher without a classroom full of children to give her clues. With her group, she followed the lead of one charismatic little girl named Reeny, who fell in love with one of Lionni's characters, Frederick the artistic mouse. When I conduct a therapy group, I usually inform myself about the each child's past and present circumstances. However, it really isn't until I have them moving and playing in front of me that I start to 'follow the scent' of the group.

For me, finding and nurturing a group culture is the most exciting and yet the most frustrating aspect of working with groups. It is like predicting the weather; it could be sunny, rainy, stormy, cloudy, cold, and hot (sometimes, all in the same session!). You can never be one hundred percent sure what type of weather you may encounter, but you can be sure that there will be some weather of one kind or another. I don't like to think of the groups having "good" or "bad" days, as the children might need to experience a fluctuation of emotions. The benefit of my experience has given me the knowledge that you gain a better understanding of your group's experience once it is over, and my biggest mistake was judging or condemning my groups too quickly.

Certain theorists have attempted to identify predictable long-term trends or paths of children's play groups. For example, Siepker and Kandaras (1985) describe the stages of group formation in children as preparation, exploration, anxiety, cohesion, and termination. I found that some of these theoretical interpretations have been helpful to me in noticing certain processes and offering guidelines that I normally would not consider. To review the theories of group formation at this point would go beyond the scope of this paper, but I do suggest reading books on this subject.

Although the weather might seem unpredictable, we know what weather can happen and how to best prepare for it. As a drama therapist, I find that stories and dramatic play are very effective in guiding, containing, and validating the variety of emotions that children experience. I have found it preferable to begin with the stories that contain the most sensory and movement activities because they are concrete, predictable, and easy for all the children to enjoy. I also find that I am constantly searching for stories that address the issues of endings and saying good-bye (which all

groups have to face). Children in therapy often have experienced the endings of significant relationships in abrupt and chaotic ways, such as divorce, death, or being taken into foster care (Cattanach, 1994). In my model, much of the process of saying good-bye can be done through the metaphor, which might help children experience endings more gradually, gently, and respectfully.

To finish this section, I would like to end with a quote from Vivian Gussin Paley, who reminds us over-ambitious, problem-solving rescuer types to approach children with more moderation and respect for their life journeys.

“Problems are not meant to be solved. They are ours to practice on, to explore the possibilities with, to help us study cause and effect. Important issues can’t be solved with one grand plan – or in one school year. Some are worked at for a lifetime, returning in different disguises, requiring fresh insights”.

(Paley, 1990; p. 80)

Finding the picture books and creating the story structures has been personally rewarding. I have designed the following bibliography to offer suggestions, but I encourage facilitators to adapt the structures to best respect the needs of their groups.

PART II

CHAPTER THREE

“PLAYING AND FEELING GOOD”: SENSORY AND MOVEMENT STORIES

Physical play helps children explore and control their bodies and sensory play allows them to experiment with how they perceive the world. Children engage in this type of play when they roll (physical) or dip their hands into putty (tactile/sensory). Through body movements, children also begin to express themselves and make contact with others (Jones, 1996).

According to Sue Jennings (1993), children need to be held and stimulated with sufficient nurture from their carers so they may flourish and develop. Unfortunately, some children are neglected, over-protected or physically mistreated. These painful circumstances often prevent children from experiencing sufficient amounts of physical or sensory play. The absence of play causes these abused children to feel awkward in their bodies and overwhelmed by their senses. This feeling of insecurity could prevent these children from taking the necessary risks that most of us need to take to develop confidence.

Jennings (1999) defines exploratory play involving the senses and the body movements as ‘embodiment play’. She advises that the proper course of therapy in these instances is to offer children many positive and safe body experiences.

“Often the emphasis in treatment is too much on attempted disclosure rather than the repair and re-parenting that is needed to provide a nurturing embodiment experience. Work with the body is important to re-establish touch, trust, and later creativity. This process may take a long time and, for the child who has suffered undue violence, requires working and waiting with patience.”

(Jennings, 1993; 35-6)

When Ann Cattanach (1992) sees children in therapy she usually brings tactile materials such as play doh, sticky balls, and slime. By using these materials, she finds

that children regress to babyhood and play as messily as possible. Children, who want to express anger but are unable to use words, can find a means of expression by squeezing, pounding, and mixing tactile materials. In this way, children can expend pent up energy and gain control over their world. In the same vein, children who desire nurturing can experience this by being wrapped in a blanket, pretending to eat a delicious and full meal, or by being guided through an imaginary warm bubbly bath.

The following stories provide a group with an invitation to explore the abilities of their bodies and their senses. Children are encouraged to move in a variety of ways such as crawling like a caterpillar and fluttering like a butterfly in Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969). In *The Ghost's Dinner* (Duquenois, 1994) they can describe the colours, tastes, sounds, smells, and tactile sensations of a good meal. In *Piggies* (Wood, 1991) they can explore the sensations of hot, cold, dirty and clean along with the pigs. These guided dramatic explorations also expose the children to positive experiences of nurturing and growth within the safety of the group.

Title: The Very Hungry Caterpillar

Author: Carle, Eric
Year: 1969
Publisher: New York: Philomel Books

Themes: **Growth and Nurturance**

Summary: This story is an account of a newly hatched and very hungry caterpillar's journey to become a butterfly. The book begins with a tiny egg resting on a leaf in the light of the moon. The following morning, the egg hatches and out comes a very hungry caterpillar. It eats its way through an apple, two pears, three plums, four strawberries, and five oranges on each of the consecutive weekdays. Finally, on Saturday, it binges on junk food and gets a stomachache. On Sunday, it nibbles through one leaf and feels better. At this point, the caterpillar is very big and ready to make its cocoon. It remains in its hard brown cocoon for two weeks. At last the caterpillar emerges from its cocoon, but it is no longer a caterpillar. It is a beautiful butterfly.

Therapeutic Value : This story provides children with an opportunity to experience growth. It explores birth (emergence), the importance of food, the safety and rest experienced within the cocoon, and re-entry into the world as a butterfly. The story also explores a variety of actions such as popping out of an egg, crawling, eating, and flying. The story lists the days as the caterpillar eats and grows, and claims that it takes more than two weeks before the butterfly can emerge from the cocoon. In this way, the story illustrates that growth can occur on the outside and on the inside and that it happens over time.

Through its use of repetitive refrains and reference to the days of the week, this picture book allows children to quickly predict and master its story sequence. For

example, at the end of every weekday the story repeats the phrase “..and the caterpillar was *still hungry*” and even during the first exposure to the story, children will repeat the phrase along with the storyteller. The children also enjoy the colourful and interactive illustrations; the pages themselves are of varying length and have holes punched through them where the caterpillar ate the food.

To explore the story using drama, the facilitator can invite all the children to pretend to be the caterpillar as it grows into a butterfly. Scattered about a prescribed play space, the children are instructed to curl up into a ball and become small little eggs. The facilitator then guides the children to grow slowly inside their eggs and pop out. The group might crawl freely through the room to search for things to eat on their own initiative, or these actions can be led by the facilitator. The eating spree ends with the caterpillar experiencing a stomachache and the relief of eating through a green leaf.

At this point, the children are told that their caterpillar has now grown very big and is ready to make its cocoon. The facilitator can tell the children that their caterpillar is changing and then slowly recite each of the twelve days as the children nestle in their cocoons. When they emerge as beautiful butterflies, the facilitator encourages them to spread their wings and explore a variety of flying styles. If possible, supply the children with scarves to wrap themselves in while they enact their cocoons and to use as butterfly wings once they emerge.

