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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Carolyn Roberts Boswell entitled "The Stories Readers Remember: An Interview Study of the Enduring Effects of Literature." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Teacher Education.

Lester N. Knight, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

William G. Brozo

J. Amos Hatch

Jinx S. Watson

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Chancellor and Dean of
Graduate Studies

The Stories Readers Remember
An Interview Study of the Enduring Effects of Literature

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mentor and friend, Dr. Allen L. Smith, to my beloved daughters and supporters, Amber Morgan Stults and Andrea Stults McIntosh, and to Jim, Dr. James M. Reynolds, who graciously gave up most of our first year together so that I might complete this work.

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Throughout the development of this dissertation, I was guided and supported flawlessly. Imperfections in the work are mine alone.

ABSTRACT

This interview study explores the legacy of the reading experiences of adults. The researcher, working from a constructivist paradigm, seeks to answer these two questions: (a) What are the characteristics of stories that participants remember, and (b) how do participants say these stories affect their thinking, their character, their worldview?

Eight participants, volunteers and referrals, were interviewed about their memories of their reading experiences. After each initial interview, the researcher read some of the literature cited by the participant as personally significant. A follow-up interview focused on the participant's response to the literature cited.

The researcher used a typological analysis of data to determine the nature of the literature remembered by readers and the ways in which readers believed that this literature had affected them. The results of the analysis support opinions common in the field about the extent of the impact of story on readers and provide additional data about the nature of stories remembered. The findings demonstrate the importance of readers' emotional engagement with their significant stories and the enduring effects of that engagement. Some findings contradict another literacy scholar's assertion that factual and fictional information are assimilated differently.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

Readers engage in reading literature for a multitude of reasons and emerge from their literary encounters with a wide variety of responses. I designed this study to probe the nature of these responses to literature. I was especially interested in the stories that readers remember for a long time. I wanted to know which stories are remembered as significant, which stories may have become a part of their cognitive structures, their personalities, and perhaps even their character.

I designed an interview study to see what can be learned about such salient stories. I hoped to answer these two questions: (a) What are the characteristics of the stories that participants remember reading; and (b) how do they say these stories affect their thinking, their character, their worldview?

Genesis of Topic

In a long interview about his experiences in becoming a reader, a middle-aged adult told me about a story he had read as a teenager, *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck (1965). He talked about how reading the story had affected his thinking regarding such issues as colonialism, economic exploitation of indigenous people, the prevalence of injustice in our treatment of the disenfranchised, and the pervasiveness of evil. He reaffirmed these feelings on subsequent re-readings of the book. He said that he had experienced the story himself with a degree of intensity that had changed his life.

I thought of several books in my own reading history, books that I still use as a point of reference in framing my thinking about a wide range of topics. These long-term

responses to salient literature in my own life, responses as intense as those to actual, lived experiences, were brought into sharp focus by my respondent's voicing of his perceptions of the significance of *The Pearl* in his life. I became interested in learning whether others perceived literature as having changed them in ways similar to or different from this response. I wondered whether or not I could make sense of the phenomenon of reading books or hearing stories as a potentially life-changing experience.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This study was designed to explore the responses of a few individuals to literature, and in particular to story. To set the parameters for the study, I needed to establish a working definition for the term *literature*. It has been defined in many different ways. For example, Donoghue (1998, p. 13) says, ". . . a work of literature is a work that calls for an aesthetic reading and gratifies it," and Lukens (1999, p. 3) says it is ". . . traditionally described as the body of writing that exists because of inherent imaginative and artistic qualities."

Unless qualified, the term literature almost universally connotes merit; and to ascribe merit requires a value judgment. I chose not to attempt those judgments for this study. Instead, I used literature in its most basic sense to mean simply a body of writing in poetry or prose, inclusive of both fiction and non-fiction. Differentiating between fiction and non-fiction can sometimes be as difficult as adjudicating quality in writing. Many texts are perceived as factual by some readers and as fictitious by others (Eagleton, 1983). I decided that my assessment of the value and the verity of the reading materials that study participants cite would reflect my tastes and beliefs but very little else.

Therefore, I accepted as literature each book and story the participants remembered. I accepted them without imposing my own value judgments on either the veracity or the literary worth of their selections.

Through the study, I hoped to learn how the participants perceive the impact of literature on their lives. I wanted to see whether they think any of their literature encounters have changed them, and, if so, how. As a student and a teacher of literacy, most of my efforts have been directed toward developing means of facilitating literacy acquisition in young people. But I found myself drawn to examining the potential effects of literacy, and to learning the extent of the impact the practice of reading can have on an individual life. Through literature, a reader can have access to the experiences and thoughts of others with whom real contact, real interaction is either unlikely or impossible. Does this transmission of life experience through words change the life of the reader to any extent? Do readers perceive such an effect? I hoped to find part of the answer in the responses of the eight participants I interviewed.

My first research question addresses the characteristics of the stories participants remember reading, the stories on which they continue to reflect. Compiling this took time, but the task proved to be straightforward and achievable. The second question, however, asks how participants believe these stories affect their thinking, their character, and their worldview. To make a valid judgment of these effects would require an understanding of the very basis of human construction of knowledge, of personality, and of belief systems.

White (1980, p.5) says, "To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of

humanity itself." Philosophers have sought answers to such questions for centuries. Over time, carefully structured possibilities have been developed, but comprehensive answers have not been forthcoming. Even philosophers note this lack of success. Hegel (1833/1985, p. 6) said, ". . . it is from the history of philosophy that a proof of the futility of philosophy is above all derived."

Did I expect my study to definitively answer such questions as these, questions philosophers have revisited across the span of recorded history? I harbored no such illusions. I echo Heidegger's (1960) assessment of the possibility of answers in similar domains: "Nothing in this sphere it is possible to prove, but much can be hinted" (p. 10).

I expected no definitive outcome. I hoped only to actively engage these deep, abiding human queries with my study's participants. I expected to add to my personal and professional knowledge base—and perhaps to my own list of unanswered questions. I believed, too, that my study could potentially add to the understanding of readers' response to literature. I expected to leave a clear record of my search, and my participants' search, for meaning in the memories of their significant literature. And although each literature response is unique to the reader responding, I expected to find common themes, experiences reflected in the literature and in the experiences of other participants. I expected these themes to be of potential use to other seekers of meaning.

Many scholars of literacy have probed the relationship between people and their stories. Biographical and autobiographical works, vignettes, and even fiction abound with allusions to the importance of reading in people's lives. Sayers (1965, p. 16) says that all of us have "memories of certain books that have changed us in some way. . . . And I have become a collector of testimonies."

Through this study I, too, collected testimonies from readers about the impact of their reading. But my collection differed from others in one significant way: it adhered scrupulously to the qualitative research model. Because of this, it provides permanent records in the form of audiotapes and transcripts that other researchers can access upon request. My research methods and methodology, my research questions, and the literature that has influenced my thinking are clearly described. These records allow others to examine my findings in context and to reach their own conclusions (Witz, 2001, p. 196). In this way, my work may be useful in the study of readers' responses to story.

Rationale for Methodology

A prerequisite to designing this study was to examine my own beliefs about what can be known and about the ways knowledge can best be pursued. First, I acknowledge that, in the physical world, traditional scientific studies have extended human knowledge to an extent that would have been inconceivable only a century ago. Carefully scrutinized observations of rigorously controlled experiments have answered many questions—and raised new questions as well. Obviously, traditional scientific methods have value in the acquisition of knowledge when the subject of one's investigation can be manipulated. When this is not the case, sometimes data can be manipulated to provide answers to our questions. Even social data, when quantifiable, can be collected and analyzed to yield hypotheses with predictive validity. But not every human phenomenon can be quantified. The vast array of options open to humans, and the myriad, shifting influences upon each one of those options, make most human behavior and its antecedents too complex to yield simple, one-dimensional answers that can be numerically encoded.

I believe that there are ways of knowing, even about phenomena as complex as human behavior. But those ways of knowing, of understanding, require constant interpreting, constant reevaluation as the details of our existence shift. Nothing in the human experience remains static. The realities we can encompass are no more stable than are reflections on flowing water. Consequently, we cannot discover or capture *reality*; we can only construct representations of it. Schwandt (2000, p. 197) says, "We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience. . . [and] we do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language. . . ."

I believe that the philosophical paradigm constructivism provides the best vantage point for understanding aspects of reality as captured for a moment in time. This paradigm accepts that the social world lacks a stable, apprehensible, singular truth. Because a universal reality is unknowable, "the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). If the subject is large, our finite minds cannot apprehend much of it. But if we work together, we can apprehend some. We can learn enough to illuminate how and why we choose particular options.

Denzin and Lincoln (2002, p. 3), in their attempt to define qualitative research, say that qualitative researchers attempt "to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them." My study looks at the phenomenon of reading, seeking the meaning that research participants bring to their literary encounters and the meaning that they bring from them. Such a study requires a qualitative interpretive design.

I believe people decide together what is significant for the contexts in which they interact. During the interview process and throughout the analysis of findings of my study, I acknowledged the participants as the definitive authorities on what they hold to be true from their perspective regarding the residual effects of their own reading. I believed they could be trusted to find and share their own truths.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Not until we turn our thoughts toward what has already been thought, shall we be employed for what has yet to be thought" (Heidegger, 1960, p. 32). In preparation for my research, I read literature addressing human response to story. I studied the work of others who have examined the interconnectedness of people and their stories to find a place for my own questions.

The reaction of readers to the stories they read has intrigued a wide variety of researchers through the years. There has been a wide variety, too, in both the nature and the purpose of their inquiries. The works I cite in the following sections represent the kinds of investigations that have been made into the nature of our interaction with text.

The first two studies, which are described in the *Range of Studies* section, illustrate the vast differences the literature encompasses. The studies differ in methodology, purpose, and findings; their only shared component is an interest in human response to story.

Research studies addressed in the next section, *Usefulness of Text,* share a common purpose: they attempt to identify components of text likely to produce specific results in readers. Results of these studies could be instructive in inspiring, and perhaps even in manipulating, target audiences.

The final category in my literature review, *Reader Response to Narrative,* encompasses works that focus on the reader rather than on the text. It is divided into these four subsections:

- *Rosenblatt's contribution*, a look at the pioneering study in reader response;

- *Nature of human affinity for story,* a collection of studies attempting to understand the importance of story in both the individual and the collective psyche;
- *Effects of reader experience on response to text*, investigations into the relationship of the reader's background and paradigms to the interpretation of story; and
- *Effects of story on specific readers*, life histories, interviews, and autobiographies highlighting personal responses to literature.

In the *Response to the Review of Literature* section, I situate my own study within the work I have reviewed. Then I briefly discuss my work as a potential contribution to the field.

Range of Studies

I can best illustrate the range in the nature of the inquiries and methodologies by citing two examples, two studies of human response to story situated near opposite ends of the continuum. The first study is a geographer's narrative. It relates interviews with thirty Kiowa tribes people living in southwestern Oklahoma (Schnell, 2000). The Kiowa interviewed described an attachment to the geographic features of the area in which they lived by telling stories from their tradition that relate to each particular landmark. These stories from tribal history and mythology were perceived by the participants to form a bond between the people and the land on which they lived. The stories surrounding these landmarks gave the Kiowa a sense of cultural identity, of relatedness to each other as well as to the area they inhabit. Schnell (2000, p. 155) explained that their homelands were "blanketed with their significant stories."

One example was the story that establishes the significance of Palo Duro Canyon, in the Texas Panhandle, to the Kiowa people. This canyon was the site of the last armed resistance of the Kiowa to being segregated on reservations. Here, in September 1874, U. S. Army forces attacked an encampment of over half of the Kiowa people. They destroyed Kiowa belongings and seized 1,400 ponies. For the Kiowa, the pony was not just a means of transportation; it was also a medium of exchange and a symbol of wealth. The military defeat at Palo Duro Canyon represented far more than material loss for the Kiowa people; it was a devastating psychological defeat as well. The canyon's importance to the Kiowa today is commensurate with the significance of the defeat. Interview participants who had visited this geographic shrine reported feelings of sadness and fear, feelings of connection with their ancestors who suffered in this place (Schnell, p. 9).

The second example I wish to cite, when contrasted with the Kiowa homelands study, illustrates the vast range of both subject matter and methodology encompassed by research related to human response to stories. A quantitative study measured regional cerebral blood flow among groups of French subjects as some listened to meaningful stories and others listened to distorted stories, word lists, or an unknown language. Distinctly discernible blood-flow patterns emerged that related to the nature of the listening, indicating that the brain perceives differences, even at the physiological level, between narrative and non-narrative language sequences (Mazoyer et al., 1993).

The first study employed the communicative and interpretive skills of a trained qualitative researcher. The second used magnetic resonance imagery to calculate blood volume in the brain's language processing areas while subjects listened to stories or non-

stories. A greater difference between research questions or a wider range of methodologies would be hard to imagine. Nonetheless, they have in common their interest in exploring the human response to story, the use, retention, and meaning making of narrative.

Studies like these two differ in purpose as well as in research design. The first sought information that would help in understanding how the history and mythology of a people, their collection of stories, affected their feelings about their homeland. The purpose of the second study was to find physiological evidence of response to narrative language. A cluster of studies I reviewed were designed to discover information about how specific texts would be perceived by the reader. I will discuss these in the following section.

Usefulness of Text Studies

Reasons for undertaking studies of reader response, the ways readers make sense of their reading experience, have been almost as varied as the questions asked and the methods used to answer them. One methodology might be called a usefulness study: editors and publishers of many journals solicit readers' responses to questionnaires about the kind of formal expository prose they prefer. These responses are needed to provide guidance in meeting market demands, thereby increasing their periodical's usefulness and possibly its circulation rates (Scherer, 1998). Document designers also use similar questionnaires to determine cultural preferences for writing styles in order to facilitate multi-national corporations' communications targeted to specific regions or specific language groups (Spyridakis & Fukuoka, 2002).

Teachers and teacher educators design and implement research projects in their quest for ways to lead their students to meaningful encounters with literature and to foster their cognitive, affective, and moral development through such literary engagements. An example of the latter type is Lewison, Leland, Flint, and Möller's (2002) set of four brief case studies that document student responses to the use of literature to teach primary- and intermediate-grade students about societal conflict. Issues depicted by the literature included such topics as the violence which permeated African slavery in America, the daily terror of children growing up in war zones, the dehumanizing effects of racism, and the pain of social rejection endured by lesbians, gays, and bisexual persons. The case studies described students and teachers dealing with troubling social issues through literature, facing conflicts in their own feelings, and discussing the need for changes in our society. The authors discussed the problems of bringing such controversial issues into the classroom, problems such as parental disapproval. But they also discussed the value of teaching children to examine and discuss controversial topics critically.

The following studies do not focus on literature, as the studies in the preceding section do. In contrast, they look to the response of readers to the literature they read.

Reader Response to Narrative

Reasons for undertaking reader response studies vary almost as much as the researchers themselves. As a composite, they reflect the deep interest in finding out as much as possible about how we make sense of stories.

Rosenblatt's Contribution

The study of reader response to literature is relatively new. Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1937) effectively launched the study of human response to story. Earlier studies evaluating the significance of literature focused on the work itself, the author, or the interrelationship of the two. Rosenblatt conceptualized a new element, that of the reader's own personal contribution to the story. In the development of her transactional view of reading, she was influenced by Vygotsky's defining the meaning of a verbal symbol as "the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by that word" (Karolides, 1999, p. 164). She also felt the influence of William James' "stream of consciousness" (Karolides, p. 164) construct. Rosenblatt shaped the concept that readers bring an immense variety of interests and life experiences to the reading of a piece of literature and that responses to the same literature can be profoundly different for different readers and even for those same readers at different times (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xvi). She says:

> The reader seeks to enter into another's experience, to glimpse the beauty and intensity that the world offers, to fathom the resources of the human spirit, to gain understanding that will make his own experiences more comprehensible, to find molds into which to pour his own seemingly chaotic experiences. (Rosenblatt, 1937, p. 8)

To understand the ways in which readers pour themselves into these molds of story, we must explore the ways readers are drawn to narrative. The following studies address that issue.