The facilitator guides the butterflies through the landscape, landing on trees and houses, and invites the children to describe what they see. To close the exploration, the facilitator requests that all the butterflies land in a field of flowers or somewhere they think they will be safe. In their safe place, the children are guided to rest and conclude

the role-play. To consolidate their experience, the children can draw a picture of their butterfly in the place where it landed.

Title: The Ghost's Dinner

Author: Duquennoy, Jacques
Year: 1994
Publisher: New York: Golden Books

Themes: **Nurturance and Friendship**

Summary: This is a story about a ghost named Henry who invites six of his ghost friends over for a colourful and magical full course dinner party. The dinner starts with Henry offering his friends a variety of juices, such as passion fruit, sour cherry, very berry, lemonade, and spinach juice. Once the ghosts drink the juice, SURPRISE, they all magically change into the same colour as the juice they just drank! They say: "Look at us. We're so colourful!" The fun continues through all of the courses of the meal. All of the ghosts are transformed into green leafy salad, yellow Swiss cheese (with many holes), and rosy pink salmon. Henry then serves his guests a "surprise" dessert that turns everyoneinvisible. His friends find this very amusing and decide to stay invisible as they wash and dry the dishes. The ghosts drink some hot chocolate, which turns them all a light brown. The ghosts then wonder how they can turn white again. Henry suggests that they drink some milk, and suddenly, they are themselves again. At the end of the story Henry goes missing, but he reappears out of the kitchen with a big BOO! The perfect end to a ghost dinner.

Therapeutic Value: I adore this story as it combines magic and fun with the very simple and safe activity of participating in a social meal. The first scene has Henry magically passing through a wall (as ghosts do), but getting his drink tray stuck and having to pass

it through the doorway. This style of playfulness and predictability invites the children to immediately engage in the story. When the soup is served, Henry warns that it is very hot and tells his friends to be careful. Hence, the story offers the children the opportunity to witness the joys of having a meal with caring friends. The children are also invited to recall a wide range of sensory experiences, such as colours, tastes, and textures. The direct relationship between eating a certain type of food and then turning that colour and texture brings the sensory quality of food instantly to life. The story also addresses the experience of invisibility and transformation in a playful forum and safely offers the children a way to return.

To enact the story the children first can be invited to stand in a circle. The facilitator can then suggest that group members are slowly beginning to change into ghosts and can start leading the children around the circle, making ooing and boing sounds and waving their arms. If a mat or a tablecloth is available, this can be placed on the floor to represent a table and offer the children a concrete space where the action will take place. The children are invited to sit around the mat by the facilitator who can take on the role of Henry and announce plans for the meal.

The variety of juices are served first. Depending on the size and the experience of the group, the children can be invited one at a time to choose a flavour, drink the beverage, and then announce what colour they have turned. This allows children to express their individuality. Alternatively, the entire group or smaller groups can drink certain flavours and turn the colours together which provides children with the safety and guidance to try new experiences along with other children.

The play can then follow the story with the children eating all the different types of food and commenting on their colour and texture changes. The exploration of eating the dessert and becoming invisible might be enjoyable for some children and, as they wash and dry the dishes, the children can comment on all the things they could do if they were invisible. The facilitator invites one of the group members to get the hot chocolate that turns everyone light brown. The question of restoring the ghosts' white colour can be raised and the children will probably most joyfully give the answer "MILK".

Once the children are transformed into white ghosts, they are asked to stand up and once again follow the facilitator around the room making ghost sounds. A fun suggestion is to have the children crouch down and cover their eyes, the facilitator then counts to three, and the entire group pops up and says "BOO"!!!! In order to acknowledge each child's individuality, the facilitator might ask the children what they would have to drink or eat to turn back into their original skin or clothing colour. The facilitator then leads them back into the circle where they spin around, say their names, and transform back into themselves. The children can then reflect on their experience by drawing a picture of a moment from the story.

Title: Piggies

Author: Wood, Audrey
 Illustrator: Wood, Don
 Year: 1991
 Publisher: New York: Red Wagon Books

Themes: Sensory Exploration through Finger Play

Summary: This story draws on the idea that our fingers are piggies. Page by page, the story introduces the reader to ten pigs that stand on the fingertips of a pair of little hands. There are two fat piggies (thumbs), two smart piggies (the index fingers), two long

piggies (the middle fingers), two silly piggies (the ring fingers), and two wee little piggies (the pinkies). The child's right hand has female pigs and the left has male pigs. Once the piggies are introduced, the story explains that sometimes the piggies are hot, cold, clean, and dirty. Each of these sensory conditions is experienced by all of the pigs; for example, when the piggies are cold they are all shown wearing winter attire and playing in the snow. At the end of the story, the child's hands perform a finger poem. The pigs skip down the tummy, dance on the toes, run away to hide, and finally by the child putting each finger together, the piggies meet for two fat, smart, long, silly and wee kisses goodnight.

Therapeutic Value: This book is engaging, as the pigs are very charismatic. They react and joyfully interact with each other in a variety of comical ways as they experience each sensation. In this manner, children are exposed to an entire range of responses, to the experience of being hot, cold, dirty, and clean and the pleasure of playing with others. For example, the smart female pig always reads, even though she is covered in snow, mud, or soap bubbles, whereas the other piggies engage in a variety of playful activities. The story begins and ends by listing the piggies, which makes it predictable and reassuring for the children.

The illustrations show each of the pigs engaged in a variety of activities appropriate for each of the sensory experiences. The facilitator can invite each child to choose which pig they would like to play and narrate each sensory scene. For example, during the 'hot' scene the facilitator can suggest that the pigs lie in the sun, swim, fan themselves, and have a picnic. When it is 'cold', the children can bundle themselves, throw imaginary snowballs, and go sliding. Getting dirty encourages children to roll,

make mud pies, and to get as dirty as possible, whereas the bath scene will invite children to play with bubbles, search for the soap, and scrub themselves clean. This type of play encourages children to reflect on their physical responses to being hot, cold, dirty, and clean. In line with respect to the picture book, the play could end with repeating the goodnight finger poem.

This book provides children with an invitation to play with fingers. In my experience, I have found that finger play helps children focus and contain their energy. After reading the story, the facilitator could invite the children to perform and repeat the actions of the finger play in the book that leads the group to go to sleep. If the children respond positively, the facilitator could engage the group in other fingerplays, which can be found in *The Eentsy, Weentsy Spider: Fingerplays and Action Rhymes* (1991) by Joanna Cole and Stephanie Calmenson. Various other activities that involves fingers include finger painting, finger puppet construction and play, and exploring sensory materials such as play doh, sand, or slime.

CHAPTER FOUR

“I’M SAFE”: STORIES ABOUT FINDING A SAFE PLACE

Exploring the border between safety and danger through games or playing house seems to be a popular theme with most children (Cattanach, 1994; Jennings; 1999; and Measroch, 2000). Yelling “I’m Safe” is a reassuring reward after a multitude of perilous efforts to get to ‘home base’ in the game of hide-and-go-seek. As a child growing up in Montreal, if the snow was deep and sticky enough, I would make a fort which no one could enter except my best friend. Hence, through games and house play, children begin to experiment with both the tension between safety and risk and the structures or containers necessary to create safety.

According to Ann Cattanach (1992, 1994), the opportunity for abused children to explore safety through play is extremely important. Once a child is harmed by the person who is supposed to protect them, they are confronted by a paradox of feelings for their carer, such as anger, fear and love and abandonment. When the boundaries between safety and danger become unclear, the child might feel so helpless that it is difficult to begin to re-make a world where she feels completely safe. Therefore, the most challenging task for a child in therapy is to dare to trust enough to let go of the past and hope for a better future (Cattanach, 1994).

Various picture books address the threats to safety that deeply concern children. Their predictable structures and the fact that they are told in the company of others make these threats to safety easier to confront. By physically closing the book, a child might be communicating that they are not ready for the story. In this way even a book can become a symbol or a container for their fear, which they can slowly choose to confront

and tackle page by page. When picture books are shared with a group, they provide a means by which children can share their experiences of vulnerability and rejoice in their ability to withstand adversity.

The stories I have chosen for this chapter approach the issue of safety as it relates to a physical place (a house) and caring relationships. *A House for Hermit Crab* (Carle, 1987) follows a crab's journey to find and decorate a new shell home, *Owl Babies* (Waddell, 1992) explores the safety that a mother can supply, and *Harry the Dirty Dog* (Zion, 1956) addresses the compromises that children must make to assure their safety. Within the 'safety' of these stories and the play that follows, children can explore ways to take risks, grow and experience comfort.

Title: A House for Hermit Crab

Author: Carle, Eric
Year: 1987
Publisher: New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers

Themes: **Growth; Finding and Creating a Home**

Summary: This tale begins with the central character, Hermit Crab, discovering that he has outgrown his present shell-home. Eventually, he finds a big strong house and moves in, but he feels that it is a bit too plain. Gradually, month by month, Hermit Crab meets groups of sea creatures and requests that someone please volunteer to help him decorate his new house. Soon a beautiful sea anemone, a handsome blue starfish, and some rusty coral agree to come and live with him. He politely asks a snail to help him clean, a spiky sea urchin to help him protect, and a lantern fish to help him provide light for his house. Finally, he finds some pebbles and, with their permission, he rearranges them into a wall. "Now my house is perfect" he cheers. Unfortunately, Hermit Crab soon realizes that over the year he has grown and now has to leave his present home and all his friends. With mixed feelings he eventually turns his home over to a smaller crab who promises to be good to his friends. To finish the story, Hermit Crab finds another empty shell that is plain, but so full of 'decorating and friendship' possibilities.

Therapeutic Value: The story Hermit Crab captures both the joys and tribulations of growth and change. He is frightened to explore the ocean floor when he first realizes that he has to move, but he also recognizes that his present home is too small. Once Hermit Crab steps out of his shell he feels vulnerable, but soon his determination and creativity are activated and he is swept away with the excitement of establishing himself.

With the kind and generous cooperation of the other sea creatures, his new house soon becomes a very comfortable home. These characters expose children to the variety of conditions that might be needed to create a pleasant and safe home, such as cleaning, protecting, beautifying and lighting. When Hermit Crab realizes that he has outgrown his new shell and needs to move, he confronts the painful realization that this will also prompt the end of his current relationships. Hence, this story touches on the uncomfortable task of leaving friends behind. Hermit Crab then steps onto the ocean floor, but this time he isn't afraid and quickly is inspired by his new creative plans. In this way the story provides children with the reassuring idea that the discomforts and fears of change will soon be rewarded by the excitement of growth.

The facilitator can begin the story exploration by inviting the children to move as each of the eight different characters starting with Hermit Crab. The sea creatures are quite varied and will encourage the children to explore many different styles of movement. Once the children feel at ease with the story characters, the facilitator can invite them to perform the story. Individual children can play the roles of Hermit Crab and the six sea creatures or all of the children can play Hermit Crab and use puppets or drawings as the sea creatures.

For a larger group, the facilitator might lead the enactment as Hermit Crab with a couple of children as Hermit Crabs as well. As the Hermit Crab actors pass by the other sea creatures, they politely request permission of one or more to join them. At the end of Hermit Crab's shell decorating journey, there can be quite an interesting variety and mixture of pretty decorations, protectors, cleaners, and illuminators. At this time, Hermit Crab might also realize that he is too big for his home and that he has to move on

and now needs to thank and say good-bye to his new friends. Here the children could be invited to express what Hermit Crab might say or do for his friends and how all the characters might feel. From this discussion, the facilitator can help the group decide on a way the characters can say good-bye and the group can enact it.

The enactment can end with all the children crawling along in a circle pretending to be Hermit Crab happily searching for and finding a new home and then gathering new friends as decorations using their imaginations. After the homes are done, they can be invited to settle down and go to sleep and slowly turn back into children. After a limited time the facilitator instructs the children to draw or model their new Hermit Crab home.

Title: Owl Babies

Author: Waddell, Martin
 Year: 1992
 Publisher: London: Walker Books

**Themes: Coping with temporary parental absence;
 Honouring sibling resiliency.**

Summary: This story takes place in a very dark forest in the middle of the night. Three fluffy white baby owl siblings wake up to discover that their mother is missing and that they are alone. The three siblings are large, medium and small-sized, which seems to suggest that they are different ages. The two larger siblings are a bit frightened by their mother's absence, but reason that she must be hunting and will soon return. The smallest sibling simply and consistently repeats "I want my mommy". During the story the chicks leave their nest to wait in different branches (small, medium and large), but then decide it would be wiser to all sit on the same branch. From that branch they huddle close together and all peer in different directions into the dark forest. When the mother finally returns safely to the nest the two larger chicks comment on how they

were scared but knew she would be all right. The smaller chick simply cuddles her and says “I love you”.

Therapeutic Value: This simple picture book with its images and prose isolates and explores the profound fear experienced as a result of separation. Within the safe confines of their nest, these three chicks contemplate the fear of being unsure about their mother’s safety and their desperate longing for her. Since the story occurs at night, the images of the white owl chicks stand out against the dark forest background. This seems to call attention to the contrast between their vulnerability and the dark scary night. The conversations between the chicks express both insecure “what if” worries and confident reassuring statements about the quick return of their mother. The image of the owl siblings huddled together on the branch models how the siblings are capable of supporting each other through their mother’s absence.

The story does not try to solve their problem by prematurely explaining that the mother is hunting, nor does it have to add any other villainous elements to prove that the chicks are at risk. It simply honours the incredible discomfort of the baby owls’ temporary separation from their mother. This story provides children with the message that the safety and comfort of our physical homes relies heavily on the presence of loving and responsible relationships.

After gathering the children in a circle, the facilitator can begin by assigning “sound” roles such as wind blowing, trees creaking, and wolves howling, so the children simultaneously can recreate the atmosphere of the scary forest. If this activity is well received, certain children can be given some of the lines that the baby owls repeat, such

as “I want my mom”. Once the children are comfortable with the roles of the forest and the baby owls, the facilitator might invite them to act out the story.

The story can be explored by assigning the role of the forest to half of the group, the babies to the other half and the role of the mother to one child. If blankets or scarves are available, they can be used to construct a comfortable nest for all of the baby owls to sit in and the forest players to sit around. The drama might start with the mother cuddling her chicks as they sleep, but soon realizing that she needs to leave the nest. Once the mother leaves, the forest can be cued to start creaking and howling as the baby owls wake up.