Nature of Human Affinity for Story

Many researchers have sought to answer questions about the nature of human affinity for stories. Rayfield conducted a study designed to define the concept in a 1972 journal article, "What Is a Story?" In his attempts to understand how humans learn language, Chomsky (2002), a linguist, recognized congruence in the deep structure of all human languages. In part because of this, he conceptualized a kind of language-acquisition device, an innate sense of grammar that is part of the human mind (2002, chap. 3). In a parallel construct, Rayfield (1972, p. 1085) conceptualized "a 'story-shaped structure' built into the human mind." Just as Chomsky found a remarkable degree of congruence in the patterns of different languages, researchers cited by Rayfield found a high level of agreement among respondents about what does and what does not constitute a story. Primary findings in his study are that the story must have a beginning, middle, and end; and its events should flow logically in an episode-response chain.

Many other studies addressed the human affinity for narrative. White (1980) attributed to story the ability to transcend culture in human communication, to convey the elements of an event or experience in terms that can be understood outside the interpreter's and the event's culture of origin, and to "solve the problem of how to translate *knowing* into *telling*" (p. 5). He theorized about the centrality of story to the human experience, noting that narrative language is not just one of the codes available to a culture to give meaning to its experience; rather it is "a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (White, p. 6).

A strong recurring theme in Donoghue's *The Practice of Reading* (1998) was the role of narrative, of literature, in expanding experience. He said that literature is "one of the means by which we are enabled to imagine being other than we are." He spoke of his own experiences as a reader, and he related specific literature responses of other readers to illustrate. He explained, "The pleasure of reading arises from. . . a going out from one's self toward other lives, other forms of life, past, present, and perhaps future" (p. 73).

Several researchers studied response to a particular literary genre. In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Bettelheim studied the fairy tale. He viewed the fairy tale as a tool the child uses to gain partial mastery over fears and emotional struggles, which can be overwhelming. He said, "The figures and events of fairy tales. . . personify. . . inner conflicts, but they suggest ever so subtly how these conflicts may be solved, and what the next steps in the development toward a higher humanity might be" (Bettelheim, p. 26). He analyzed many of the classic fairy tales and speculated about specific needs in children these story elements might meet.

Christian-Smith's *Becoming a Woman Through Romance* (1990) examined the response of teenage girls to romance novels made available to them in public schools. The study, which involved a close examination of forty youth romance novels, reader questionnaires, and interviews, attempted to establish both the nature of the genre and the range of reader responses to the novels. The author found that teen romance readers chose books that followed a consistent format. They wanted a romance to have these qualities: ease of reading, a fast-paced story line, a physically attractive, popular, and financially secure heroine and hero, a happy ending, and girls who were "strong and get

the best of boys" (Christian-Smith, p. 107). The heroine was always perceived as a good girl, and she always had competition from another girl who was her moral inferior. Traditional gender roles, such as the proactive male/reactive female stereotype, were key story elements. Heroines typically did not have vocational aspirations. Christian-Smith concluded that the young women who read these stories used them for entertainment, for escape, and for two diametrically opposed purposes: to imagine ways to resist patterns of domination; and to reconcile themselves to the societal norms and expectations that suppress their opportunities for self-actualization.

Kaplan (1986) looked at romantic fiction ostensibly written for adult women but read by young women as well. Male readers, of course, may also read these works; but Kaplan asserted that their primary constituency is female. She traces shifting value judgments about the dangers and benefits of reading romantic fiction from the sixteenth century, when social critics worried that reading such literature would arouse "the erotic and romantic at the expense of the rational, moral, and maternal" (Kaplan, p. 145), to current times, when romantic novels are variously viewed as contributing either to the continued subservient position of women in our society or to the radical subversion of male dominance. Kaplan concluded, "Still excluded in major ways from power. . . in the public sphere. . . romance narrative can constitute one of women's few entries to the public articulation and social exploration of psychic life" (Kaplan, pp. 164-165).

Bruner (1986, p. 52) examined the elements of stories which make them salient, including the idea that "...they must be recognizable as true to conceivable experience: [they must] have verisimilitude." In *Making Stories* (2002) Bruner studied the story ending, or coda, as well. He defined the coda as the transition the storyteller makes from

the story back to the current setting. He said, ". . . great narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving. . . about the road rather than about the inn to which it leads" (Bruner, 2002, p. 20).

The story can be, as a fairy tale is for the child, a vehicle for working out solutions for our problems. It can also be, as in a Dostoevsky novel, a reflection of the complex limitations of human nature, of problems beyond human solution.

Closely interrelated, the telling and the hearing of stories can be powerfully compelling experiences. Didion (1979, p. 11) said, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." Almost as soon as our species developed language, we invented the myth. Not even literacy is a requirement for narrative, for every pre-literate group has its mythologies (Egan, 1997, p. 33). Still, the development of writing has extended the potential of narrative exponentially. Birkerts (1994, p. 6) reflected, ". . . the experience of literature offers a kind of wisdom that cannot be discovered elsewhere; . . . there is profundity in the verbal encounter itself, never mind what further profundities the author has to offer . . . "

Even the transmission of our understanding of our own lives may be impossible without the use of stories. In the prologue to the autobiography that he dictated at the end of his life, Jung (1963, p. 3) said, "I cannot employ the language of science. . . . What we are to our own inward vision . . . can only be expressed by way of myth." After a lifetime of studying the human mind scientifically, he could not explain himself scientifically. He said, "I can only tell stories" (p. 3).

Readers help to shape the stories they hear by bringing their own experiences to the interpretation of the narrative. Egan (1997, p. 45) said, ". . . audiences are not

uninfluential in the stories told to them. . . ." But readers' interpretive rights are not unchallenged. Eco (1992) explored the parameters of reader interpretation in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* finding that there are limits beyond which readers' construal of text may not rationally extend. In contrast, Donoghue (1998, p. 93) called for a broad acceptance of readings, "open interpretation, according to which plural readings may live side by side without troubling one another." The following studies explore the factors in readers' experiences that contribute to these plural readings.

Effects of Reader Experience on Response to Text

What kinds of experiences do readers bring to their literary encounters, and how do these experiences affect their interactions with the stories they encounter? Three studies may serve to illustrate the differences that reader experiences make. Anderson, Pichert, and Shirey (1983) found that readers' content schemata, their existing knowledge related to the story encountered, affect the ways they perceive and remember stories. In their experiments, large numbers of high school and college students read the same story about two boys playing hooky from school at the home of one of the boys. Many details about the boy's house were embedded in the story. The researchers divided the participants into two groups and assigned each group a different frame of reference. One group was directed to read the story as if they were potential homebuyers, and the other group was to read as if they were potential burglars. Participants assigned the homebuyer paradigm remembered many more details related to the home's amenities, while those assuming the burglar paradigm remembered home security/vulnerability issues from the story. This relationship was true when recall was solicited immediately after reading the

story, but it was also true even when recall was solicited over two weeks later. It was true even when the story was read before the paradigms were assigned.

Kropp and Halverson believed that they found effects of a naturally occurring paradigm in their 1983 study of preschool children's preferences for and recall of stories in which gender-role stereotypes were either prevalent or absent. Girls preferred and remembered better those stories in which girls played stereotypical roles; boys' preferences and recall followed the same gender-specific pattern. They responded better to stories in which boys engaged in activities traditionally seen by our culture as masculine. This seems to suggest that readers' response to literature is related to how closely the story aligns with their personal preconceptions of reality.

Daly, Salter, and Burns (1998) also measured gender differences in story recall. They compared boys' and girls' immediate and delayed recall of three stories. One story used a violent male protagonist, one had a female protagonist, and the third employed reversed stereotypical gender roles. The researchers found statistically significant gender differences in recall for each of the stories. Boys outperformed girls in recalling the violent male story, but girls remembered more than boys about the story with the female protagonist and about the story having reversed gender roles.

In a study of differences in moral story message comprehension between adults and primary- and intermediate-grade children, Narvaez, Bentley, Gleason, and Samuels (1997) found that adults and children understand narratives differently. In addition, they found evidence that adults ". . . may not understand moral narratives in a uniform fashion since there are recall differences for moral reasoning in narrative texts due to moral judgment development" (p. 2). Narvaez et al. discussed research showing that most

children cannot extract the theme from a story until about fourth grade (Lehr, 1988, as cited in Narvaez, Bentley, Gleason, and Samuels). Their own study found that differences in the ability to extract embedded content, such as theme, are not based solely on reading ability but also on age and experience level. This study suggests that maturity and prior reader experiences, as well as the literature itself, are critical in determining reader response.

The preceding studies illustrate the effects of readers' situations on their interpretations and recollections of literature. My study and the studies described in the following section examine the impact of the literature on the reader.

Effects of Story on Specific Readers

In my study, I investigated the enduring impact of stories that have been particularly meaningful to readers. Closely related to traditional reader response studies, my topic differs from that construct in its sense of direction. Reader response studies typically investigate how the characteristics and experiences of the reader affect the interpretation of the story. Alternatively, I investigated how the experience of reading a story or stories affected the reader, particularly on a long-term basis.

Several other works approached the reader-literature interaction from the same direction I propose. I consider each of the following to offer significant contributions to understanding the relationship between reader and text.

Books Remembered: Nurturing the Budding Writer (Mahmoud, 1997) represented a compilation of autobiographical sketches by children's literature authors who related stories of their own childhood reading. The sketches appeared first as articles in various

issues of *The Calendar,* a Children's Book Council publication. The authors relate stories of how books they read as children affected their lives as writers. While the articles are as varied as the authors themselves, a prevailing theme is expressed by author Jean Craighead George, "I am. . . finding to my deep amazement how deeply these books [of my childhood] affected me. I am what I've read" (Mahmoud, p. 83).

Rosenthal's *Speaking of Reading* (1995) compiled interviews of 77 readers who were as diverse as Mahmoud's were uniform. Her readers included famous authors like Mahmoud's, but they also included a scientist, a leader of the feminist movement, a professional athlete, a news anchorperson, and a Broadway singer. In addition, Rosenthal interviewed a wide array of ordinary people. Some of these respondents were proficient readers, but some were barely able to read at all. Some read proficiently, but chose to do so only under duress. Rosenthal presented her study as a series of 77 narratives; they appeared to be interview transcriptions with the interviewer's voice edited out. They offer compelling reading. Rosenthal categorized her participants in these eight ways:

- Literature readers
- Frustrated readers
- Those influenced by childhood reading experiences
- Voracious readers
- Habitual readers
- Those learning to read as adults
- Information readers
- Those aware of their reading process

Rosenthal's respondents gave examples of literature that had a lasting effect on them, but these interactions were alluded to rather than explored deeply. Rosenthal concluded her book with a personal plea for adults to mentor struggling readers rather than with a summary or an analysis of the data she collected. The extent of her concern is reflected in her current vocation: She chairs the Learning Assistance Department of the City College of San Francisco (Malamud, 2003).

Sabine and Sabine (1983, p. 174) conducted a nationwide interview study, asking over 1400 people this question: "What book made the greatest difference in your life?" They asked librarians in each area where interviews were conducted to recommend interview subjects. Preference was given to people deemed most representative of the area and to those well known outside the local area. Since the purpose of the study was to provide positive exposure for public libraries, the participants chosen were those thought most likely to attract the attention of new readers and potential library fund drive donors. *Books That Made a Difference: What People Told Us* (Sabine & Sabine, 1983) gave a fascinating overview of their findings.

Children Talk About Books: Seeing Themselves as Readers (Fry, 1985) documented conversations held over an eight-month period with six readers between the ages of 8 and 15. Fry chose to engage the children in conversations rather than interviews, preferring exchanges that emerged from dialogue exclusively rather than those guided by an interview protocol. The results assumed a conversational tone as well, but they are expanded by Fry's speculations about reasons for the children's responses to their reading.

Another look at children's reading was presented in *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (Cherland, 1994), an ethnographic study of seventh grade girls in a small affluent Canadian community. Cherland observed the students both at school and at home and analyzed their response to literature in the context of their community groups.

Spufford's *The Child that Books Built: A Life in Reading,* (2002) gave an intimate look at one adult's salient childhood literature. Spufford admitted, "I need fiction. I'm an addict" (Spufford, 2002, p. 5). He analyzed the reasons that he immersed himself early in life in reading. These reasons included his younger sister's fragile health, his parents' need to focus on her care, and his own need to escape feelings of guilt or responsibility for her. He sought to understand the characteristics of the literature that particularly appealed to him. He saw some literature as confirmation, a continuation of the self, and he quoted critic Kenneth Burke, "Only those voices from without are effective . . . which speak in the language of a voice within" (Spufford, p. 52). In contrast, he also recognized, ". . . the first hint of a possibility that fiction can be an alternative to experience, rather than a representation of it" (Spufford, p. 52).

The final volume I chose to characterize the study of response to literature was *Ruined by Reading* (Schwartz, 1996). The author, examining a life-long reading habit, asked ". . . the classic addict's question: What is it doing for me?" (Schwartz, p. 1). The book explores possible answers to the question. Schwartz said reading was "learning to live in another's voice, to speak another language," that we read not to escape from the routines and struggles of our lives but "from the boundaries of our own voices and idioms" (Schwartz, pp. 111-112). Of the gift the good writer gives us, she wrote, ". . . it

appears that the critical thing these others were able to do was identify and localize a subject that for me remained undefined and elusive—until I read their books and saw it clear and elegant" (Schwartz, p. 68). The power of reading was acknowledged in this work, but lingering questions were presented as well: "Can we ever be understood? Or is language only an elaborate sustaining lie, every sentence a soliloquy?" (Schwartz, p. 75).

Response to Literature Review

This review of literature has encompassed a broad range of studies, all of which relate to my study in their examination of human response to literature. The first two, the study of the Kiowa tribes people's linking of story to landmarks in their homeland (Schnell, 2000) and the study of blood flow patterns in the brain when listening to stories and non-stories (Mazoyer et al.) were used to define the broad parameters of the field. The usefulness of text studies were included to show ways in which texts can be used or modified to achieve particular effects. This understanding relates directly to my attempts to understand the effects of specific texts on the readers in my study. Rosenblatt's work (1937) provided the foundation for all subsequent reader response studies, including mine. Studies of the human affinity for narrative shaped my thinking about the stories remembered by participants in my study. Research related to the effects of reader experience on response to text suggested reasons for my study's participants' responses. And the stories of specific readers' responses to literature asked questions very similar to those in my study.

Like the authors whose work I have reviewed, I am intrigued by the possibility of learning more about how readers influence the stories they read, how they interpret them

and shape and re-shape them in their memories. In my study, I sought to probe deeply into the effect of narrative on eight participants. I wanted to find and understand their salient stories. Eight is a very small number to study, but the narrow field made a deep sampling of perspectives possible for me. Bruner asked what makes a story salient (1986) and how the story segues back to the present, to the reader's life (2002). I believed I could discover specifics of how these questions play out in the lives of the eight people who shared their stories about their stories.

In my study of residual reader response, I explored the ways Spufford's voices that "speak in the language of a voice within" (2002, p. 52) become effective. I wanted to know which voices readers in my study perceive as speaking their own internal language. And I wanted to see when and, if possible, how literature becomes an "alternative to experience" (Spufford, p. 52). My research design allowed me to probe the reading responses of the people who shared their salient literature with me. I wanted to know which stories the participants remember as significant, which stories, if any, have become a part of their cognitive structures. I wanted to examine the stories, to see what aspects of each are remembered. I wanted to understand, as fully as possible, whether these stories have affected the participants' lives. If I have found any success in this endeavor, then I have found something to contribute to the field of reader response.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the reasons I chose to do a qualitative interview study to answer my research questions. It describes the methods I used and the limitations of the study. A summary concludes the chapter.

Factors Affecting the Choice of Methodology

The questions about reading that came to captivate me are quite simple. I wanted to know about the stories people read and then remember, the stories whose questions and answers may have become a part of the reservoir of experience on which people draw when they are using the light of the past to illuminate the present or the future. I wanted to learn as much as I could about the nature of these stories. I wanted to know how they affected the people who would share their stories with me, or whether they had any such effect at all. In this chapter I will explain why I saw an interview study as the approach most appropriate to my questions and to my beliefs as a researcher.

Research is conducted to extend the apprehension of reality. Therefore, the researcher's personal conception of the nature of reality, and of the ways reality can be understood, determines the approach that the researcher will take in the quest for knowledge. My research questions involve human emotion, human thought, human behavior. When seeking answers to questions involving these realities, I am a constructivist: I believe that human realities are multiple and situation-specific, that the truth can appear different from different vantage points and at different times. I believe that making sense of life occurs when human beings interact and decide together the meaning of events. Reality, then, represents what the participants perceive to be real in

the context they are examining together. This set of assumptions, the constructivist paradigm, undergirds my research.