The facilitator can join and be a baby owl in the nest to demonstrate to the children ways of being scared, worried, rational or brave. The child playing the mother owl will be told to return after a set period of time. This brief scene can be repeated with the children trying out different coping strategies and even different animal families. To end the role-play the facilitator can invite all the children into the nest and take on the role of the mother owl as she congratulates her chicks for their bravery and tucks them into bed. After a limited time, the children are instructed to open their eyes and be children once again.

Title: **Harry the Dirty Dog**

Author: Zion, Gene
 Illustrator: Bloy Graham, Maragret
 Year: 1956
 Publisher: New York: Harper and Row

Themes: **Running away and returning home**

Summary: This story begins with Harry, a small white dog with black spots, burying his scrub brush and running away from home because he really doesn't like to take

baths. He goes into the city where he plays on the street, at the railway station, and on a construction site, and gets very, very dirty. Finally, he jumps down a coal chute and gets the dirtiest of all; he changes from a white dog with black spots into a black dog with white spots. Harry grows hungry and cold and returns home, but to his dismay, his family doesn't recognize him. Harry tries all of his familiar tricks to convince them that he is the real Harry, but he fails. Discouraged, Harry starts to walk away, but then he digs up the scrub brush and runs into the tub. The family washes Dirty Harry and discovers that he is in fact their dog. The story ends with Harry, in his favourite cozy place, dreaming about getting dirty with the scrub brush hidden under his pillow.

Therapeutic Value: The story provides children with an opportunity to compare the freedom and uncertainty of being independent to the nurture and obligations of relationships. The story gives children the permission to explore their autonomy, but honours the importance of belonging and the compromises that sometimes need to be made in order to maintain family relationships. Harry makes the decision to return home as he worries that his family thinks that he has really run away. In this way, the story respects Harry's awareness that his family is important and acknowledges his efforts to be accepted. Although Harry does eventually take a bath in order to be recognized, the ending playfully accepts the pleasure Harry took in getting dirty and that he still might need to control the whereabouts of his scrub brush.

After sharing the story, the children can first be asked to sit in a circle. The drama can start with the facilitator introducing a magic doggie bone that helps children change into any type of dog they wish. As dogs, some children might be inclined to run around. Therefore, before the transformation, it might be useful to explain to the

children that they should follow the directions of the facilitator to keep the activity fun and safe. The facilitator begins the story by cupping his hand to his ear and pretending to hear the bathtub running. Quickly, he guides the children to find the scrub brush and bury it. Then the children can follow the facilitator to another section of the room to enact Harry's adventure.

In the city, Harry rolls in the dirt, crawls through tunnels, plays hide and seek, and slides down a chute to get dirty. While the children pretend to play in the dirt, the facilitator remarks that they are becoming dirtier and dirtier. Once the 'dirty' play is done, the facilitator can comment that the children are so dirty that they can no longer be recognized. The children can then start to worry about their families and feel hungry. The facilitator points out that the city is becoming dark and cold, and then invites them to recall some good aspects of being at home with their families. The facilitator then suggests to the children that they can return home by following him to the original play area.

When the children return home, the facilitator offers them the opportunity to play a variety of tricks such as singing, dancing, rolling over and playing dead, but pretends not to recognize them. The children could be guided to perform all the tricks together or they could perform solo tricks or tricks in pairs. Finally, the facilitator might sit in a quandary until a child hopefully recalls that they have to recover the brush and have a bath to be recognized. The children can then have a wonderful pretend bath. Once the children are clean, the facilitator joyfully acknowledges them, serves some pretend food, provides a blanket to cuddle, and invites them to recall one event of their day. To

conclude the play the facilitator suggests that the children pretend to sleep, then touches each of them with the magic bone and says their names so they can be children again.

CHAPTER FIVE

“HERE COMES TROUBLE”: STORIES ABOUT CONFLICT

Some degree of conflict and a certain amount of ‘getting in trouble’ are probably quite normal events in the lives of most children. Disagreements, arguments and fights can occur between family members, friends, schoolmates, and teachers. It is difficult to predict or assume to know how these conflicts impact the life of any child. Regardless, most children are very attentive to unfair decisions, being tricked or frightened, and getting angry. They often yearn to understand and need a safe way to explore these explosive situations.

By reading and exploring stories about conflict, children can address challenging life circumstances and gain control over them. Stories about conflict offer children a variety of good and bad characters and situations. Often children will gain mastery over a story by repeating it over and over again. Once the children have mastered the story, the painful emotions it calls forth might lose their power or intensity. In this way, stories about conflict act as containers or pretend scenarios where children can express their emotions without the risk of being harmed or harming others (Cattanach, 1997).

Children who come to therapy often require a space to express their hurt and sort out their strong emotions such as anger, pain, and fear. Ann Cattanach (1992) states that it is the therapists’ role to hear these distressing stories, accept what has happened to the child, tell them it wasn’t their fault, and help them understand that they are not evil. She suggests that children need the opportunity to be accepted for the good and the bad that they have experienced. Some stories of conflict relieve abused or traumatized children of the feeling of guilt and shame and that they are not alone in their misery. Children

like to know that others also experience events just as horrible as they do and sometimes experience even worse circumstances (Cattanach, 1997).

Just over the horizon of conflict live the wonders of fairness, compromise, problem solving, resilience, and forgiveness. Any good story requires balance and hope when dealing with conflict. In this way they offer children an opportunity to experience the consequences and the resolution of a conflict. Within the picture books in this chapter, children can make a monster appear and disappear in *Go Away, Big Green Monster* (Emberley, 1992), observe the trickery of a spider and how he is outwitted in *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock* (Kimmel, 1988), and in *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) know that after a bad day a hot meal can be really comforting.

Title: Go Away, Big Green Monster

Author: Embereley, Ed
Year: 1992
Publisher: Toronto: Little, Brown & Company

Themes: **Making a Monster Disappear**

Summary: This die-cut book introduces a monster by slowly adding its facial characteristics. As each page is turned, the child discovers that a monster is being described and created. The monster starts out as two big yellow eyes, and then continues to grow as a long bluish-green nose, a big red mouth with sharp white teeth, two squiggly ears, scraggly purple hair, and a big scary green face are added. The face of the monster is made of a variety of bright colours that stand out against a black background. Once the child reaches the centre of the book, the monster's face is complete. The text then announces "But ... YOU DON'T SCARE ME! So, GO AWAY ...". At this point the child can dismantle the entire monster facial feature by facial feature and page by page. Once the monster has been sent away, the text states "... and DON'T COME BACK! ... Until I say so!"

Therapeutic Value: This book offers children a chance to observe and control the appearance and disappearance of a monster. The story introduces children to the notion that a monster does not only have to be a scary whole, but can be broken down and made more manageable. The text also provides the child with simple and strong words to order the monster to go away or come back. This story can be very self-affirming for the child. In a bookstore, I observed a five year old child energetically read and re-read this story employing a more confident voice with each repetition.

Reading the book can be empowering. I suggest that all of the children, either in pairs, in small groups, or in a chorus involving the entire group, have a chance to read the book aloud. Each group member can be encouraged with “Oos, Ahhs, and Oh Nos!” at the monster and affirming cheers as he or she makes the monster disappear. The facilitator can then call attention to the fact that certain monsters can be built and taken apart. Using a variety of coloured play dohs or construction paper, the group of children could cooperatively create a monster by each adding one feature by turn. Consequently, each child can also take away the monster’s features with the accompanying “Go away big mouth!” These features do not only have to be limited to the monster’s physical aspects, but can include behaviours and attitudes (for example: yelling, stealing, being stupid, etc).

Depending on the size and interest of the group, the children can then be given the opportunity to create their own monsters to assemble and dismantle, either individually or in pairs. The activity can conclude with the children organizing a ‘disappearing’ monster museum. If each individual child has his or her own monster, the facilitator can encourage the children to consider how they are going to make their monster disappear. Does it mean that their monster is going to be put away for today? Or, does it mean it is going to be put in the garbage and never come back? Usually, adults make the decisions about whether to keep or throw away their child’s possessions. Hence, this story will offer the children a chance to consider the consequences of keeping objects versus throwing them away. The activity can end with the children deciding what they would like to do with their monster until all the monsters have ...disappeared!

Title: **Anansi and the
Moss-Covered Rock**

Author: Kimmel, Eric
Year: 1988
Publisher: New York: Holiday House

Themes: **Playing Tricks**

Summary: This story begins with Anansi, the spider, coming upon a moss-covered stone, and he soon discovers, through experience, that it is magical. Whenever anyone comes along and says the magic words "Isn't this a strange moss-covered rock," that person faints for one hour. Anansi gets very excited and knows just how to use this magic rock. He visits Lion, who has some delicious yams (Anansi loves yams but is too lazy to pick them himself). He invites Lion to go for a cool walk in the forest and leads him directly to the rock where Anansi prompts him to say the magic words causing Lion to faint. After an hour Lion returns home with his head spinning and is sad to see that all his yams are gone. Anansi plays the same trick on every single animal in the forest.

All this time, however, Bush Deer has been watching and decides to teach Anansi a lesson. She gathers coconuts and allows Anansi to invite her to go for a walk. In Anansi's best effort to get her to say the magic words, he says them himself and passes out. All the animals go to Anansi's house and retrieve their food. The story concludes by sharing that Anansi was caught this time, but he is still playing tricks to this day.

Therapeutic Value: This picture book tells of one adventure of Anansi, who is a popular trickster character from the West African and Caribbean traditions. This story

allows children to explore the benefits and disadvantages of playing tricks. The story's playful representation of Anansi might encourage the reader to be more considerate and less harsh about his motives. In this way, the story introduces the possibility that we can at times all be tricksters or be on the receiving end of a trick. The story interestingly brings together a variety of trickster imagery, such as magic, falling unconscious, and being dizzy. This calls attention to the fact that tricks can be fun, risky, and painful. The Bush Deer is small and quiet, but she benefits from these traits because they help her observe Anansi's tricks. The illustrations reinforce her resilience, as throughout the entire first part of the book she is present in each picture peeking through the leaves.

The story can be explored by acting all the events and characters, or it can be explored focusing only on one part. For example, the facilitator can invite all the children to pretend to be the Bush Deer. The facilitator first lets the children find all of the Bush Deer's hiding places in the illustrations. Sitting in a circle, they conduct a mock 'Bush Deer' meeting to discuss the events of Anansi's trick playing and what can be done. At this point, all the Bush Deers can imagine different types of food that could lure Anansi and place them in the centre of the circle.

For the following scene, the facilitator plays the role of Anansi using a spider puppet. The Anansi puppet becomes excited about the objects and invites the children to walk in the forest. Using a scarf to represent the rock, the facilitator might then try to trick the children into saying the magic words. Finally, the Anansi puppet says the words and falls down. The children return all the stolen objects to the other animals and reassemble in the original circle. The facilitator asks the children how the other animals reacted to getting their food back and what they thought about Anansi. If the animals

were generous and donated some food, perhaps the activity could end with a delicious meal and a nap.

Title: Where the Wild Things Are

Author: Sendak, Maurice
Year: 1963
Publisher: New York: Harper Collins Publishers

Themes: **Being Mischievous**

Summary: A small boy named Max decides to wear his wolf suit and cause trouble around the house (nailing holes into the wall and chasing the dog). When his mother calls him “Wild Thing,” he talks back to her so she sends him to his bedroom without supper. Slowly and quite magically, Max’s room starts to transform into a wild forest and a whole world beyond for him to explore. Soon a boat appears and Max sails away to a far distant shore where the Wild Things live. When the huge roaring monsters first approach Max, he controls them all by staring at them without blinking once. They make Max king of the Wild Things and together they all have a ‘wild rumpus’ of howling under the moon, swinging from trees, and just plain stomping. Max ends the rumpus by sending all the monsters to bed without their supper. He then starts to feel lonely and longs to be where someone loves him best of all. Beckoned by the comforting smells of far away, he says good-bye to the monsters and sails back to his room to find his supper waiting for him.

Therapeutic Value: Where the Wild Things Are is a classic picture book. On the surface it is a story about a boy who gets sent to his room without supper. The transformation of his room and his subsequent journey to where the wild things are opens the door to a wide variety of possibilities and scenarios to explore. This could be a

story about anger, punishment, escape, triumph, or forgiveness. The flexibility of its imagery provides an open arena for children to explore the emotions that the story stirs in them. However, in the end, the events return the children to the safety of home and a hot meal.

One way to explore this story as a group can be to begin with the children standing in a circle. The facilitator could then invite each of them to think about what they would do if they were Max. The entire group then simultaneously puts on Max's wolf suit, pretends to be Max and acts out some mischievous behaviours. Perhaps after the last suggestion, the facilitator declares that Max was being bad and on the count of three everyone says "Wild Thing, Go to Your Room!" The children could then be invited to sit and help the facilitator describe the room as it transforms into a forest and the world beyond. The facilitator can then announce the arrival of the boat and invite the children to climb on board. The trip can be calm or rocky with the children describing what they see, hear, smell and feel.

When the group arrives on land they might be encouraged to imagine each other as the Wild Things and using Max's 'staring without blinking once' trick, control the monsters and announce a 'wild rumpus'. The children can then suggest activities for the rumpus and the group could act them out together. At the end, the facilitator can explain that the monsters are sleeping and that Max is feeling homesick or lonely. At this point, the children can be encouraged to name some things or people that Max might miss. Guided by the smell of supper, the group can return to the boat, wave good-bye to the monsters, and sail home. The journey home can be filled with conversations about examples of good food for supper. When the children arrive back in the original circle,

they can eat their supper and the whole group could end the activity with a unified “I’m done!”

CHAPTER SIX

“HOORAY FOR ME!”: STORIES OF SELF-AWARENESS

Children who have experienced abuse, are coping with a learning disability, or who find themselves in therapy, may have been defined according to the difficulties in their lives by parents, health care professionals, or educators. Sue Jennings (1999) suggests that it is important to address all aspects of the child and not just the vulnerable side which is initially presented to the therapist. She states that far too often therapists see their clients as a collection of problems rather than seeing these challenges as issues within a wider context. It is important to work with children's strengths rather than just with their perceived weaknesses.

In my experience of working with children in difficult situations, I have found that some of them grasp onto roles of strength and power. One boy I worked with embraced his hero/rescuer character so fully that he refused to leave the role and be himself again at the end of a play session. I negotiated with him to take the strength of that character, place it in his heart, and say his own name. I acknowledge that it is important to validate the vulnerability that children experience, but I also realize that they need to celebrate their strengths, their ability to fight back, and their willingness to be helpful.