The information I sought, the effects of literature interactions on the thinking of readers, has no physical evidence. Since all the information is subjective and internal, I depended on the self-disclosure of participants for data. I used the long interview, a protracted period spent asking questions designed to guide the participants toward extensive reflection. I saw the long interview as the only direct way to elicit such disclosure, to collect rich data that represents human thought.

Polkinghorne (1983, p. 267) calls the face-to-face interview, "in the context of a relationship . . . the exemplar of data collection in human science." Witz, Goodwin, Hart, and Thomas (2001) say that audio-taped, in-depth interviews optimize the utilization of human sensitivity and communication while providing records that can be scrutinized by other researchers. These attributes make the long interview the best option for answering my research questions about the meaning participants attach to their reading.

Quantitative means of gathering data, such as a questionnaire, could not have produced the range of responses necessary to adequately cover the nature of the stories deemed significant by the participants. As a researcher seeking such personal and idiosyncratic information, I could not have begun to anticipate the components of significant stories or the connections between these stories and the participants' ways of thinking and being which may have been influenced by the stories' impact. Yet this accomplishment would have been essential for me to design an adequate questionnaire. I believe that only dialogue can support the discovery of such interactions. Bruner (1986, p. 122) states, "If one is arguing about social 'realities'...the reality is not the thing, not

in the head, but in the act of arguing and negotiating about the meaning of such concepts." Some feelings and experiences can only be understood as we find words to frame them (Vygotsky, 1986).

Methods

The following sections describe specifically the ways I conducted the study. Included are the selection of participants, the data collection, and the data analysis and narration.

Participants

Because I was interested in long-term responses to literature, all the participants in my study were adults. The adults had to be literate in order to participate in my study, but no other restrictions were imposed.

Four people volunteered to participate when they learned of my study. The reasons they gave for their interest included liking to talk about books, wanting to participate in a research project, and desiring to learn more about how people think about reading. These volunteers and other colleagues referred four other participants who were willing to be interviewed. The volunteers and referrals ranged in age from 32 to 80, a range of nearly 50 years, and included four males and four females.

Participants' educational backgrounds varied widely. Two participants had attended three years of college, one had attended a single quarter of college, two held master's degrees, one held a law degree, and one a medical degree. The extent of their formal schooling ranged from 11 to 26 years. One participant dropped out of high school during the sophomore year to return and earn a general equivalency diploma at the age of

sixty-five. Current job titles represented included funeral home attendant, immigration attorney, rental property maintenance worker, family physician, teacher, and graduate student. One participant was unemployed at the time of the study, and one, a retired proofreader, sometimes writes articles for publication in magazines.

All the participants were white. Six of them lived in or near a small city in the Southeastern United States. One lived in a small town in the same state, and another lived in a large metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic seaboard.

Participants signed an informed consent form, found in Appendix A. They were given copies of their interview transcripts. Each will be given a copy of the final write-up of the study.

Data Collection

Long interviews, audio-taped and transcribed, provided the data. Lengths of the initial interviews ranged from 20 to 105 minutes, with an average length of 59 minutes. I was guided in the development of my interview protocol by Mischler's (1986) ***Research Interviewing***. Notes taken during the interviews were used to support and extend the transcriptions and to shape questions asked during the interviews.

At the end of each initial interview, the participants were asked to list the titles of stories perceived as particularly significant to them. I read, or re-read, some of those stories in order to have a basis for understanding the meaning found by the participants. I chose the stories to read based on my judgment of their significance to the participant and their relevance to my study questions. For example, any book repeatedly cited by a

participant was read. At least one work by authors cited as important to the participant was read, as were examples of genres elicited by the initial interview. I also read each book cited by more than one participant, if I had not already read it. For one participant, for example, I read *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1963); *Madame Butterfly* (Long, 1969); *God's Little Acre* (Caldwell, 1933); *Waiting for Godot* (Becket, 1954); "Why I Live at the P. O." (Welty, 1977); *The Ponder Heart* (Welty, 1954/1978); and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams, 1947).

This literature and the questions raised by our reflection on the initial interview were discussed in a follow-up interview. This interview was also audio taped and transcribed. Second interviews were shorter than initial interviews, with a range of 20 to 56 minutes and an average length of 30 minutes. Each participant was given the opportunity to read and verify the transcribed notes of the interviews and to give clarifications or revisions. A copy of the initial interview protocol is in Appendix B; two follow-up interview protocols are in Appendix C.

Data Analysis and Narration

Data analysis was ongoing, beginning with the first interview. Each interview was transcribed, using Microsoft Word® software, and analyzed soon after its completion. Each was subjected to recurring analysis in light of subsequent interviews. A final analysis was conducted when the data set was complete.

In analyzing the data provided by the interview transcripts, I used the typological model described by Hatch (2002). In a typological analysis, the researcher classifies the data according to types so that patterns and generalizations may be sought. The types are

chosen before the analysis begins rather than emerging inductively during examination of the data.

The first step in the typological model is the identification of categories likely to encompass all the data collected that are relevant to the study. My research questions suggested these two typologies for my data: (a) What are the characteristics of the stories the participant remembers reading; and (b) what was the participant's response to the stories remembered?

After the typologies are selected, the data are read and categorized according to the typologies identified, one typology at a time. I used hard copies of the interview transcripts, marking data related to each typology with a different color of transparent ink. At this time, I also made an initial identification of data to be considered for quotation in the findings by marking them with moveable transparent arrows.

The next step the typological model suggests is the recording of summaries of the entries for each typology. I used Microsoft Word to make summary sheets for each participant's data related to each typology. After each summary statement, I listed the related interview statement or statements by line number or numbers.

Following the next step in the model, I sought patterns, preliminary themes, and relationships in the summary sheets for each typology. Then I read the data again, grouping entries according to patterns perceived in the previous step. To record and manage this portion of the categorization, I used Access®, a database that is part of Microsoft's Office 2000® software package.

The next task in typological analysis requires the making of judgments about whether the data support the patterns found. It is essential to search the entire data set for

examples that would refute or contradict the patterns (Hatch, 2002, p. 157-158). Ryan and Bernard (2002, p. 782) emphasize that data not fitting the patterns and categories, negative cases, may not only disconfirm elements of the model, they may also suggest countervailing relationships not encompassed by the previous design projections. When negative cases have been accommodated, a conceptual structure for the patterns themselves must be developed. At each of the data readings, I used red transparent arrows to mark entries with the potential to provide non-examples of patterns or to negate developing themes. These contradictions were addressed, accommodated, and incorporated into the development and the reporting of patterns and relationships.

In the final steps, each pattern is distilled into a one-sentence generalization, and data are found to support them (Hatch, 2002, pp. 152-161). These generalizations and summaries of the supporting data and non-examples, along with complete digital copies of the transcripts, will be made available to researchers upon request.

While the purpose of the typological analysis is to lift data significant to the study from the mass of data collected and to organize that data into a coherent, comprehensible unit, care must be taken in the process not to isolate individual datum. Enough of each datum's context must remain to qualify its veracity to the study participant under the circumstances addressed at that point in the data collection.

I tried to hear the participants' data as the ". . . stories or narratives through which people describe their world" (Silverman, 2000, p. 823). I sought to provide enough of the setting for the data I reported for readers of my study to understand participants' statements with the meaning that the participant intended to convey, to hear the participants' stories.

I felt that the typological analysis model worked well for my study. This method of analyzing data is especially well suited to interview studies (Hatch, 2002). Some of the guiding questions in my protocol for the initial interviews were designed primarily to put the participant at ease or to encourage thinking about reading experiences rather than to elicit relevant data directly, but most of the questions were useful in suggesting substructures within the typologies. The literature I read to inform my work provided another lens through which to view my data. It also suggested themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The multiple reexaminations of the data from the different bases supplied by the typologies and by the patterns I discovered yielded insight into the relationships between data elements. The structure provided by the model enabled me to see relationships and patterns I would not have discerned had I not used it to guide my analysis.

In reporting the results of my analysis, I used the structure suggested by the generalizations developed from the typological analysis. Much of my attempted communication of my study findings has assumed a narrative form. Both my review of literature and the results of the study itself reaffirmed my appreciation of the story as a vehicle uniquely suited to the transmission of ideas, of beliefs, and even of simple factual information.

As I reported my findings, I chose not to identify my participants by age, occupation, or educational status, except in very specific instances when I could be fairly certain that a connection existed between such personal information and the data reported. An example of such a connection was the discussion of professional reading, which clearly related to occupation. To cite the participants' personal information in

other instances could imply relationships that I cannot confirm, relationships that may not exist.

In order to avoid the awkwardness of the phrase *he or she*, or the distastefulness of using *he* for participants of both sexes, I used gender-specific pronouns in referring to participants: I referred to a male participant as *he* and to a female participant as *she.* I made this choice for purposes of clarity and convenience only. This usage should not be construed to imply a finding of gender differences in response to reading. While I acknowledge that gender does make a difference in many areas of life, I refuse to concede that these differences are predictable. Use of the pronoun *he* or *she*, in most instances, gives readers of my study not one iota of evidence about reasons for the participant's response. If the English language offered a gender-free singular pronoun for persons, I would have used it gratefully.

Limitations of This Study

Findings in this study are limited by the participants' abilities to remember their responses to stories they have read and by their abilities to perceive and remember any changes the stories may have effected. Results are also limited by the researcher's ability to ask the kinds of questions that could elicit such memories and such perceptions.

Claims of generalizibility from one small qualitative study obviously cannot be supported. To be generalized to any population, the number of participants would need to be significantly larger. The participant list would have to be generated by random sampling techniques to assure that respondents were statistically representative of the

population for which generalizations were to be made. My study met neither of these two criteria.

A case could be made that the people who volunteered to participate in my study would be atypical of the general population, self-selected by their interest in reading. In fact, two non-volunteers would seem to support this possibility. One was a colleague who said she would never be able to participate in a study such as mine because, although she reads extensively, she never remembers anything she has read. Another person who asked me about my work said that I would never be able to use him in the study. He characterized himself as a dyslexic PhD and said that his reading experience would be too abnormal to fit into the research in which I was engaged. I searched for him later, hoping I could persuade him to tell me his story; but I was unable to find him. On the other hand, some of my participants were quite different from my hypothetical construct of a standard reader. I simply do not know the degree to which my participants represent other readers. This is why my results cannot be extended beyond the eight participants who shared their experiences with me.

These limitations do not mean that my study is without value, that it makes no contribution to the knowledge in its field. Questions can be raised by a study such as mine. Frames of reference can be developed with potential use in reflecting on other circumstances, on data from other similar groups. My study provides an approach to the study of readers' responses to literature that differs significantly from any I found in my search for similar studies. It is the only one in which the researcher asks participants to share their perceptions of the effects of all the stories they remember. It is the only one in

which the researcher reads the participants' salient literature and seeks to understand the participants' response from that knowledge base.

Summary

Because the research questions of interest to me have no observable answers, I sought the disclosures of a small group of people willing to engage in an exploration of their feelings about the significance of the stories they remember having read. I designed an interview study from a constructivist paradigm to elicit and record the feelings and beliefs of these participants about the stories they have found salient. The audio taped interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a typological model, and the findings are presented in the following chapter.

4. FINDINGS

I interviewed eight readers, in two long interviews each, about their perceptions of the influence of the stories they have read. The following statements represent samples from interview transcripts:

- "I haven't really sat down and read a book myself per se in years."
- "I don't think I'm reading anything worthy of a lot of thought."
- "I used to read all the time. But I've forgot about all I ever read."
- "I never let things like that [reading] persuade my character in any way."
- "I can think of nothing I've read [that relates to things that are important to me]."

Each of these statements initially discouraged me. The purpose of my research was to develop understanding about the stories people remember and the ways these stories affect their lives. What if no stories are remembered? What if there is no effect?

I began to reconsider the advice I had been given to limit my study to people who perceive and articulate a strong relationship between their reading and their thinking, people who believe their reading has affected them in ways similar to the ways I believe mine has affected me. But I wanted a more extensive view of readers' responses than research limited to responses like mine could give me. Mine is not the only truth, the only story.

I decided to proceed with the study as I had originally conceived it and to use the information these participants could give me, these readers with a different view. I remained convinced that I needed to hear those participants who described themselves as non-readers, those who believed they had forgotten almost everything they had read, and those who said their reading had no impact on their lives. I considered that, because of

our different perceptions, it might be possible to learn even more from these participants than from those whose experiences with reading were more like my own. So I asked all the volunteers and referrals to share their stories. And in spite of their initial feelings that they had nothing to offer my study, each of them had new ideas and fresh insight to contribute. Each story has shaped my thinking about the relationships between readers and their stories.

In this chapter, I develop my understanding of the thinking that the participants shared with me. The chapter is divided into two major sections aligned with the two facets of my research question. The first section will examine the nature of the stories that the participants remember, and the second will examine the participants' perceptions of the personal effect of those stories.

The data units do not always allow easy segregation into the categories I chose. The memory of a particular story and judgments about the reasons for its being remembered are often intricately linked to the participant's response to that story. Therefore, the nature of the stories and the participants' responses to those stories cannot be strictly separated. There are overlapping elements in many participants' stories. Data that address issues in both categories will be discussed in each place that they make a contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon in question. In some cases, this means that different aspects of the same data entry will be discussed in more than one setting. I reuse this data because it is significant to more than one area of my study.

Although the categories which follow are not a perfect way to approach an understanding of the ideas the participants shared, nor are they the only way, I believe

that they are the approach best suited for my research. They provide the best conceptual framework I was able to design.

Stories Remembered

This section provides an overview of the books and stories remembered by the participants followed by a discussion of the participants' perceptions about ways in which these stories were remembered. I have divided this discussion into the following sections:

- Stories that are written in ways that appeal to the reader
- Stories that enrich, reinforce, or extend the reader's experiences
- Stories whose content deals with themes important to the reader
- Stories that reinforce understanding and build connections with other people

The section will conclude with a brief summary of the literature remembered.

Overview of Stories Remembered

Interview participants listed a total of 181 stories. Of these, only a few were cited by more than one participant. Six cited *The Bible*. Two of the books it contains, *The Book of Job* and *The Book of Revelation*, were mentioned by two participants each. Three participants discussed *The Last of the Mohicans* (Cooper, 1757/1992). *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1847/1996); *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky, 1917); *Squanto, Friend of the Pilgrims* (Bulla, 1954); *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960); and *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), were each listed by two participants. An alphabetical listing of the books and stories cited, along with a key that indicates which participant cited the book, is

included in Appendix D. To protect the participants' anonymity, interview transcripts are labeled with numbers representing the participants rather than with the participants' names. The letters *a* and *b* differentiate between the initial and the follow-up interviews. Thus, the participant I interviewed first is participant 1, and the participant whose initial interview was last is participant 8. If the third participant interviewed cited a book during the second interview, for example, that book is marked 3b.

The singularity of the readers' lists surprised me: I had expected a larger number of books to be remembered by two or more readers. Shared reading experiences seem to come up in casual conversation with more frequency than they did in my interviews. Participants with whom I spoke after our interviews sometimes mentioned other books they remembered but had failed to discuss during the interviews. One participant, reading a compilation of all the participants' remembered literature, found many books he had read and remembered as significant. He had mentioned none of these during our interviews. I wondered whether a different interview protocol or an additional follow-up interview might have elicited a more complete list. In retrospect, I wish I had asked the participants to keep a list of books remembered between interviews. I am confident that the list would have contributed to the thoroughness with which participants remembered their significant stories.

In addition to specific titles, the participants gave categories of stories they remember. Most of these characterizations were by author name. "I think of the Agatha Christie novels. I used to read a lot of those." "...Hemingway, I love his dialogues...." "Barbara Taylor Bradford...Mary Higgins Clark." "Shakespeare." "Toni Morrison." Often the participant seemed to be using an author's name as a link to a kind of stories

read and remembered. In a few cases the author's name seemed to be the only thing the reader remembered from the stories. A total of 59 authors were cited; and, as with the story titles, there was very little overlap. Agatha Christie and C. S. Lewis were mentioned by two participants, and three readers mentioned Shakespeare. These authors, along with the key to the participant who remembered them, are listed in Appendix E.

I could understand the affinity readers felt for the work of a particular author. I have my own favorites, too. I was also reminded of two incidents from my experience with children's reading. Once a sixth grade student in my class wept when she realized she had read the last of the books in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series. And I remembered my daughter, then a middle school student, reading Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) as I tucked her in one night. She finished the book a couple of hours after her bedtime and burst from her room demanding to know, "What else did she write?" She was most disappointed with my answer.

Four readers mentioned stories remembered from series, sets of related or sequential books that are usually, but not always, written by the same author. Of the 18 series cited, only two were mentioned by more than one reader. Both of these were juvenile mystery series, *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*. They were remembered by two participants each. The series that readers remembered are listed in Appendix F.

Readers often remembered stories by genre groups. I use a broad spectrum of meaning for *genre*, including not only categories like biography, history, poetry, and romantic fiction, but also participants' designations like "books about chess," "how-to books," "First Amendment cases," and "junk." Thirty-eight such categories were offered. Again, there was very little duplication of categories between participants. Five readers

referred to history and two readers to mysteries. Four participants mentioned professional literature, but four different professions were represented, education, law, medicine, and writing. Genre groups are listed in Appendix G.

When asked about what they remembered, readers sometimes listed sources of stories. These 25 sources included newspapers, magazines, comic books, book clubs, the opera, and encyclopedias. They also included non-traditional sources such as the Internet, books on CD, videotapes, movies, and television. Sources are given in Appendix H.

I was surprised by the variety of sources from which the participants gleaned their stories. Readers remembered nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and children's stories, Aesop's Fables and comic books. One reader remembered belonging to the Doubleday Dollar Book Club and getting Reader's Digest Condensed Books. Newspapers and magazines were mentioned, of course, and one reader spends an hour or two a day reading on the Internet. He likes to follow up on current events and human-interest stories from a variety of online sources. He likes their brevity. "I don't like a lot of filler and a lot of fluff. I like specific details, and then, you know, draw my own conclusions." Another reader told of the stories in case law, particularly three Supreme Court cases that had been especially significant. I had not thought of court cases as venues for story, but I came to understand that story can even be part of the courtroom strategy. In *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (2002, p. 55), Bruner told of testifying as a friend of the court in a Delaware appeal involving racially segregated schools. His role was to tell the story that would make clear the damage such segregation did to black children. His book finds many reasons for narration, including the development of stories to help people reach consensus on just solutions to social and legal problems.

The numbers given in the preceding section—numbers of books, numbers of authors, and numbers of participants who remembered the same stories—are not intended to create an illusion of quantifiability for my study. They are intended only to give a sense of the scope of the participants' remembered stories. Each component of the readers' remembered stories must be looked at as an entity rather than as a quantity. I will discuss aspects of these remembered stories in the following sections.

Remembered Stories are Written in Ways that Appeal to the Reader

Stories that readers remember often contain vivid, memorable language with sensory appeal. Similes and metaphors are used, and the senses are actively engaged. Dreams and symbols may be used to extend appeal beyond the physical senses.

Their Language is Memorable

Three of the participants said it is important to them for a book to be well written, even lyrical. Participants remarked on authors' writing style. "Hemingway. I love his dialogues." One complained about the practice of rewriting classics to make them easier for young children to read. She lamented, "The poetry is completely gone out of the writing. The hard, the reaching up language is gone . . . ." While one reader said directly that he never cared for poetry at all, another loved it. "I read a lot of poetry. It sings to me." She remembered some books specifically because of their poetry. She spoke of having loved *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams, 1947). What she remembered of it was its setting, New Orleans, and a single line: "Stella for star." When asked why she thought she remembered one book, the reader said, "I think it was the language . . . the beauty of the language . . . ." Another reader enjoys similes and metaphors so much that

she sometimes goes back through a book she has read and marks all of them, "*S* for simile, *M* for metaphor." Sabine and Sabine (1983, p. 34) quote actor Tony Randall remembering *Look Homeward, Angel* (Wolfe, 1957), "I was obsessed with it. It was all I thought about for several years. I thought I'd discovered writing."

Their Descriptions Are Vivid, Sensory

Clear descriptions contribute to a book's being remembered, according to the readers I interviewed. One reader used a visual metaphor to describe the way he remembers *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) from the *Chronicles of Narnia* series, "I remember the way that Lewis painted . . . the doorway . . . through the closet." I could see it, too. And Narnia's "snow-covered trees . . . . I can still see what I think came from that in my mind, sort of a pure world, a pure place."

A visual memory was all that remained of one book a reader read long ago, and he was uncertain whether the picture he saw was from a book jacket or from the text itself. Another reader commented that the reader contributes much to the vividness of a story by imagining it fully.

It was important to the study participants that the setting be drawn distinctly, and that it be an intricate part of the story. "It enhances your ability to feel like you're there, if you can really visualize a lot of details about where the book takes place."

Sight is not the only sense that can be engaged by a powerful story. In speaking of *Across Five Aprils* (Hunt, 1964), which she read as a fifth grader, a participant said, "I remember vivid images about things that were different than the other children's books had been . . . . I remember . . . a vivid description about the meal that the mother had

cooked for her sons . . . . While I was reading it, I could smell the onions, I could smell the potatoes."

They may use descriptive devices.

Discussing author Bodie Thoene's books, a reader said, "They're full of similes and metaphors . . . . "She vividly described the setting so that I felt like I was really entering that world." Describing one scene as depicted by the author, she said, "Some of her descriptions of sunsets and snow-covered mountains were so vivid, I almost felt like I was glimpsing the sunset literally, and that I could touch the snow on the mountains."

A participant expressed how powerfully these literary devices can help a reader to become part of the story: "[The author] used similes and metaphors when she talked about landscapes and city scenes. . . . And I felt like I had taken a plane trip to Vienna, very literally."

They engage the emotions in a sensory web.

Emotions can become enmeshed in the sensory memory of a story. One reader spoke of *Time of Wonder* (McCloskey, 1957), a book she had read as a child and now reads to her daughter, "Whenever I read it, I can smell salt water. There's kind of a feeling of fear that comes with that smell. The storm that's coming . . . it's all around them . . . they can't get away."

One reader described New Orleans in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams, 1947). "I found the description of the setting very vivid. The heat . . . ." She drooped in her chair—wilted—as she spoke of her memories of reading the play. She paused for a drink of water before she continued to link the story's heavy theme with its oppressive physical setting.

Perhaps vivid descriptions of a story's setting are important to us as readers because we know that an understanding of the setting can contribute to our being able to connect with the story. One reader summarized that significance; "We're . . . grounded by place as human beings." When we understand *the place* of the story, when we can relate it to our own place and to the places we know, we can assimilate the story as our own.

They use symbols and dreams to engage other senses.

The use of symbols and dreams in story can connect with our senses at the subconscious level. Three participants in my study mentioned symbolism in books they remembered. One reader currently reading a mystery, *The DaVinci Code* (Brown, 2003), explained how intricately symbols were woven into the plot. He said that some of the use of symbols had given him an idea for a mystery novel he is conceptualizing. Another reader spoke of her discovery, upon rereading, of the use of fire as a symbol in *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1869/1994).

One participant was especially fascinated by both symbols and dreams. She remembered *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1963) as highly significant in her life, and she spoke of dream interpretation in *The Book of Daniel* from *The Bible*, and of the symbolism in the story of "Ezekiel and the Wheel," also from *The Bible*, and *The Book of Revelation.* When I asked her about the meaning of the symbolism in the Ezekiel story, she replied, with surprise, that she hadn't thought about it. She remembered and enjoyed the symbolism quite apart from any underlying meaning it might convey. Donoghue (1998, p. 95) says a symbol can have "the effect of a rune or a charm. Its clear intention…is to produce the effect of a dream." It is not always necessary to understand

the meaning of a dream or of a symbol to enjoy its use. There is an allure to the symbol that alludes to an understanding just beyond our reach.

The readers I interviewed said they remembered some stories because of the beauty of their language, some for their vivid engagement of the reader's senses, and others for the way they used symbols and dreams to lead the reader to a dream-like connection with the story. In my personal reading, I have lovely memories of the beauty of the language used in many of the stories I have loved. I remember the lyrical, poignant beauty of James Agee's *A Death in the Family* (1957) clearly, even though I could not quote, or even adequately paraphrase, more than a phrase or two. I remember sequences from some fantasy novels almost as if they were my own waking dreams, a quasi-sensory experience that I strongly prefer to the equally valid versions experienced by others; therefore, I do not expect to find filmmakers' versions of Tolkien's (1965) *Lord of the Rings* trilogy to be as pleasing to me as my own dream-like memories of the books.

Stories can be remembered for the beauty of their language; they can also be remembered because of what they offer the reader. In the following section, stories remembered will be examined in terms of what they offer the reader.

Remembered Stories Enrich, Reinforce, or Extend the Reader's Experiences

Stories can enrich the reader's life in many ways. They can entertain, they can present challenges, they can reflect or expand the reader's experiences. Stories that do

these things are likely to be remembered. This section addresses the ways readers find their needs for enrichment and reinforcement met through literature.

They Entertain

Only three of the study participants mentioned reading purely to be entertained; those who did sometimes rationalized or qualified the reading. One reader said that she had read only "junk" during the past week because it was her beach vacation. Another explained that she read one author's work only for entertainment; she did not expect to gain anything else from it. One reader only mentioned reading for enjoyment in connection with reading books by a familiar author, one who could be trusted not to let any unpleasantness tarnish the story. But one participant made no apologies: "I knew I was missing the technical part, but it didn't bother me. It was still fun reading . . . . Just entertain me, don't make me think."

Hazard (1944) reminds us of the power of books to give us entertainment, diversion, escape. He writes that the story ". . . is still the best way we have found, if not of leaving our island, at least of forgetting sometimes that we are prisoners on it" (p. 69).

They follow a pattern predictably—or they surprise.

Some readers enjoy and remember books because they confirm their expectations. Readers gave this predictability as a primary reason for reading books in a series or books by a particular author.

One reader who reads primarily romantic fiction described the format: "The typical romantic, perfect couple comes through trials and triumphs to finally be together." The corollary theme she gave was that the heroine was ". . . always a very strong woman who builds an empire of some sort. . . they overcome obstacles and completely triumph."

Christian-Smith (1990, p. 25) says that this romantic fiction pattern involves the ". . . heroines' attempts to try to negotiate better terms for themselves—to seek ways to be influential and powerful." Frye (1976) adds another condition to the standard story line of romantic fiction: The hero is almost always a member of the upper classes. "Even in Shakespearean romance distinctions of rank are rigidly maintained at the end" (p. 161).

One book, *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell, 1940), violated the romantic fiction format grievously, according to one participant. In the final pages of the book, the hero abandoned the heroine. The situation was not rectified to the participant's satisfaction until a sequel was written by another author after Mitchell's death. When the participant suggested that the original author didn't know what she was doing, I asked whether she thought Ms. Mitchell had made a mistake. She replied, "No. I think she died too soon." This reader believed that, had the author lived, she would have reunited the estranged couple in a sequel of her own.

Kaplan (1986) believes that *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell, 1940) departs from the romance formula in several other ways as well. She characterizes the protagonist as more closely aligned with masculine than feminine stereotypes and the novel itself as dealing with the loss of the quasi-mythical Southern society and the emergence of a less graceful but more just modern society. She says, "It is history and fantasy spoken from the position of the women" (Kaplan, 1986, p. 144). Two of the readers I interviewed voiced a search for this theme in choosing their stories to read.

Predictability is not a guarantee that a book will be remembered, or even read. Books can be avoided because they are too predictable. A reader dismisses an author: "I

don't read her very often, like years in between, because it's the same plot, different story over and over and over."

Bruner (2002, p. 28) disparages predictability: ". . . the impetus to narrative is expectation gone awry." Books were often remembered because they surprised, because they confounded the reader's expectations. Discussing a good character in *Walk Egypt* (Williams, 1960), a participant said, "You'd think everything would just turn out great for her, wouldn't you? But it doesn't."

A book can be remembered because it unpredictably defies the reader's beliefs about its suitability. Discussing James Fenimore Cooper's books, a female reader said, "They were what I would consider a boy's book, and I just remember truly enjoying them."

A predictable story or book that conforms to the reader's expectations reinforces that reader's thinking in comforting ways that make the book likely to be remembered. Books that surprise, books that challenge the reader's assumptions, can provide opportunities for seeing expanded possibilities. This, too, makes a book memorable.

They engage the reader's imagination.

Donoghue (1998, p. 56) states: "I believe that the purpose of reading literature is to exercise or incite one's imagination; specifically, one's ability to imagine being different." The readers in my study remembered literature that gave them this opportunity. From *Stuart Little* (White, 1973), a reader remembered, ". . .the idea of sort of expanding your idea of what's possible in life through a book like that." Speaking of other books he remembered, he said that they gave new ideas and also new paradigms, new structures for ordering ideas.

Comparing reading a story to watching the same story on television, one participant said that the version viewed on television was far less vivid because of "the imagination aspect in reading." The fantasies in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series (Lewis, 1956) inspired one reader to imagine. He said, "There was something magical about them." Another reader characterized all fiction as "just figments of somebody's imagination." And one participant refuses to read a book if it doesn't "give me the opportunity to see something in a different way." The "figments of somebody's imagination" can indeed give us new ways of seeing things. Donoghue (1998, p. 51) said, "We might use [a book] to imagine, yet again, what it must be to be different. Which is, in my view, why we continue to have an interest in writing and reading."

Books that entertain us, books that engage our imaginations, are often remembered. Books that challenge us are likely to be remembered, too.

They Present Real or Vicarious Challenges for the Reader

Some readers remember books that challenge them. One participant never remembers the story ". . . if a book doesn't push me into an area that I haven't explored." Intellectual challenges are welcomed. One reader remembers the *Sherlock Holmes* (Doyle, 1892/1993) stories because of "the idea of logic, of being able to sort things out." He continued, "Sherlock Holmes is a puzzle. Sometimes what I do [in my work] is a puzzle." Challenging books are not limited to those that extend boundaries or give opportunities to test our logic in solving a mystery. Books can challenge our intellect directly, as mysteries do if we are trying to solve them. They can also provide emotional challenges when they give opportunities for readers to imagine themselves as participants in the story.

Readers remembered books filled with adventure, books which invited their imaginations to join the expedition. Of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Clemens / Twain, 1884/1962), one reader said, "It was an adventure, it was uncharted territory, it had risk. . . . Travel, risk-taking, adventure, having fun and doing good. You've got it all right there. Even some fishing." Of *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719/1946), "That was risk taking, that was adventure, that was improvising." When asked what he remembers about mysteries, a reader replied, "I think it's the excitement." Another reader explained what she remembered about *The Last of the Mohicans* (Cooper, 1757/1992), "I liked the spirit of adventure."

Why do readers remember adventure stories? Perhaps it is because they lived the stories vicariously. One reader told me, "So I guess maybe I experience more of that living on the edge than I do [in real life]." Fry (1985, p. 75) says, "This virtual experience seems to be what we especially value about reading fiction. As we read, we re-enact what has happened as though we were there." And that, according to one participant, constitutes ". . . adventures of the mind."

The familiar has its attractions, and a book that begins with reader's familiar experience may be remembered. It may also lead the reader into new territory. Those books are discussed in the following section.

They Relate to the Reader's Personal Experience—or Create New Experiences

"Well, I've known so many people like that. I suppose that's why it struck a chord with me. I've known so many people like that." This summarizes the power of the familiar to entice us to incorporate a story into our memories. "I grew up with people like that. That's why I loved her. I loved Eudora Welty." The reader grew up in Memphis;

Welty's stories are written about people in the author's native Mississippi. The reader recognizes her community in the author's stories. One reader, passionately interested in Civil War stories, attributes part of his interest to the fact that he had family members, ancestors, who fought on both sides of that conflict. Two participants cited their hometown newspapers as the last reading material they would be willing to give up. The familiar resonates strongly with readers.

Like familiar settings and characters that remind readers of people they know, familiar experiences often make a story memorable. One reader said she was "a very small gym rat who had aspirations of being an athlete" when she discovered *Nancy Leiberman, Basketball's Magic Lady* (Jones, 1981). She could still quote the opening lines. Another reader, fascinated by rivers, remembered stories in which rivers played a role.

Dramas were included in the list of stories remembered by the two participants with theatrical experience. One reader, who was 15 when he joined a traveling theater company, says that now, 65 years later, he remembers only the plays he was in. Other interests also made stories memorable. Stories about camping and fishing made the list of remembered books, as did books about the history of chess.

One reader recalled a series of news stories about people who did things he might have done, but was glad he had not. A reader who fought in World War II remembered clearly books about that war, particularly *Citizen Soldiers* (Ambrose, 1997). That book covered most of the battles in which he fought.