Taking on the role of the hero, the trickster, or the one that offers a special talent, permits children to experience these roles and explore them (Cattanach, 1994; Neelands, 1990). Ann Cattanach (1997) comments on the benefits of children engaging in heroic roles:

“It can be helpful for the child in therapy to reframe their experiences through their own storymaking, which defines trials and tribulations as the human condition and

the protagonist as heroic. This would seem an extended identity from that of a psychological label or to be endlessly portrayed as the victim rather than the victimized hero on a hopeful quest for honour and the safety of home, however that can be defined.”

(Cattanach, 1997; p. 167-8)

The following stories provide children with the opportunity to explore and expand their abilities by inviting them to play a variety of roles. *Would They Love a Lion* (Denton, 1995) follows a little girl’s imagination as she becomes a variety of animals with varying moods. *Nothing* (Inkpen, 1995) is a story about a lost toy that regains his family and his identity. The story of *Frederick* (1967) tells the tale of a unique heroic mouse who entertains his friends during hibernation. All of these stories give the group permission to call forth and celebrate each child’s sense of resilience and talent.

Title: Would They Love a Lion?

Author: Denton, Kady MacDonald
Year: 1995
Publisher: New York: Kingfisher

Themes: **Exploring Different Temperaments and their
Consequences**

Summary: This book opens, with the main character, Anna, waking up to discover that she is not a bird, as in her dream. With the help of her reversible house coat and her blankets, she decides to pretend to be a bird sitting on a nest. Anna's play initially guides her to explore other animals such as a bear, an elephant, and finally a huge dinosaur. After having scared everyone away as the dinosaur, Anna tries being a rabbit. The rabbit turns out to be lovable, but too quiet, and Anna triumphantly announces that she will be a kitten – a cat – A LION! She then wonders if they (her family) would love a lion. She explains that lions can hide, roar, stalk, pounce, eat fast and run fast. When Anna roars as the lion her whole family jumps. Anna concludes her adventure by needing a rest and finding out that, yes, her family would love a lion.

Therapeutic Value: The text of the story is very simple as it follows Anna's imaginative desires. She confidently goes from one animal to the other, explains why she wants to explore that animal and why she wishes to change. Anna invites the children along as she enacts a procession of animals. The selection of animals is quite varied, exploring a range of emotions, temperaments and personalities. The story also demonstrates how these different animals affect Anna's relationship with her family and what she does in response to their reactions.

The story exploration can begin by having the children call out all the animals and have the entire group embody them together. If the groups requires structure this

enactment can be contained in a circle or, if less direction is necessary, the children can freely roam the space. To help the children really examine the body movements and mannerisms, half of the children can perform the various animals while the others watch and search for new and different ways each animal can be performed. The group can also explore the temperaments of the animals by using sound and movement. This may present children with the possibility that a lion can be fierce and calm. These explorations can offer children a chance to appreciate and expand upon their own temperaments.

The story can be explored further by having the children comment on the reactions that the members of Anna's family have towards her different animals. For example, she shifts from a bear to an elephant when her family doesn't notice the bear. To explore relationships each child can portray an animal expressing a certain temperament, and other members of the group can be invited to approach that animal. The children may be encouraged to share what motivated their animals to react the way they did, and what it was like approaching the animals. This process can address the issue that some children are only acknowledged when they are being bad, and that most of our reactions are related to how other people act towards us.

Once the animal characters have been adequately explored, the group can be invited to be Anna as she wakes up and progresses through all the animals. The facilitator or perhaps some children can play the role of family members. There is also a cute little dog in the story that gets the wits scared out of him after he is roared at by the dinosaur. The story ends with Anna asleep on the couch, so the children can also be

guided back to a sleeping position. The children can then be asked to do some artwork or tell a story about the animal they liked playing the most.

Title: **Nothing**

Author: Inkpen, Mick
Year: 1995
Publisher: London: Hodder Headline Books

Themes: **Journey to find an Identity**

Summary: The reader is introduced to a dingy and tattered stuffed toy buried under a pile of rugs in the attic. It has been there so long that it has forgotten who it is. The toy is called 'Nothing' by one of the house owners as they clean out the attic. Once they have finished they leave the little toy behind on the attic floor. A mouse warns the toy that it will be thrown out by the new people if it stays, and shows the toy a hole to escape through. As the mouse disappears under the floorboards, the toy suddenly recalls that it had a tail too. 'Nothing' escapes to find himself under a starry sky, but he falls down a drainpipe and lands in a garden. After encountering other animals, the toy recalls that it used to have whiskers and stripes, but it still can't remember its identity. A lolling tabby cat named Toby asks the little toy who he is and, instead of explaining, 'Nothing' sobs "I don't know who I am!" The cat takes the raggedy little toy to visit his new home as he had just recently moved (Toby takes 'Nothing' the long way because it was more fun). Once in the house, Toby drops the toy on the lap of his elderly owner, who discovers that 'Nothing' is his old cloth tabby cat named 'Little Toby"! With the help of his elderly owner, Toby gets washed up and repaired and looks as good as new and is soon tucked in with the family's new baby.

Therapeutic Value: This story sensitively shares the hardships that this little forgotten toy experiences as it tries to regain its identity. The images and the text validate the pain and challenges of being lost, forgotten and unkempt. It demonstrates hope and resilience by continuously offering small clues to help 'Nothing' find its identity. Once the toy cat finds its owner and its home, it is cleaned up and mended. The book illustrates the importance of being taken care of and re-accepted by caring family members. These events guide the reader to consider that good health might not be limited to the individual, but depends upon the participation of others. The humble success of this little toy reaffirms the simple reward of being acknowledged and repaired.

To begin the exploration, the facilitator can instruct the children to lie down in the play space and, if available, have blankets or pillows to partially cover each child. The facilitator starts the story by explaining how the children have been buried for what seems like a long while. The children are guided to remove the blanket and start moving slowly. The facilitator then continues to tell the story as the children enact the little toy's adventures. The story offers children the opportunity to crawl through a hole, stare at a sky full of stars, fall down a drainpipe, be led through the neighbourhood, and finally be washed, dried, and repaired. At the end, the children are invited to mention who they (as the toy) would like to be given to. If the children are able, they can create or draw their own little 'Nothing' toy and tell its story.

Title: Frederick

Author: Lionni, Leo
Year: 1967
Publisher: New York: Albert A. Knopf

Themes: Valuing Creativity and Fairness

Summary: Frederick is member of a mouse community that lives in a stone wall near a meadow. The story focuses on the other mice busily gathering all the necessities for the winter months. Every time they pass by Frederick with their mouths full of berries, corn and nuts, they ask him why he isn't working. Frederick answers that he is gathering colours, warmth from the sun and words to help them through the winter. Once the summer is over, the mice all gather into the crevices in the stone wall. When the food runs out, the mice recall what Frederick had said about the sun rays, the colours, and the words; they ask him to share his "supplies". Frederick does so and warms them in the sun, dazzles them with descriptions of colours, and inspires them with his poetry. The story ends with the other mice calling him a poet and Frederick responding "I know it."

Therapeutic Value: This story is a simple attestation to the importance of creativity and the imagination. Facilitators can use its premise to address the importance that creativity and the imagination play in making people feel better. The story also addresses the importance of community and co-operation for survival. It recognizes Frederick's courage to be different and the ability of the group to accept and value his difference.

The children can start the story by enacting the different mice characters. The initial motivation for the exploration can start by emphasizing to the children that winter is coming and they need to prepare. The facilitator guides the enactment 'in-role' as

either a directive leading mouse, a co-working gossip mouse, or a supportive mouse, to explore the children's reaction to Frederick's "not" doing his job. A special space can be created to represent the winter layer with a marked entrance, for example, crawling under a table and then sitting around a mat. The enactment could then involve the children enjoying all the great food, but then slowly the supply is exhausted. This would be a good opportunity to invite children to reflect on how it feels to be hungry and bored.