We are comfortable with books that reflect our familiar experiences. We also like books that reflect our philosophies. One reader said, "I had always, always watched my

dreams. . . ." It is not surprising that when she read Jung's (1963) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, it became important to her immediately. Schwartz (1996, p. 107) says that we read, sometimes, ". . . to confirm what we already know, who we have resolved or consented to be." At those times, we find what we expected in our reading, she says. "Naturally. We would find it anywhere, because we bring it with us" (p. 107). A philosophy similar to our own can make a book memorable, but so can a dissonant philosophy, as one reader found in B. F. Skinner's work and another in the novel *Green Mansions* (Hudson, 1916). They remembered those books because they found the philosophies depicted there to be unacceptable to them personally.

Stories are valued and remembered if they describe a way of life attractive to the reader. One participant said he valued the novels of two authors because of the way the authors lived as well as the way they wrote. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) ". . . lived life to the fullest." In speaking of British author James Herriot, he made his own feelings clear: ". . . he had sort of an idyllic life...He lived in [rural England] and got to practice a profession there in a small town. It just seemed like a nice life. I would have loved to have had the opportunity . . . ."

Readers remember stories that tell of how they might like things to be. They also remember books that made their own lives better. One reader recalled with pride the first long book he ever read, *Squanto, Friend of the Pilgrims* (Bulla, 1954). He spoke of how accomplished it made him feel to read such a book, even though it was "only about this thick" (and he measured a couple of centimeters with his thumb and forefinger). I was amazed at the extent of his recall about details of the story, and at how real Squanto seemed to him. But he put the importance of the book in his life into perspective for me.

"It's a childhood memory; it's a real fond memory. Everybody's got good memories and bad memories. That's a good memory, you know."

Most of the readers in my study said they enjoyed reading fiction as a way to learn more about cultures that fascinate them. One reader likes stories set in Latin-American countries, one in the Far East, two in the South, and one in Russia. Another likes Native American stories. Each of these readers indicated that they feel that reading good fiction helps them understand the realities of the other culture.

One reader said she deliberately chose fiction to read in order to learn more about a part of the world. She read Michener's *Hawaii* (1959) before traveling to Hawaii, "to find out what it would be like." It worked for her. "It seemed familiar when we went."

Readers remember some books because they reflect the familiar, and they remember other books because they make new worlds familiar to them. Sometimes the same book has the potential to reflect the familiar or the unfamiliar, depending on the point at which the reader encounters it. The next section examines some of the readers' remembrances of literature perceived differently at different points in their lives, especially stories they have read more than once.

They Give New Meanings on Subsequent Rereadings

Books may be remembered because they have been reread or reinterpreted at different stages in the reader's life, and sometimes they are remembered because they gave new insight when reread. One reader's comment illustrates this quite well: "When I read *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1869/1994) for the third time, I was more aware of the symbolism of fire in the book." Several readers mentioned reading *The Bible* or passages from *The Bible* multiple times. One comment illustrates both the effects of rereading and

the regard in which the reader holds that book. "It's like reading *The Bible* over and over. I'll go back and find a little jewel in there and it'll . . .give me new thought and everything." Schwartz (1996, p. 47) says of a favorite childhood story, "I still return to it every few years; it draws me . . . . Each time it bestows on me, yet again, some crucial knowledge that is all too easy to lose, that the world seems bent on making us forget."

When readers come back to a previously read book, they bring the results of all the experiences they have had since the first reading. They are different people, to some extent. They are always older; and almost always they bring different expectations. These include their memories of their first encounter with the story. I remember my own second reading of a favorite novel, *Look Homeward Angel* (Wolfe, 1957). I re-read the first half of the book with such a sense of foreboding, such a feeling of doom. I read in constant dread of the death of the protagonist's brother, one of the few details I remembered from my first reading. I remember more from that second reading than from the first, but my clearest memory of the book is the way the first reading colored the second.

Many stories are remembered because they enrich and reinforce, or they extend, the reader's experiences. Others may be remembered because they address issues of significance to the reader. These books will be discussed in the next section.

Remembered Stories Deal with Themes Important to the Reader

In evaluating the worth of a story, and in speaking of their response to it, readers often referred to the story's being true to life. Three readers said they preferred reading history to reading fiction. These readers especially seemed to want their fiction to feel true as well. When one of them spoke of a work of fiction that had been important to him,

he said, "...that's just the way it is, you know." Another reader said, "I could see where that could be real." He used that statement to explain why he valued the story, and accepted its aspects of truth, even though it had elements of fantasy that might have caused him to reject it. Truth, or a feeling of truth, was an aspect of literature most of my readers seemed to value highly.

Stories with themes of doing good seemed to linger in the memories of the participants in my study. Readers seemed to want characters in their salient stories to grapple with issues of good and evil, and they wanted good to prevail. Good does not always prevail, of course. Some stories were remembered because of the difficulty of the struggle. Some were remembered because their themes or the outcome of the conflicts they depicted were so disturbing to the reader.

In the following sections, these three aspects of remembered literature will be discussed. The first section deals with the perception of truth in literature, the second with themes of doing good, and the third with the confrontation of difficult issues that create disturbances in the reader.

They Are True—or Feel True

"And that stuck with me because, really, it's true." This reader, and most of the others I interviewed, said that a story could not be memorable to them unless it were true, or could conceivably be true. Bruner (1986) noted that they must be" recognizable as 'true to conceivable experience': that they must have verisimilitude" (p. 52). The readers said, "It has to feel genuine. It has to feel like, well, I could have had a day like this day in the book." "It has to feel like it could really happen for me to feel the possibility I could connect to the story." If the characters don't seem real, I can't relate to them."

Readers agreed that authors of stories they remember research details to assure the verisimilitude of their work. At least, as one reader said, "I think the good ones do, yeah, I think they do. And you can learn about things that way." Another reader pointed out that many authors of fiction acknowledge sources from which they obtained background information for their stories.

The readers differed, though, on how important accuracy in details was to them personally. It was very important to one reader. "'Cause there was . . . another series in which the author didn't really tell exactly where it was taking place and didn't really tell the exact dates . . . . So I don't plan to read any more in that series . . . ." This reader conducts her own triangulation on the historical fiction she reads. She looks up references to the period in encyclopedias, reads historical documents of the time, and compares the work to other historical fiction set in the same period. In contrast, another reader dismisses the importance of accuracy, saying, "Rhett comes back, so what difference does it make if Waterford was making crystal during that era or not?" Still, the near-consensus of the group was expressed by the reader who said, "It's gotta be believable."

Some readers expressed a strong preference for nonfiction. "Well, I don't read much fiction, because when I read something, I want to know the facts." "What happened, when it happened, and the conditions . . . ." ". . . I like to know what actually happened, and it's documented. That's what fascinates me."

Following an interesting tangent, I found that several of the participants attributed a higher reliability to print than to other sources of story. One reader said, "Well, I like documented evidence on something that happened . . .but I also enjoy . . .watching on film or DVD or whatever." He had watched the video of the film *Gettysburg* "probably

25 or 30 times" he said, and he also read several books about the battle. Since he didn't remember the names of any of the books he'd read, I read *Reflections on the Civil War* (Catton, 1982) and watched the *Gettysburg* (1995) video in preparation for the follow-up interview. There were a few discrepancies between the book and the video that I asked him about. In every case, he answered my questions with data from the book rather than the video.

Pursuing that tangent, I read about the different ways we approach print and non-print media. I wanted to see if there might be a connection between the nature of the medium and our perception of the veracity of its message. Birkerts (1994, p. 146) suggests that the pace at which the medium is presented may affect our acceptance of its ideas. He says when he is reading, he sometimes pauses to stare off into space and think about what he has read. He says, "We don't just speed a thought through our neural network—we inhale it, hold it, wait for it to sent ripples through the whole of our being." And, he insists, "Rewinding the tape is no solution" (p. 146). Hernandi (1980) also believes that the speed of reading or viewing affects the response to the story. The speed of reading is, of course, determined exclusively by the reader. I suggest that having more time to reflect on ideas, more time than a film or video allows, lets the reader examine the ideas more closely, allowing more confidence that any judgments of their veracity will be accurate.

Readers in my study seemed to find a perception of truth very important in their remembered stories. Also important was the perception of moral integrity. Many books were remembered because, in the reader's judgment, good prevailed.

They Have Themes of Doing Good

Stories in which good prevails resonate with many of us. They show life as we believe it should work out. One reader said that when selecting new books to read, books of which she knows nothing, she reads the ending first. If it does not meet her expectations, if good does not prevail, she does not read it. It is easier, of course, to forget a story if it is never heard.

Several readers expressed a strong preference for stories in which the morally superior characters prevail. When I asked one participant why he remembered *The Last of the Mohicans* (Cooper, 1757/1992), he said, ". . . they killed Magua in the end. The mean guy."

One reader said he is interested in stories about Confederate general Robert E. Lee because of the principle he modeled: "Take care of your people." Another reader learned that lesson from a group of children's books: *Corduroy* (Freeman, 1968/1976), *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Williams, 1922/196?), *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1933), and *Crow Boy* (Yashima, 1955). In the first two books, a neglected stuffed animal is reclaimed, realized. In the third a duck destined for a family's dinner is set free. In the last book, a child despised as inferior by his classmates is finally appreciated. The lesson the reader heard the books teaching was simple: "Save something!"

The book mentioned most frequently in connection with themes of doing good was *The Bible.* Only two participants in the study did not mention this sacred book of Christians. A third participant mentioned it only once, and then it was mentioned along with *The Koran*, Islam's sacred book. The other five mentioned *The Bible* frequently. One participant, who went to church schools until her second year in high school, said

that most of her early reading was either based on *The Bible* or was from *The Bible* itself. Four participants included Bible-related literature among the stories they remembered reading. Two of the participants said they had read *The Bible* through several times. One reader said she plans to read it through every year for the rest of her life. When Sabine and Sabine (1983) asked over 1400 people the question, "What book made the greatest difference in your life?" the answer most frequently given was *The Bible.*

The degree of interest in *The Bible* shown by participants was not surprising to me. My study was conducted in the Southeastern United States, an area that has often been referred to as *the Bible belt.* The Judeo-Christian heritage of this region assures a high degree of exposure to *The Bible* for most readers. I would suppose it to more widely available to readers in this area than any other text; I would expect it to be remembered.

Two readers cited *The Bible* as a book that had both themes of doing good and themes of dealing with issues of fairness and justice: "Throughout *The Bible*, fairness and justice are emphasized." Readers gave specific examples of problems of justice resolved in *The Bible.* Numerous other stories were remembered because they addressed issues of fairness and justice, too. Not all of them dealt with racial issues, but most did. Participants seemed to view struggles against African-American racial bias as the most prominent issue of justice challenging society. As with the participants' response to the *Bible,* it seems likely that this perception was shaped at least in part by the geographic location of the study. Other racial/ethnic matters, gender discrimination, and economic justice were mentioned; issues of sexual orientation and age were not. Disabilities were mentioned as an issue only in connection with a particular novel, *Jane Eyre* (Brontë, 1847/1996).

Books remembered as providing models for dealing with issues of justice included *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (Hardy, 1891/1998), *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850/1997), *The Crucible* (Miller, 1953), and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). A reader praised the author's work in creating the attorney in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, saying, "I've always felt that it was much more difficult to be articulate, intelligent. . . and to convince people what was just than just to feel the burning passion of wanting justice."

Clemens/Twain was acknowledged by a participant for the way he infused *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884/1962) with what the reader felt were attempts to raise the consciousness of racists, attempts to circumvent the barriers racists erect to prevent their seeing the results of their intolerance. The reader said, "He weaved it into his stories...in a way that was appealing to people who were racist.... He got this great story, and...you can't read it without seeing the inhumanity of man... against man." Speaking of the author's literary strategy, the reader said, "It was brilliant. He put that right in there in a way that it didn't seem like he was trying to fit something into a story." He said that Dickens had done the same thing. "He cried out against social injustices through his literature."

Supreme Court cases were cited: *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), and *Palmore v. Sidoti* (1984). The reader felt these cases serve as models for thinking about issues of fairness and justice. As an attorney, this reader had both special access and professional interest in such legal cases. Although I have neither of these connections, I remembered many stories of interest related to cases, particularly stories

relating to civil rights rulings. But I had never viewed the case law itself as story, until this participant clearly described it in this way.

One final reader slyly suggested that the reason stories needed to deal with issues of fairness and justice was to provide plot opportunities for the heroines in her romantic novels. "You know, they've got to rise above *something*."

Not all stories dealing with themes of fairness and justice have happy endings. Some books and stories were remembered because the issues with which they dealt were not resolved to the reader's satisfaction.

They Address Difficult or Disturbing Issues

Some stories were remembered because of pain they caused the reader. Several participants mentioned stories of real tragedies such as the Holocaust, maritime disasters, and wars. Three children's books, two dealing with anger and one dealing with crime, still bother one participant. The books are: *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), *Caps for Sale* (Slobodkina, 1968), and *Crictor* (Ungerer, 1958). *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky, 1917) disturbed and continues to disturb one reader. Two Toni Morrison books were remembered as painful by a participant, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Song of Solomon* (1977/1993), as was Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Each of these three books deals with difficult issues of prejudice, poverty, deprivation, and depravity. Another book was cited as disturbing, *The Nanny Diaries* (McLaughlin, 2002), because the reader felt it depicted the abdication of parental nurturing responsibility. A reader was disquieted by a B. F. Skinner book in which ". . . he seemed to rule out the possibility of high moral life."

Two books that were read by readers when they were middle-school age, *Almost a Famous Person* (Michelson, 1980) and *Green Mansions* (Hudson, 1916), are still troubling those readers today. One of those readers warns, "Books can be too strong. They need to be balanced. You can't have one book and hold it under your arm and go."

Stories may be remembered because they feel true, because they have themes of doing good, or because they confront difficult issues. Another category of memorable stories defined by the participants was that of stories that depict complex characters and connections between people.

Remembered Stories Reinforce Understanding and Build Connections with Other People

One of the reasons the study participants gave for valuing and remembering stories was the opportunity those stories gave them to develop an understanding of other people. Several readers expressed the idea that they could learn about real people by reading books with well-developed characters and intricate webs of human relationships.

They Depict Human Connections and Encourage the Reader to Build Connections

Close interpersonal relationships are the part of a story that lingered with one of the participants. Speaking of an especially enjoyed series of books, he said, ". . . you see friendship as a powerful factor . . . the friendship between various good people in those works carried them through trials and tribulations . . ." Family connections were mentioned as memorable parts of other novels.

When I asked readers why they remembered a particular story, their answers often related to the degree to which they cared about the story's characters. "What I do with a book depends on what the author offers. Depends on . . . whether the author really causes

me to care about that character, what happens to that character." This reader clearly voiced the connection that often seems to exist between caring about the characters and remembering the story. Other readers expressed that importance in other ways. When asked what made her remember some stories but not others, a reader said, "The characters. Maybe I wish that I could do some of the things that they did. Knowing that I won't." Characters of integrity were remembered most clearly by one reader, who gave characters in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1965) as an example. One reader cared more about the characters and believed she was more likely to connect with and remember stories ". . . when people are shown vulnerable . . . ." One participant shared an understanding of how the author of the novel *Vienna Prelude* (Thoene, 1989) made the characters important. She said, "From the beginning, she gave me a very clear picture of who Elisa was. I felt like she was someone that I admired and that I would enjoy spending time with."

Caring about characters can become quite intense. Describing the heart-rending appeal of a suicide victim, one reader said, ". . . in this book, I got to know him. You get to *know* him but you don't get to *tell* him . . . he's gone." Another reader obviously cared deeply about the protagonist in *Madame Butterfly* (Long, 1969), ". . . when she was so sure that he was gonna come back, and he didn't . . . that just broke my heart." Some readers spoke of the characters in their stories as if they were real people with whom they had real connections.

They Have Complex Characters

Often this caring implies good characters, but not always. Broyard (1971, p. 281) said, "An evil character brilliantly portrayed will awaken our empathy—even

sympathy—more readily than a good one in a pedestrian description." He proceeded to describe how he had come to sympathize with a particular Cormac McCarthy character. Although the character was a murderer and a rapist who vandalized corpses, Broyard said, "I cared about Ballard and very nearly forgave him his sins because the author seduced me into feeling that he was someone I knew very well . . . " (p. 281). One of the readers in my study described a similar appreciation for author Toni Morrison's skill in developing characters: "She can make you empathize with a pedophile."

To make the reader "empathize with a pedophile" or sympathize with a murderer, the author must clearly depict far more than those singularly unsympathetic aspects of the character. The author must show the reader that the character is too complex to be reduced to a single despicable label such as *pedophile* or *murderer*.

Readers appreciate and remember stories that give them complex characters to study. Sometimes they may not like the story if they do not understand or approve of the character, but they remember it. I found it interesting to note the frequency with which participants cited books whose characters had been clearly drawn, even if those characters proved to be difficult to appreciate as people.

Even a complex character that cannot be accepted or assimilated may linger in the memory. Speaking of a book last read in childhood, a reader said of her response to a character, "Felt weird. Couldn't relate to the character of the burglar. I needed to relate." She was unable to relate, but she remembered.

Complex sympathetic characters seemed most likely to be remembered by the participants in my study. One reader spoke frequently and appreciatively of the characters developed in Tolstoy's novels. She said, "I enjoy the way he paints a clear picture of

changes in people's lives because I like to see changes. I like to see growth." This statement from the same participant illustrates the extent to which a well-drawn character can become real to a reader: "Tolstoy also captures the personality of Pierre in a way that fascinates me . . . . Tolstoy created him as such a real person that I really want to get to know him better . . . ."

One reader remembered Chaucer's complex characters quite clearly. She had written a paper in high school comparing each of the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* to a modern person. She spoke of the project with obvious delight.

To the student of human behavior, books can provide a valuable set of field notes to study. One reader told me, "Books can reveal even more than an interview at times, because they give that omniscient perspective on the thinking of another person. It's almost like opening a person's head and looking at those inner workings." Reading about complex characters in literature gives us the chance to see, or to imagine that we see, some of the causes of human behavior that are difficult or even impossible to discern when we encounter similar characters in real life. Books that give us such insight, even if it is only illusory, are likely to be remembered.

Stories can be remembered because they are written in ways that appeal to the reader. They can be remembered because they enrich, reinforce, or extend the reader's experiences. They can be remembered because they deal with themes important to the reader. They can be remembered because they reinforce understanding and build connections with other people. But not all stories are remembered.

Sometimes Stories are Forgotten

Knowing why some stories are not remembered should help us understand why others are. Study participants gave two different reasons for forgetting stories; there may be many others.

I read *The Notebook* (Sparks, 1996), remembered and recommended by one participant at our first interview. When I brought it up to discuss at our second interview, about two months later, he did not remember it at all. When I gave a few details from the book, he did remember the story; but initially he had not. He explained, "I was reading one right after another at that time, and lots of times they don't stick with you too well." I wondered whether there was such a connection for other readers between reading a lot of books in close succession and not remembering them.

Another participant believed she had deliberately forgotten details of *Green Mansions* (Hudson, 1916), a book that had disturbed her. She said, "That story was very vivid up until the point that it started turning dark and things started getting unpleasant. And I think I've blocked out most of the story from my memory for that reason." A story *not* remembered can affect the reader, too.

The reader who said, " I used to read all the time. But I've forgotten about all I ever read," actually remembered quite a lot. Birkerts (1994) doubts that books are ever fully forgotten. He believes the stories we have experienced endure as fragmentary images and impressions in our memory, just as the memories of real events do. He says, ". . . as in life, so in art. Just as most of what happens to us dissolves . . . so most of what we have read loses definition and becomes a blurry wash" (p. 146).

The stories listed in the preceding sections, those stories of which the study participants had a conscious memory, provided the basis for my attempts to understand the ways in which readers respond to literature. Using these stories, the participants and I worked together to construct answers to my second research question, the ways in which participants say the stories they remember affect their thinking, their character, their worldview. The participants' responses to these questions about their responses to their significant literature are discussed in the following section.

Effects on Readers

The preceding discussion of the nature of books remembered incorporated many aspects of the current topic, how the stories remembered affected the readers. I found it impossible to completely separate the nature of a story as perceived by a reader from the effect of that story on the reader. Nevertheless, I believed it would be helpful to consider the two aspects separately, even though they are actually no more separate than are the literal and figurative meanings of a metaphor. The following section examines the remembered stories through the readers' perceptions of their personal significance and effect.

Overview of Effects on Readers

"Powerful stuff." "It made a powerful impression on me." Several readers described a story using the word *powerful,* which means *having the capacity to produce an effect.* When readers acknowledge that a story is powerful, they are, in effect, saying that the story is making a change in them. They are not, however, passive recipients of the story's agency. The relationship between the reader and the story are reciprocal in

terms of power. Schwartz (1996, p. 118) says, "Since the book . . . must be opened and fathomed, we enjoy the heady power of being necessary to its life." Donoghue (1998, p. 102) also spoke of the power of the story and the word itself: "Every strong word embodies an ambition to take over the world."

Specific ways in which the participants said their powerful stories impacted their personal worlds are discussed next. Participants' responses are categorized into the following sections:

- The reader found a personal space
- The reader found resonance, validation
- The reader confronted challenging issues through the literature
- The reader built connections through the literature

The section will conclude with a summary and a compilation of ways in which participants say their stories have changed them.

One of the ways in which readers say their significant stories affected them was by allowing them to step away from their own egocentrism, to look at themselves and their worlds from a different vantage point. This other vantage point, this different but personal space, is discussed next.

The Reader Found a Personal Space Created by the Story

Rosenblatt (1995) quotes a student explaining the value literature has for the reader, "...its objective presentation of our own problems. It places them outside us, enables us to see them with a certain detachment and to understand our own situation and motivation more objectively" (p. 40). Bettleheim (1976) also speaks of this value of

literature, saying that fairy tales in particular provide a neutral space in which children can objectively assess their own situations. Kaplan (1986) suggests that romantic fiction provides this safe space, this place apart for looking at other lives, other problems, into which we can read our own.

Sabine and Sabine (1983) found many readers who spoke of how they used literature to find a place apart; readers in my study spoke of this as well. Readers spoke of their engagement, their feelings while reading. "Consumed. That's the first thing that pops into my mind." "I just feel . . . preoccupied with it . . . It kinda blocks everything else out . . . It intrigues me, and I stay with it until the conclusion, usually." "It's like opening another world, pretty much." "If I'm reading a book, I have finally discovered I might as well sit down and read it, because I'm not going to do anything else until I've finished." One reader spoke of working a double shift in a coalmine, coming home just before midnight, and reading until four in the morning. He could recall few specifics about what he read, but he remembered the state he entered. His face assumed a peaceful look as he spoke of it. "I'd sleep upstairs where I wouldn't bother nobody with the light. Lay there and read."

Readers enter this state along different paths. One reader prefers the venue of history, ". . . how things came to be." Another follows up on current events and human-interest stories on the Internet. "If I find an interesting enough story, I'll research it on the Internet and find out more about it and read it there." A reader voiced the perception of a clear alignment between her personal and professional goals: ". . . my interest being how to articulate justice." The stories she remembered often related to this theme. Two readers prefer historical fiction. One reader said on many occasions during our interviews, "I

entered the world of . . ." Sometimes she referred to the characters, sometimes to the place, sometimes to the era; but she always focused on the state, the state of entering another world, a space apart.

Birkerts (1994, p. 103) says, " . . . the state I occupy while reading often feels more focused, more meaningful, more *real*, than those that comprise most of my nonreading life." He compares this feeling about reading to the way he experiences some dreams: "they carry me to a truer place" (p. 103).

How important is that space apart to the reader? On being asked about saying that the hometown newspaper would be the last thing he'd give up, one reader affirmed the importance of that reading. "Yes. With a cup of coffee every morning. That's how I start my day."

Often it seems that access to this personal space, this alternative realm, is gained through sensory engagement with the story. On many occasions during the interviews, readers described a sense of pleasure they gained from engaging with a story. One reader associated smells with particular books. Others spoke of the lyrical language of stories, both prose and poetry. "I loved *Song of Solomon* because it's so lyrical. The poetry in it just gave me the chills." Hemingway's dialogues, Eudora Welty's regional dialect, and the cadences of the King James translation of *The Bible* were all remembered with pleasure. An elderly reader recalled his high school literature classes: "There's plays in that, you know. And I loved that." Asked why she thought she remembered a novel read 30 years ago, a reader answered, "I think I just enjoyed the language of the story." Some books elicit an almost physical response that lingers. One reader told how she had loved *The Good Earth* (Buck, 1931): ". . . and unto this day I think about the book, and I just

absolutely have this feeling about it, this sensation that goes with it." Another participant spoke of the bliss of abandoning responsibilities to curl up with a story, feeling ". . . completely negligent, because I do nothing else."

The potential exists for the reader to find personal validation in this space created by the reading of stories. Some of these possibilities are considered in the following section.

The Reader Found Resonance, Validation

"The books that matter to me . . . are those that galvanize something inside me. I read books to read myself" (Birkerts (1994, p. 102). Readers looked for such resonance in stories, and they responded strongly when they found it. One reader stated his preference, ". . . It's just something that has to be real close to me, down to earth, down to my lifestyle, something I'm familiar with . . . ."

One reader described the system she has developed to be sure she finds resonance in the literature she reads. She said:

> I consider the moral fiber of the author and the moral fiber of the characters that are presented. I don't want to waste time with characters that do things that I wouldn't want to do. And I don't want to waste time with characters who don't uphold the principles that I consider essential.

This reader values personal resonance so highly that she may refuse to read a book if she believes it will not provide this connection.

Seeing something of ourselves reflected in books can be a very pleasant, affirming experience when the characters are admirable and their lives are appealing. An

example is the resonance one reader found with characters in Tolkien's (1965) *Lord of the Rings.* Speaking of Frodo, the protagonist, at the end of the story cycle, this reader said, ". . . you saw the good side of his remaining life. And I guess that some of that was kinda like my life. I feel like I've worked really hard and . . . finally getting to where life has been better."

Unfortunately, seeing ourselves in our stories can be painful, as well. One reader spoke of *Crow Boy* (Yashima, 1955) with sadness. Set in Japan but telling a universal story, *Crow Boy* is the story of a child who is rejected by his classmates throughout his entire six years in school. Because of a loving teacher's guidance, the class comes to see and appreciate the boy, finally, on the last day of school. The reader remembered a third grade classmate who was picked on by other students, teased because he was poor. She remembers herself doing nothing to support or protect this child, afraid that she would be his replacement. ". . . you're okay, if you find somebody to exclude. And it's sickening and sad about us." She finds resonance with *Crow Boy*, and wishes every child could hear his lesson.

Books and stories comforted readers in my study, as they have many others. Sabine and Sabine (1983, p. 91) gave an example of a reader they interviewed who says she would have killed herself after her husband's suicide had it not been for the comfort she received from a book she read. One of the readers in my study had a book that had comforted him in a similar way, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (Johnson, 2001). This story is an allegory written to help people adapt to change. There are four characters, two mice and two men. When the cheese they have all been eating disappears, the mice move on to find more cheese. The men delay, returning to the same barren site every morning.

Finally one of them decides to set out to find more cheese. He leaves writing on the walls detailing what he learns on his journey, hoping his friend will follow. The reader said, "I could see myself lots of times back through the years . . . afraid to do this or didn't think I could do . . . that, and something came along that give me the boost I needed, and I went on."

The reader said he found comfort in the book, that it helped him through a difficult time of change when his wife died. He has since insisted that all his children read the book, to prepare them for unpleasant changes in their futures. "You can see yourself in one of the characters," he said. "I could see . . . that it had such a relevance between it and actual life, why I guess is how come that to influence me."

I saw evidence that this story had become part of this reader's thinking. When he was discussing Bible stories, he spoke of Job, a character who had once had everything but had lost it all. The reader started to explain to me the losses Job had suffered, but he suddenly stopped, knowing he had a good way to convey to me what had happened to Job. He said, simply, "Job's cheese was moved!"

Books and stories that help us see ourselves, that help us build connections, can prepare us for understanding beyond our previous limits. Stories that extend our limits are considered next.

The Reader's Understanding Was Expanded

One of the participants loved *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Dodgson/Carroll, 1862/1950) as a child, ". . . because I thought that the world would be like this, just a big place of discovery." Reality turned out not to be quite like that for the reader, but it can remain so in story. "Literature offers a release from the provincialism of

time and space" Rosenblatt (1995, p. 184). "There's a whole other world out there that we're unfamiliar with."

Rosenblatt (1995, p. 40) says that one of the reasons we can seek to enlarge our worlds through literature is that we have "multiple natures, " the uniquely human capacity to be more selves than we have opportunity to be. Casting ourselves in other roles through literature gives us an opportunity to experience, or almost experience, those other possibilities.

I asked one reader whether she thought the novels that she reads depict reality, any reality. She said, "I don't live in that kind of world, but I think there are people who truly live that way . . . . I think they really do exist, and they really do live that way."

This other world, these other worlds, have many points of entry. Bruner (1986, p. 159) says that ". . . the function of literature as art is to open us to dilemmas, to the hypothetical, to the range of possible worlds that a text can refer to."

One reader was exploring another world around the time of our second interview, the world of the Vietnam War. His vehicle was a book, *Very Crazy, G.I.* (Jorgenson, 2001). A participant related a vicarious visit to czarist Russia, though the fiction of Tolstoy and other Russian authors; she also told of an extended period of exploring Native American cultures through books. After reading a novel with a teenage boy as a protagonist, a female reader said, "Wow! I'm so glad to get that inner picture."

Some of the inner pictures are disquieting. Discussing *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982), a reader said, "These weren't people I would want to be like. But it was an insight into life, and the struggles and pain and lack of a happy ending. Poignancy . . . and beauty

and ugliness . . . ." Literature "explores human plights through the prism of imagination" (Bruner, 2002, p. 10).

"The book made me curious about people I didn't have anything in common with." In some ways, it may be easier to learn about people from characters in stories than it is from real people. A reader said, "It's much easier to relate to characters in books than it is to characters in your life." I asked her why she thought this was so. She said, "Characters in books don't agitate me personally."

According to the participants in my study, experience through literature can help in understanding real life. The reverse is also true. One reader told of his visit to an area he now reads about in *The Bible*. "During the war I was in Syracuse, Sicily. That's where Paul was on his way to Rome, after the wreck. And I knowed about Paul being there, and it seems like it gives you a different feeling about it." Literature informs us about the real world and the real world informs us about literature.

One reader summed up the potential books offer for expanding our worlds. He said simply, "Well, I learn something out of 'bout every book I read."

The stories to which we have access often seem to meet our needs, but this is not always the case. The next section addresses both these eventualities.

The Reader's Needs Were Met—or They Were Not

When we sense voids in our life, real or imaginary, we sometimes turn to literature for completion. Rosenblatt (1995, p. 40) writes ". . . the force of the reader's emotional reactions will be channeled in ways dictated by his sense of his own shortcomings." So the middle-aged reader who misses the freedom of wandering in search of adventure as a boy reads mysteries and adventure stories . . . . "And so I guess

maybe. . . I experience more of that living on the edge . . . ." The reader who insists that she is not a strong woman reads romantic fiction filled with strong women. The housewife who thinks *God's Little Acre* (Caldwell, 1933) is "a little too risqué for me" decides to read it anyway, ". . . and I thought it was awful—but I liked it." The reader growing up in a poor family remembers using books to give vicarious experience: "We were not able to travel; [stories were] just the way I escaped to other lands."

Readers' needs are not always met by what they read. Two readers said they did not read books now. Since both had books and spoke of books they had read, I assume that they meant they read few or no novels. One said, "I had so much required reading in college that . . . it's just hard for me to sit down and read a book. I was used to [being made] to read a book, so now I don't do it." The other reader also spoke disparagingly of reading assignments throughout his school years.

Both readers who said they never read books were male. I do not know whether or not that is relevant. I can make no assumptions based on the experience of two participants, but the literature strongly supports the supposition that males are more likely than are females to respond to literature assignments by ceasing to read. For example, the findings of Pottorff, Phelps-Zientarski, & Skovera (1996) provide evidence that children see literacy activities as having a strong gender identity, evidence that they see reading and writing as less appropriate for males than for females.

Citing evidence that boys are at risk educationally, Brozo (2002) designed a literacy education program to capitalize on young males' interests and ideals, linking their reading to their dreams for themselves. Had it been available to the readers in my

study when they were in school, perhaps this kind of program could have allowed them to enjoy literature they now reject.

Trying to meet our needs through reading is often very rewarding, but there can be disappointment, too, a feeling that we do not measure up to storybook standards. The reader who reads romantic fiction about strong women said, "Maybe I wish that I could do some of the things that they did . . . . Knowing that I won't."

The reading experience does not always meet the reader's expectations. But all the readers I interviewed were able to verbalize ways in which they believed their lives were made better by reading. Some of these ways are discussed in the following section.