The facilitator then suggests to the children that they are all creative and imaginative mice who will entertain the community until spring arrives. If some children need a structure for their creative expression, use the story's idea of asking for a pleasant sensory memory (the sweet taste of ice cream, a bumpy bike ride, etc.) and a nature memory (red flowers, big trees, etc.). Finally, the group can create a poem. The enactment ends with the facilitator-in-role mouse asking a child to go out and see if it is spring yet. If so, everyone crawls out of the hole, assemble in a circle and give a big cheer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“I’LL MISS YOU”: STORIES OF LOSS AND SEPARATION

Understanding loss and separation can be challenging and emotional for young children. In their lives they can encounter death and non-death losses. Adjusting to the death of a family member or close friend can be very difficult causing the child worry and grief. Many of the children I have worked with know the unhappy experience of losing a pet. Non-death losses could include the difficulty of moving away from friends and changing schools. One of the saddest moments of my childhood was when we had to cut down our huge willow tree in the backyard. I loved that tree and still recall how powerless I felt watching it being taken down branch by branch.

In her book, *Storymaking and Bereavement*, Alida Gersie (1991) explores the impact that death and loss have on children. She claims that a child’s relationship with death is influenced by their temperament, their life experiences, cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs and the stability of their home environments. Also important are the attitudes that the significant adults in their life have towards speaking about death. Some parents feel that children might become overwhelmed when they hear of death. Parents also might avoid discussing loss with their children because they may have difficulty admitting their own feelings.

When death or separation are experienced in conjunction with an abusive relationship, some might conclude that the child might feel relief. According to Ann Cattanach (1997) no matter how terrible the abuse and hurt of a home situation, to leave the past or a family member behind and adapt to new circumstances can be challenging.

Hence, the process of grief and separation should be sensitively considered in all circumstances.

Gersie (1991) claims that sharing stories about loss offers people the opportunity to share and acknowledge their grief. The following stories approach death and separation from a variety of perspectives. They help children to re-address memories that are associated with the losses in their lives at a controlled pace and at an emotionally safe distance. Gersie (1991) suggests that in avoiding the subject of death we do not offer the children an opportunity to appreciate the value of life. How children understand death profoundly affects the quality of their lives and how they perceive their relationships.

The picture books in this chapter approach death and loss by choosing to celebrate relationships. In *Little Miss Spider* (Kirk, 1999) a small spider's desperate effort to find her absent mother teaches us how care can still come from other relationships. The story of *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (Viorst, 1971) follows a boy's journey to acknowledge his relationship with his cat after its death. *Old Pig* (Wild, 1995) is a touching tale of the close and loving relationship between a grandmother pig and her granddaughter as they spend their last few days together. These stories will hopefully offer children an opportunity to address the issues of loss in their lives in ways that are gentle, supportive and respectful.

Title: Little Miss Spider

Author: Kirk, David
Year: 1999
Publisher: New York: Scholastic Press

Themes: Searching for a lost parent; Accepting Care

Summary: When Little Miss Spider hatches from her egg, she is concerned that her mother is not present and starts to search for her. Little Miss Spider's sad pleas are heard by a beetle named Betty, who offers to help with the search. They ask various other bugs, with no luck until a small plump spider directs Little Miss Spider to a mother who is yellow and black like herself. Unfortunately, she finds out that it is a hungry bird with its hatchlings. At the point Little Miss Spider is about to be fed to the hatchlings, a brave Beetle Betty whisks her away to safety. Beetle Betty then asks Little Miss Spider to remain with her. Little Miss Spider agrees by saying, "I looked for my mom and I found you at last." At the end Beetle Betty is seen feeding Little Miss Spider and tucking her into bed. The story concludes with this rhyme "For finding your mother, there's one certain test. You must look for the creature who loves you the best."

Therapeutic Value: Little Miss Spider is illustrated with bright and simple images. The text is also told entirely using rhyme, which offers some predictability through the more harrowing parts of the story. Tiny illustrations reassuringly foreshadow aspects of the story: for example, Beetle Betty is shown running to save Little Miss Spider as she heads towards the bird's nest.

This story touches on the experiences of abandonment, search for a lost parent, and understanding the role of a foster or adopted carer. The plight of Little Miss Spider is validated and supported as she searches for her mother. Beetle Betty doesn't question

or doubt Little Miss Spider's need to find her mother, but immediately and actively participates in the search with respect and urgency. Only after the search proves to be dangerous does Beetle Betty suggest to Little Miss Spider that she stay with her.

This story provides an interesting variety of characters children can explore using role-play. The children can first be invited to play Little Miss Spider and Beetle Betty in pairs. The facilitator then narrates the story as the pairs enact it. The children are asked to freeze and comment on how their characters are feeling. The story concludes with Little Miss Spider being cared for by Beetle Betty. This can lead to a discussion about whether Little Miss Spider will continue with her search or if she is content to stay in Beetle Betty's care. The play can conclude with both of the characters going to sleep. The children might wish to switch roles and play the story again. Once the enactment is over the children can either draw a picture or tell a story about Little Miss Spider. (Actually, Little Miss Spider is a pre-quel to the many other Miss Spider adventures written by this author).

Title: The Tenth Good Thing about Barney

Author: Viorst, Judith
 Year: 1971
 Publisher: Aladdin Paperbacks

Themes: Funerals; Questions about after death

Summary: The story begins with the announcement that "My cat Barney died last Friday. I was sad." The story is told from the point of view of the pet's owner, a young boy. It starts with the boy describing that he was so sad he could not even watch television or eat chocolate pudding. His mother then suggests that he make a list of ten

good things about Barney to mention at the funeral. The boy can only come up with nine things, but the funeral takes place with his family and his friend Annie.

After the funeral the boy and Annie get into a debate over whether Barney is in heaven, eating tuna and drinking cream, or in the ground. The argument is not resolved. Annie goes home and the boy joins his father who is working in the garden. The father explains that the ground changes things and that nutrients in the ground help flowers grow. From this conversation, the boy discovers that Barney is helping to make the flowers grow, which is the tenth good thing about Barney.

Therapeutic Value: The story is told from the perspective of the small boy and therefore adopts his simple storytelling style. The black and white illustrations supplement the story and permit the reader to meet Barney. It is also interesting to observe how the different seasonal representations of the tree under which Barney is buried, change as the story progresses.

The story explores the theme of relationships, death, and what happens after death. Although the story comes to a conclusion, it isn't limited as it is the boy's own conclusion. The story accommodates some of the phases of bereavement and separation that Alida Gersie (1991; p. 29) describes:

- (6) Addressing the bond that exists
- (7) Dealing with unfinished business
- (8) Giving each other blessings for their different journeys
- (9) Saying Good-bye

The bond between the boy and Barney is reviewed and deepened with the boy's description of the nine good things (1), the boy mentions that Barney only ate a bird

once which could represent the process for settling outstanding issues (2), the boy finds his own personal resolution and blesses Barney's different journey and role (helping flowers grow) (3), and perhaps the last tiny illustration of Barney walking away could represent finally saying Good-bye.