The Reader Found a Better Way, Through the Literature

Readers frequently said that a particular book or story had given them new insights and deeper understanding. The book most often mentioned in this regard was *The Bible.* There was a distinct range of responses to this book. Only two readers did not mention it. Two others mentioned it only once. The first referred to the beauty of its language. The second reader mentioned it, along with *The Koran*, as a book whose teachings might not need to be balanced. The other four readers mentioned it multiple times. They all said it had been the most important influence in their lives. Their comments provided insight into how they perceive this influence. One reader said he had learned that "People have got to work with each other, deal with each other in the best way that we can, under bad circumstances. That's just the way it is." ". . . it's food for my soul." "The stories in *The Bible* have had a real impact on my life." "In reading *The Bible* it's so exciting to have access to God's thoughts." "I've read it over and over, and every

once in a while I'll run into some little jewel that'll really sparkle and set me afire. That's what it's for, I reckon. Have understanding that I didn't have before."

Books other than *The Bible* were also cited as providing readers inspiration and moral leadership. One reader mentioned *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkein, 1965): "I've wondered what taught me to be . . . a person of integrity who stands by my friends. And that was portrayed mightily in the books . . . perhaps the books had an influence on my moral development."

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Clemens / Twain, 1884/1962) was mentioned as a model of a good way to show the suffering caused by racism while keeping the racists reading. A book whose name had been forgotten told the story of a ". . . black man in Mississippi who set up a co-op to provide jobs for poor African-Americans caught in the cycle of violence, caught in the cycle of poverty . . . ." The reader remembered his response on reading the book, "This man is creatively changing a dysfunctional racist system. He's working from the ground roots up, and that struck me as intelligent, as bold, and as good."

Two readers attributed personal improvements to reading. One said that he had learned relaxation techniques by reading a series of books, and another said that whenever she was reading good literature her language patterns, vocabulary, and writing improved.

A participant said he had loved British veterinarian James Herriot's autobiographical books because they ". . . showed you how to get better and yet how to deal with embarrassing situations that maybe come out of your not . . . having had enough years of practicing under your belt to prevent."

Another reader mentioned a Supreme Court case, *Palmore v. Sidoti* (1984), as a story that had provided exemplary leadership. The question in the case was whether the custody of the child of a divorced couple should be taken from the child's mother because the mother was involved in an interracial relationship. The child's father sued for custody, saying that the child would suffer if she remained in the biracial household because society discriminates against minority groups and racially mixed couples. The court declined to move the child. They agreed that racial prejudice does exist, but refused to base their decision on that prejudice. Justice Burger said, "The Constitution cannot control such prejudice, but neither can it tolerate it. Private biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot . . . give them effect."

The reader said, "I can't ever remember feeling so free after reading something, and *cheering*." She said that she used the Court's reasoning in *Palmore v. Sidoti* (1984) a few years later when her father expressed his concern about her marrying someone of another race. She said she ". . . wouldn't give effect to discrimination and discomfort of other people because of a societal norm that had nothing to do with morality." She also mentioned *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), the decision that struck down Virginia's laws against interracial marriage.

The same reader cited another Supreme Court case, *Roe v. Wade* (1973), as an example of a story that taught her about the limits of the government's role in making moral decisions. She said the decision helped her think through personal conflicts when her moral and political beliefs were not congruent.

One reader said that her reading was directed toward personal growth. "I have a willing spirit to learn. If I'm wrong, I want to learn why and what I can do about it. And I find books are my best friends."

All the readers in the study cited many positive attributes of reading, many positive effects of their stories in their lives. In their efforts to understand the factors that affected their responses to literature, several participants mentioned the effect of the timing of their reading a particular story.

The Reader Responded Differently at Different Times

- "At the heart of it is . . . the coming together of a particular personality and a particular text at a particular time" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xvi).
- "Men do not understand BOOKS until they have had a certain amount of life." (Pound, 1951, p. 100).

Participants in my study cited differences in the way they interpreted stories at different times in their lives. One reader recently watched the film versions of the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1965). He had read the books when he was still in school and enjoyed them, and he enjoyed the films. When I asked him to compare the text and film versions, he hesitated. He said, "They seem separate to me; I don't know. But then I'm a very different person, at a very different place in my life." He seemed to attribute the difference in the two encounters to the timing rather than the medium.

One reader's response to a particular novel illustrates the difference that can be made by time and by life circumstances in our perception of a story. When she was in college, she read *Doctor Zhivago* (Pasternak, 1958). She loved the book. "He was just a romantic figure torn between his two great loves." Thirty years later she sees the story

differently. "Looking back, after my own life influenced my feelings about the book, he was just a weak jerk."

Another reader, trying to remember when she had read specific stories, said, "I'm putting my life in cubbyholes here, because you do read different things at different stages in your life, as you need it, to fill that void." Schwartz (1996, p. 106) concurs: "Perhaps at every stage what we read is what we are, or what we are becoming, or desire." Our experiences change both our perceptions of the stories we read and our responses to them. In the literature and among the participants in my study, many readers remembered reading a story at a time when they felt that it was of optimal significance to them, of optimal assistance in helping them confront challenges they faced.

The Reader Confronted Challenging Issues Through the Literature

In relating their significant stories, participants often referred to their truth, their reality. The truth of their stories was perceived as a major factor in the way their stories affected them.

The Reader Found Truth—In Some Form

- "But it's the truth, even if it didn't happen" (Kesey, 1962, p. 8).
- "Well, ma'am, I don't read much fiction, because when I read something, I want to know the facts."

The novelist Kesey and the reader I interviewed present the two ends of the continuum on which the readers in my study aligned themselves. The participants in my study valued truth, and they valued it highly. "I like to know what actually happened, and

it's documented . . . . That's what fascinates me." But they were also willing to accept as true something that felt as if it could have been true. ". . . it has to feel like it could have really happened for me to feel the possibility I could connect to the story." Had circumstances converged differently, the story in question might have been history rather than fiction.

After all, history itself can logically be viewed as only one construal of a set of more or less accurate accounts of past events. Cooper (1757/1992), in the middle of his historical novel *The Last of the Mohicans*, speaks of the balance between history and fiction. At the point in the story where a great massacre of soldiers and civilians has occurred, even though they had surrendered and been granted amnesty, Cooper pauses to reflect on how the general who permitted this outrage will be remembered. He says, "...as history, like love, is so apt to surround her heroes with an atmosphere of imaginary brightness, it is probable that [he] will be viewed...as the gallant defender of his country, while his cruel apathy...will be forgotten" (p. 217). Then he deplores this probability and returns to his role as a novelist: "Deeply regretting this weakness on the part of a sister muse, we shall at once retire from her sacred precincts, within the proper limits of our own humble vocation" (Cooper, 1757/1992, p. 217).

Polkinghorne (1988) assumes a stance mirroring Cooper's, viewing history from the standpoint of fiction. He says, "The historical narrative takes the types of plots developed by literature and subjects them to the test of endowing real events with meaning" (p. 62). Truth has many voices.

Historical fiction is one of these voices. Treglown (1998, p. 54) says that much of what we know of history is learned from novels. ". . . it is novelists and poets, more than

historians, who have helped us to grasp the reality of the Nazi genocide—and also of Stalin's Gulag and the nuclear immolation of Hiroshima." Rosenblatt (1995) implies a personal resonance that makes fiction connect when history may not. She says, "Will the history of the great depression impress [the student] as much as will Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*?" (p. 7).

Historical fiction fascinated three of the participants in my study. The three varied in the degrees of truth to which they held it. One reader was quite clear on personal requirements. "I really enjoy hearing accurate history and learning about that and using that as a basis to fully enjoy the fiction." The implication is clear. This reader could not fully enjoy the fiction without being able to believe that it was, in some sense, true. This interpretation was reinforced when the same reader discussed historical fiction with inaccuracies. "If I find inconsistencies that are disturbing, then I'll finish that book, but I probably won't read any other books in that series." She described to me the process by which she triangulates sources to determine whether a story's details are accurate. When reading a novel, she looks up information about the era in an encyclopedia, she reads primary source data about the period, and she compares the work to other historical fiction about the same events. She said she could not feel free to enjoy the fiction, to "enter that world," unless she knew it to be factually supported.

The second of the two was far less concerned about adherence to historical facts. She said, "Details don't bother me . . . I don't know enough about a period . . . to know if the details are right or wrong."

The third reader among the group seemed to use historical facts as a source of material from which he constructed his own internal historical fiction. I will discuss this

at length, because I have not seen this response in any other reader, nor have I seen anything like it addressed in the literature. This reader expressed both a hunger for facts and a desire to know more than facts can tell us. He was—he is—passionately interested in the Civil War. He reads and rereads detailed accounts of battles, explaining, "It keeps your mind refreshed . . . just to remind you . . . about the dates and the times . . . ."

Birkerts (1994, p. 91) said, "When we read a sentence from a work of nonfiction—a history or a study of some topic, say—the words intersect with the psychic continuum, but they do not significantly modify it . . . we do not reposition the self." I believe, at least in the case of this reader, that Birkerts is mistaken. I believe I saw this reader being changed, becoming emotionally involved, on the basis of facts he learned about the Civil War.

My first interview with this participant was held July 23, 2003. It was a hot summer evening, but not quite so hot as the battlefield at Gettysburg had been just over 140 years earlier. Before and after our interview, the participant told me a great deal about that three-day battle. He knew many details: he knew temperatures, battalion sizes, kinds of makeshift uniforms the troops wore, times, troop movements, kinds of weapons used. Above all, he knew the losses, as casualty counts and, I believe, almost as individuals. He told me stories of how it must have been, all of them based on the facts he knew.

I was amazed by the extent of his specific knowledge of the battle, of the war, but I was even more astounded by the extent of his emotional involvement in it. He worried about the men not getting enough to eat. He seemed to agonize over the decisions that had to be made by General Pickett and General Armistead, both given orders that

compelled them to lead their men to almost certain death. He had to stop when he was explaining the nature of the canister shots, cans of nails and other shrapnel fired from the cannons into the advancing infantry. He apologized, "I get upset every time I think about it. I'm sorry." When I asked him about whether these stories had affected him, he replied, "They kinda shaped my life . . . ."

One reader spoke of the difficulties she faced in becoming a discerner of truth. She said she had ". . . a hard time not taking everything I read as true." Another told of a period in her life when she decided she must stop reading espionage novels because they were disturbing her. They contained accounts of morally reprehensible government activities carried on in the name of protecting national security. She said, "I felt like the author had done research, or certainly was more knowledgeable than I, and that our . . . governments were really and truly doing these things, and I don't particularly want to know that." Then she laughed and said, "Just keep me safe. Don't tell me how." I asked her whether she thought all those accounts embedded in the fiction were true. She replied, "I don't think they would have thought it up if it wasn't." Barthes (1987, p. 93) explains part of the power books have over us, power to make us believe their truth. He says, "Writing *declares*, that is what makes it writing" (p. 93).

Both truth and its corollary construct in fiction, verisimilitude, were highly valued by the study participants. Truth was credited with both instructing and guiding them. But the perception of truth never guaranteed a comfortable response to a story. Sometimes the effect was quite the opposite. Truth, or close truth, that disturbed readers is explored in the next section.

The Reader Was Disturbed

Kafka (1958) thought we should limit our reading to ". . . the kind of books that wound and stab us . . . that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves . . . ." His reason was this: "A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us" (p. 16).

Each of the readers in my study had at least one experience similar to the one Kafka recommended. *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky, 1917) troubled one reader. He said that Dostoevsky ". . . started out portraying these awful motives to this guy, and I found it very distasteful and dysphoric. I don't know if I was afraid on some level I had bad motives and couldn't face that . . . ."

A reader had to stop reading literature about the Holocaust when she had young children. She was unable to deal with her emotional response to the cruelty to children depicted in the books. A reader was distressed by the death of a man who jumped from a bridge on Christmas day, holding his young son. The reader was searching for accounts of the man's life and death in all the newspapers to which he had access. Civil War history both fascinated and disturbed one reader. Another reader was troubled by the plight of many characters in what she perceives as too-realistic fiction. No reader was without a story that caused pain. Two readers had such an intense reaction to stories that I wish to discuss them at length.

One reader encountered *Green Mansions,* (Hudson, 1916) when in the sixth grade. At first she loved it. It tells the story the story of a Columbian expatriate living alone in the rainforests of Guyana early in the twentieth century. He meets and falls in love with a lovely, enigmatic Native American girl, the last of her tribe. Near the end of

the story, the girl is killed by members of a neighboring indigenous tribe because they believe she is a devil. The man returns to civilization, cynical and desolate. The reader told me, "The book changed. It went from a beautiful, romantic, delightful experience in the forest to a dark novel full of sadness and defeat and frustration. I didn't want to be there." In the context of discussing this painful book, the reader told me that she avoids books that "would cause me to be unnecessarily disturbed." She reads the work of trusted authors, or she reads endings first and samples throughout the book before she begins reading it. She does not want to read anything that could disturb her unless she feels "the value of the book was worth considering the sad event." And she does not want to read anything with a philosophy dissonant to her own beliefs unless that book, too, has a value commensurate with its cost. She seems to attribute the origin of her careful screening of books to her encounter with this novel.

The other reader read *Almost a Famous Person* (Michelson, 1980). This book tells the story of an athlete, a basketball player who played at the University of California, Berkley, in the late 1960's. His college career was marred by racial strife. As a black athlete during this troubled time, he was victimized by both sides of the power struggle. When he was unable to establish a professional career after college, he killed himself. The reader in my study read this book when she was 14 years old. She remembered exactly where she was when she read it, because "you remember how you felt before the book and how you felt after the book." She was an aspiring athlete herself, hoping to play professional basketball after a college career. She internalized this athlete's pain. "What would it take for my life not to be worth living? Is that possible? What will happen to me? How will I handle not reaching goals? . . . is that a possibility?"

This reader is now 33 years old, and the book still troubles her when she thinks about it. I know this, because I bought the book to read after our first interview. When I got it out to discuss at our second interview, she burst into tears. She said she has lived through enough failure now that she is no longer so afraid of it for herself, but she still cannot escape the pain the book causes her.

While the participants acknowledged that stories may cause pain, pleasant responses to story were mentioned far more often than painful ones. Some of the more frequently mentioned effects of story were the connections engendered.

The Reader Built Connections Through the Literature

"There is nothing to match the affinity of people who were defined and nourished by the same book, who shared a fantasy life" (Schwartz, 1996, p. 47). Readers use stories to connect with other people.

Connections with Others

The clearest example I saw of this among the participants was the mother who began reading to her daughter before she was born because "I wanted us to start thinking together. I wanted to tell her everything that I knew, and tell her everything that I didn't know. And the best way to do—I just started reading books to her." The reader, three years later, seems pleased with the results. She said, "So that's how I got off to what I hope will be a good start with my child." There is a bonus connection for the reader as well. She said, "I am sometimes delightfully jarred back into a memory of those books, and they're a big part of me. So sometimes it's a reconnection with them."

In talking about reading to her child, the reader used the phrase "connect with a book." I asked what she meant by this, and she said, "Sharing the moment and the same feeling. Being in the same place. Just being together, not just physically, but emotionally."

One reader inadvertently emphasized the importance of using books to build connections when he was explaining why he began many books but did not finish them. He said, "I tend to start a lot of books and not finish them." He continued, " I find it interesting just to taste a little of a book, and taste a little of a lot of books, rather than try to read one from cover to cover." One of the reasons he gave for wanting access to the ideas in so many books was that he liked to use conversations about the books he had sampled as a bridge for connecting with other people.

Connections with Characters and with the Author

Readers can connect with characters in the stories, as one participant did with the characters in *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1869/1994). And one reader spoke of Celie, the protagonist in *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982), who was ". . . unattractive . . . and poor and unloved by her husband and a victim of abuse, the kind of people that in everyday life get shunned. But the book made you love her."

Some of the connections with characters that readers reported were uncomfortable. In speaking of author Toni Morrison's ability to make you sympathize with an unsympathetic character, the reader says, "She can make you understand their thinking, what took them to that place . . . she can make you feel very conflicted about people." Donoghue (1998, p. 16) wrote, "I can sympathize with someone only to the

extent to which I can imagine being that person." The readers told me that a good writer develops characters that allow the formation of that connection.

Readers can develop a connection with an author, too. Applebee (1978, p. 129) writes that finding meaning in a text is always a social process. The reader is thinking through the thoughts of another, the author. This process can come to feel like a partnership. One reader said, "Eudora Welty writes like I was brought up." In reading her stories, the reader finds "a knowing happiness." One reader spoke so frequently and with such intimacy and reverence about a particular author, Bodie Theone, that I am not sure whether she knows her personally. I suspect that she does. I should have asked.