Children can be invited to dramatically explore a variety of the events and relationships in this story, which contains a funeral ritual, a suggestion of what can occur in heaven, and the process of decay and renewal in life. The group members can invent their own pet or creature that has just died and follow the same process as the story. The children can describe what they enjoyed about their pet, a bad thing that it did, what they believe will happen to their creature and perhaps express what they are going to do without the creature in their lives. Finally, they can all bury their creatures and say good-bye.

To experience Barney's transformation, the children can also embody the decay and renewal process. They can first each become animals, have their animal die, be buried (under a scarf), transform, and then grow into another form of life (that the children could choose). The facilitator can verbally guide them to transform into dirt and slowly grow into their new life form and move around. This process can be continued and repeated to guide the children into the continual life and death cycle. The exploration can end with a discussion or artwork reflecting their experience.

Title: Old Pig

Author: Wild, Margaret
 Illustrator: Brooks, Ron
 Year: 1995
 Publisher: Toronto: Penguin Books

Themes: Celebration of Relationship and Saying Goodbye

Summary: In this tale, the relationship between a grandmother (Old Pig) and granddaughter pig is shared. It begins by acknowledging their relationship, for example, how they have lived together for a long time.* It then runs through their daily routine and explains that they share all the chores. Then one morning Old Pig doesn't come down for breakfast as usual and rests in bed all day: this leaves granddaughter very concerned.

The next day the Old Pig says that she needs to prepare herself for her death, she returns her library books, pays all her outstanding bills, and empties her bank account. She gives her money to the granddaughter, who starts to cry, but the grandmother makes her promise not to (which is described as the hardest promise she ever had to make).

They then spend a day together appreciating the splendors of nature from Old Pig's point of view. Finally, they return home; the granddaughter takes care of Old Pig and holds her through the night (for the very last time). On the last page, the granddaughter is shown standing next to a duck and looking out onto the lake.

Therapeutic Value: This tells a simple story of a relationship and places it in the context of everyday events. The illustrations are colourful, soft and their home is cozy and familiar. The granddaughter is drawn with body and facial expressions that capture her concern, despair and later her contentment as she comforts her grandmother. The story follows how the grandmother's sickness and death and the granddaughter's coping with loss impacts on their relationship. The grandmother maintains a level of autonomy that

permits her to make her final preparations in her own dignified way. Although the granddaughter is experiencing deep sadness, she concerns herself with her grandmother's final wishes and needs.

I read this story to my nephews, and when I reached the end of the story, there was a moment of somber silence. One of my nephews was concerned that the granddaughter would be very sad and lonely. It seems that the familiarity of the daily events causes the reader to not only read the story, but experience it almost first hand.

To begin the story exploration, the children can all stand in a circle and be invited to explore the roles of the granddaughter and the Old Pig. In pairs as the granddaughter and Old Pig, the children follow the story events such as doing the chores and having corn and oats for dinner. When the Old Pig doesn't come down for dinner, all of the Old Pig children could meet in the centre of the circle and lay down. If there are any blankets available they can be used to represent the beds. After attending to the Old Pig, the granddaughters can then walk around the outside doing all the chores alone.

When Old Pig goes out the next day, the Old Pig children can perform the story actions in the centre of the circle. On the last day Old Pig and granddaughter can walk around the circle and enact spending the day together in the town feasting on all the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. At this point, the facilitator may encourage the children to share with the group what they see in their imaginations. At night after Old Pig is tucked into bed, the facilitator dims the lights and plays some music, or the granddaughter pigs can sing a song. Finally, the pairs might sit or cuddle close to each other.

In the morning, the granddaughter pigs could get up, come into the centre and mention one thing to remember Old Pig by. Once they are done the facilitator asks all of the children to hide their eyes, count to three, and when they arise they will be children again. The children can then address their feelings about the role-play with the facilitator.

If the children require more emotional distance from the characters, they could create a puppet story to explore the relationships. The story follows the same process of loss described by Gersie (1991) in the previous story exploration about Barney. It can also be enough just to offer this story without any dramatic work, and use it simply to validate a child's sense of loss.

CONCLUSION

I began this paper with the intention of promoting the use of picture books in drama therapeutic work with children. There are many simple and magical qualities that make illustrated stories so appealing to people of all ages. They are not just stories with pictures, but complete aesthetic experiences that capture our wishes, hopes, fears, and dreams. When a parent or a caring adult shares a picture book with a young child, they embark on a shared and joyous mission to discover the many meanings that lie within the words and the illustrations. In this way, picture books help families connect.

Professionals have also seized on the usefulness of picture books. Educationalists have embraced their ability to help children learn how to read and how they can teach children about numbers, facts, and vocabulary. Health professionals have noticed that picture books can be used to validate and guide a child's emotional experiences. Bibliotherapists and drama therapists have created books containing lists of picture books aimed to benefit children living in a variety of circumstances. These books mirror a child's experiences and provide them with a variety of possible solutions. However, the incentive for a child to read a picture book and the adult's intention for selecting the picture book for the child might be different.

When Vivian Gussin Paley (1980) read *A Blue Seed* by Rieko Nakagawa to one of her kindergarten classes, she discovered that her understanding was inconsistent with her students. In this story, a fox gives a boy a blue seed in exchange for a toy airplane. The seed grew into a little blue house that soon is filled with the boy and a happy bunch of animals. Later the fox returns and kicks everyone out. At this point the house rises up to the sun and explodes. When Paley asked her students if it was fair for the fox to

chase everyone out of the house, they answered “yes”. They believed that he didn’t know that the seed would turn into a house and thought that maybe the fox didn’t have a house. Paley was surprised, as she would have punished the fox. The picture book, in this case, taught Paley that sometimes, adult understandings and children’s understandings do not always match.

Ann Cattanach (1997) appreciates that adults and children can live on separate islands of perception. She also respects that stories can offer therapists a way to communicate with children. By engaging in an authentic conversation about a story, a therapist and a child can learn by comparing and adjusting their different perspectives. In this manner, a therapist can help a child understand what is confusing for him and not what is confusing for the therapist. My picture books and drama therapeutic exploration suggestions can help children sort through the challenges in their lives by enabling the young participants to actually step into and resolve the story’s dilemmas. However, each group may be different and the facilitator should feel the freedom to adapt the stories and drama explorations to respect the needs of the group.

With groups, the role of picture books jumps to another level of wonderment. The stories and dramatic activities also offer a child a wonderful opportunity to be creative and proud of their accomplishments. They provide the group with a common theme in which to mutually grow and find a sense of belonging. Another important element in assuring that the play is safe is the role of the facilitator, who provides the story, the structure and the commitment to honour the children’s best interests as they play. By sharing and playing with picture books, children can learn that they are not alone and that they are capable of being and playing with others.

Learning, growth and restoration seem to be the ultimate goals of therapy and education. By sharing stories and drama in a safe and respectful manner, children can nurture their individuality and gain a sense of community. When a dramatic activity is engaging, familiar and in the company of others, children will flourish.

“Let’s go and swim and play and SEE things! he said happily.
“We can’t,” said the little red fish. “The big fish will eat us all.”
“But you can’t just lie there,” said Swimmy. “We must THINK of something.”

Swimmy thought and thought and thought.

Then suddenly he said, “I have it!”
“We are going to swim all together like the biggest fish in the sea!”

He taught them to swim close together, each one in his own place,
And when they had learned to swim like one giant fish, he said “I’ll be the eye.”

And so they swam in the cool morning water and in the midday sun
And chased the big fish away.

In *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni

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