One reader said events reconnect him with stories: ". . . when something similar happens, it brings back a memory of what I've read earlier." Stories can build connections, even if only with the story itself. One reader said, "I have read books that just absolutely, to my soul, just got all the way down into me."

One of the ways books reach into our souls is through our close connections with their characters. Readers use their experiences to more fully imagine the character the author has sketched, thus actively realizing the characters in their own imagination.

The Story Characters Became Real, Through the Reader

Some of the readers start with characters that *are* real: Three readers enjoy reading biographies. Readers of fiction often actualize the characters in their minds, at least to some degree.

Several times during the interviews I conducted, I noticed participants speaking of characters as if they were real. "I have always envied the attorney [in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960)] because he was so able to articulate . . . what was right in the

situation." "I enjoy the people . . . . It's fascinating to go with those people, to attend the balls . . . ."

One way of making the character real is through identifying with the hero. Three of the participants told me that they found themselves engaging in this fantasy. "I enjoy entering the world of the main character." Another reader explained, "I think I put myself in the place of the guy that's trying to be a hero, or the woman, and kind of imagine what it would be like to be in that situation." He continued, "I'd like to think I could have done . . . it, and then had success, been daring . . . to live a little on the edge." He quickly established his limits. "But I'm not into that kind of danger. But it's sort of fun, you know?"

The reader's final statement finds resonance in Rosenblatt's observation, "Another important potential satisfaction from literature . . . is the possibility of compensating for lacks or failures through identification with a character who possesses qualities other than our own or who makes fuller use of capacities similar to our own."

One reader says she identifies with characters in stories so she can fully experience what it would be like to live in a different place or time, under different circumstances. She chose inspiring characters and, as she said, "entered their worlds." In remembering books, she sometimes spoke of them in terms of her identification with the protagonist, as in, "One [important book] would be *Vienna Prelude* by Bodie Theone (1989), because I really enjoyed living the part of Elisa as I was reading that."

One reader of romantic fiction identifies with characters she believes to be unlike herself, "strong women." I think of this reader as a strong woman, but she does not think of herself this way. It is not my perception that matters. She says:

> If I'm reading about a strong character that I'm identifying with at the time, then I become that person. I'm sure the people around me are confused. And then it's a little bit disappointing to find out, "Oh, wait, I'm not that person. I haven't achieved this." Come back down to real life.

She speculates about the characters she joins vicariously. "I wonder sometimes what it would be like . . . how do some people . . . particularly a woman . . . rise above . . . or what makes a person be more driven than I certainly am?" When I reminded her of her accomplishments, she said, "I haven't risen above and claimed anything yet. And I don't know if I will."

How long does this attachment last? In comparing reading to watching movies, one reader said, "A movie's over for me when I leave the theater, as far as continuing with the character. But . . . as I'm reading, I become that character for some length of time. Maybe only in my small mind, but, you know . . . ."

Being someone else, even temporarily, has potential for enjoyment. Donoghue (1998, p. 108) said, "I wouldn't mind inventing myself in this way, creating a fiction and calling it for the moment me." This close, personal identification with story creates more than the potential for enjoyment. It creates the potential for change.

The Reader Was Changed

"It's a play that has fascinated me all of my life, ever since I can remember reading it." *Waiting for Godot* (Becket, 1954) ". . . has stayed with me the longest from the time I read it, back years ago . . . because it made such an impression on me." The play covers two days in the life of a pair of confused, forgetful men whose only purpose

is waiting for Godot. He never comes. The participant said, "It's just exactly what I think life is all about. You need to do what you're going to do, because if you keep waiting for Godot, he's going to come by with the sickle . . . ." When I asked her if she ever thought about Godot when she was making a decision about something. She said, "Yeah . . . . Maybe I let that influence me too much, because a lot of times I'm not very practical."

She believes reading the play made her different from what she would have been otherwise, because her family was cautious. She told a story to illustrate, and perhaps to support her own *Godot* philosophy. She said her grandmother saved a funeral dress, a dress to be buried in, for several years. At the time of her death, it no longer fit her. Then she gave me the moral to her story, "Live for the here and now, Girl!"

A reader, speaking of *Palmore v Sidoti* (1984) and *The Crucible* (Miller, 1953), said, "Reading about somebody else's courage gives you the courage to do something." Four readers said reading *The Bible* had a profound impact on their lives. Two of them gave examples of that effect. One told of a book-study and prayer group that met once a week for seven years. She spoke of the transformation of the group from submissive housewives to . . . something else. "And this began to shake things up."

One reader read liberation theology books, books about the Roman Catholic church's involvement in Central and South American political and economic struggles. She said those books "led me to El Salvador to be an observer right after peace accords were signed...the books that I read on liberation theology were very instrumental in directing me in graduate studies."

One participant discussed the effects of reading *Who Moved My Cheese?* (Johnson, 2001), an allegory dealing with the struggle to incorporate change. When I

asked him whether reading the book had changed him in any way, whether it had made him do anything differently, he smiled and said, "I'm still 'a working." To understand that statement, it would be helpful to know that the reader suffered a cerebral hemorrhage that required surgery and a month's hospitalization. He was released from the hospital a week before our second interview, and he had already gone back to work. He is eighty years old.

Birkerts (1994, p. 84) hypothesizes of adult readers, ". . . they formed a good part of their essential selves through interactions with books." At least one of my readers would agree. When speaking of the books she read as a child, *Corduroy* (Freeman, 1968), *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Williams, 1922/1968), *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1933/1961), and *Crow Boy* (Yashima, 1955), she said, "A couple of things about these . . . books and the way they, I think they've affected me. I went to law school to try to save something. Didn't know how, but I was hoping that I would have the tools to be able to have a voice, maybe find the voice that I didn't have in third grade when Nicky was being picked on, to get the courage." The children's stories the reader cited as having inspired her to find a voice, to find a way to save things, all involve the saving of a person or a personified animal or toy. She related these to a personal memory, that of a third grade classmate who was picked on by the less vulnerable members of the class. She seems still to be trying to atone for her failure to save him.

One reader was so strongly convinced of the power a book has to change her that she chooses the books she reads carefully, with that end in mind. She says, "I check to see if it's a book that is worth the time I'll invest into it . . . a book that will teach me something potentially, and a book that will potentially make some difference in my life."

She concluded, ". . . what I've read is the essence of who I am and what I hope to become."

A reader who could not recall the details of many of the books she wanted to talk about said:

> . . . they have become part of me, so I can't . . . objectively look in on character or situation. But I have digested them and incorporated them into who I am, what I think, how I feel, how I handle—I have them as reference points . . . . Sometimes I'm not so sure that they didn't kinda happen to me, too.

How do stories create this perception in a reader? They create a personal space for the reader. They give resonance and validation. They present challenging issues for the reader to confront. And they help the reader build connections with others.

"Aah, books . . . . Adventures of the mind."

Summary of the Findings

"Through narrative, we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow. Memory and imagination fuse in the process" (Bruner, 2002, p. 93).

The participants in this study shared generously of their time, their memories of their significant stories, and their feelings about how they experienced the effects of these stories. They made their fusion of memory and imagination transparent so we could work together toward an understanding of their remembered stories and the effects of those stories on their thinking.

The readers remembered some stories because they were written with beautiful, vivid language. They remembered others because they recognized experiences like their own in the stories, or found new possibilities related to their own familiar territory. Some stories were remembered because they dealt with themes important to the reader, and others because they reinforced understanding and built connections with other people.

How did the readers believe their stories had affected their lives? Readers' stories about their significant stories and the ways these stories had affected them generated 231 pages of data, single-spaced. I distilled the effects into these four categories: (a) They created a personal space for the reader; (b) they gave resonance and validation; (c) they presented challenging issues for the reader to confront; and (d) they helped the reader build connections with others.

My findings do not present a complete picture of the participants' shared memories and perceptions. I simply chose and arranged the excerpts that spoke to me most clearly, most representatively of the ways readers perceived the legacy of their salient stories in their lives.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Do we use narrative, to any degree, to construct ourselves? If so, what kinds of narrative do we use, and how do we use these stories in the ordering of our thoughts, the shaping of our personalities? What is the nature of the legacy of reading in the lives of adults? These questions are central to a study of the influence of books and reading. They form the basis of my research questions: (a) What are the characteristics of the stories that readers remember; and (b) how do they say these stories affect their thinking, their character, their worldview? In this chapter, I will discuss the sense I make of the findings.

Nature of Remembered Stories

Throughout the interviews, readers remarked on the language in their stories, on the way narrative enriched their own experiences, and on the way stories linked to personal themes in their lives. Each of these connections, however, is replete with a personal, emotional response. Both reading and remembering the reading create emotion.

Readers remembered stories written in appealing ways, books with memorable language. Poetry was mentioned, but lyrical prose was mentioned, and quoted, more often. Stories with vivid, sensory descriptions of settings were remembered by readers in vivid, sensory ways. Participants spoke of smells and sensations associated with the stories, of scenes *painted* by the writer. They remembered similes and metaphors used to make story settings and characters more accessible to the reader's imagination, and they remembered the way physical sensations suggested by the author related to their own emotional response to the story. Three readers mentioned the use of symbols and dreams

to engage the reader's senses at the subconscious level. Sensory appeal was a very important factor in making a story emotionally memorable.

Stories that readers remember often had components that enriched, reinforced, or extended the readers' experiences. Stories that briefly entertained might be forgotten, or they might be remembered for the pleasure they gave. Readers stated preferences for predictable books, books that followed a familiar pattern without disappointing. Paradoxically, they also liked and remembered books that surprised them, books that "pushed [them] into an area [they] haven't explored." They remembered books that engaged their imaginations and their intellects, books that challenged their minds and provoked their imaginations. Books that related to the reader's personal experience were likely to be remembered, but readers also said they valued books that enabled them to imagine new experiences related to but different from their own. They liked books complex enough to give additional meaning on subsequent readings. Thus, many of the readers discovered that some books could enrich their experience more than one time.

The variety of emotions the participants reported experiencing from being challenged or intrigued by reading ranged from one reader's smug self-satisfaction that results when she solves the mystery before the author explains it away to the feelings of devastation one participant described as her response to the failure and suicide of someone in a book whom she had seen as quite similar to herself. Intensely personal, the readers' responses are neither predictable nor simple. From mild irritation with a character to complete outrage with an author for allowing a happy story to "turn dark," the emotional response to story reported by readers in my study covered a wide range of feelings.

Stories that address themes important to the reader are likely to be remembered. Most of the participants in my story said that a story could be important to them only if it were true or could conceivably be true. Books with comfortable themes, themes of doing good, were remembered by readers, but books with difficult themes, themes disturbing to the reader, could also be remembered in great detail and with strong emotion. Themes that interest or engage the reader seem to make stories memorable regardless of whether that engagement supports or disrupts tranquility.

If a story reinforces understanding and supports the reader in building connections with other people, it is likely to be remembered. Books can support this connection-building by depicting human connections, by offering models to emulate or reject. Stories with complex characters fascinate readers and are likely enjoyed and remembered.

In this study, readers remembered stories because they were written in appealing ways, because they enriched or extended personal experience, because they dealt with themes important to the reader, and because they reinforced understanding and helped the reader build connections with others. They shared the nature of the stories they remembered, and they also shared the emotions and the effects of their response.

Effects of Remembered Stories

One of the primary effects of story cited by participants was the creation of a separate space, a personal space away from the reader's everyday life. Readers spoke of being "consumed," "preoccupied." They spoke of "opening another world." Often this space provided by story gave the reader an opportunity to consider real-life options within the pressure-free parameters of story.

Readers found resonance and validation in their salient literature. They reported that the books and stories they remembered expanded their understanding of the world, of others, and of themselves. They said that books and stories had often met their needs; but two readers expressed frustration at having been made to read books, even good books, when they were in school. Even these two frustrated readers said that books had helped them find better ways to manage their lives, better ways to live. And several readers said that the same literature had affected them differently at different points in their lives.

Sometimes readers confronted challenging issues through literature. Stories the readers believed, whether because they were actually true or because readers felt they could be true, offered new knowledge, new insight, about events in the past and about possibilities for the future. Readers said they found both illumination and guidance in these. Not all of this came without cost. Some of these real, almost-real, or too-real stories dealt with troubling issues, themes that brought pain, even grief to the reader. Realities are not always what the reader wishes they were. Some of the readers felt that literature is sometimes almost too strong a reminder of this.

Some of the readers used significant literature to relate to other people. The participant who read to her child before she was born said she did so because she wanted the two of them, mother and child, to start thinking together. The reader who reads parts of many books so he can talk about them with other people is using literature to connect, too. Readers said literature helps them understand other people, and other groups of people with whom they might not otherwise have contact, people of whom they might not otherwise have understanding. Books build connections. These connections include

the connections readers sometimes forged with characters in the books, characters of whom they spoke as if they were real people, real acquaintances.

My final research question asks whether readers' remembered stories can affect their thinking, their character, their worldview. All the readers in my study responded affirmatively, but the degree of that affirmation varied widely. One reader initially said that he never allows what he reads to affect him in any way. After thinking over the literature that he viewed as significant in his life, he answered differently. Another reader said that what she had read was an essential part of who she was and who she hoped to become. One reader said that what she had read had as great a role in shaping her life as her parents or the time and place of her birth. The extent of the perception varied, but all the readers could cite changes in their lives that they attributed to reading.

What are the characteristics of the stories readers remember? How do they say these stories have affected their lives? Did my study find any answers to these questions?

Every reader remembered significant stories. The sources of those stories differed. They came from literary classics, history books, online newspapers, children's literature, contemporary novels, opera librettos, *The Bible*, comic books, and a variety of other media. Yet readers had understandings in common, understandings about what made these stories memorable to them. Their responses were a diverse group of tapestries, but they were woven from common threads. The reasons they gave included vivid descriptions, lyrical language, truth or verisimilitude, and the ability to engage the reader's imagination. The stories' content was likely to be related to themes important to the reader, such as issues of fairness and justice. Remembered stories might bring pleasure or they might bring distress, but almost invariably they engaged the reader

emotionally. And participants often seemed to describe a remembered story less in terms of the story itself than in terms of their response to it.

It is this response, this emotional engagement with reading, that seems to form the basis of the significance of reading in the lives of the participants I interviewed. Several of them mentioned that most of their reading is done for the purpose of gathering information. Professional literature, current news, even income tax documents were mentioned as typical of the participants' reading in the week before our initial interview. The information-gathering function of reading is an essential function, of course; but the participants in my study seemed to place that kind of reading in a different category. They did not speak of the professional literature they remembered, the newspapers they remembered—unless they engaged with a portion of this reading as narrative. What the information gatherers shared, even from their information gathering, were stories. The newspaper readers spoke of human tragedies, human plights, human triumphs; one of the readers of professional literature spoke of the way human needs, human stories infused even this literature.

While some of the participants spoke of both history and current events as engaging them emotionally, most of the readers told of their emotional involvement with fiction. I wondered how this engagement occurs, how readers become so involved with a book that they begin to care deeply about the story, enough to remember it through the years and continue to reflect on it.

I thought of the space apart that books and their stories provide. Several of my participants spoke of it. One could not imagine beginning the morning without the hometown paper and a cup of coffee. Another spoke of being unable to leave her chair

until a good book is finished. I remembered my own long afternoons as a child, stretched out on the floor in front of the shelf that held the encyclopedias. I thought I could learn almost everything if I read enough, so I would start seeking facts, knowledge, understanding. Then I would find myself caught up in a story. Some of them still come to mind. Anne Boleyn. See also Henry VIII. See English Reformation. I would doubt the possibility of emotional engagement with encyclopedias, had I not experienced the phenomenon myself.

I wondered how the books provide this space apart, this opportunity to choose to become involved in the stories of others. Perhaps it is the opportunity to observe the world, or what we perceive to be a valid representation of the world, while we ourselves remain unseen. Perhaps it is the opportunity that stories, and the characters in stories, give us to try on different personalities, to think different thoughts, to be different people, if only temporarily. Then the story, and the other possibilities, can be left behind. Or do they linger? Some of the participants in my study believe they do.

The ways participants remembered stories in books as different from stories in movies may be instructive in the ways books absorb us. Several readers said that books provide an opportunity for personal, emotional engagement in ways that movies cannot, even though both are vehicles for narrative. One participant, for example, said that "a movie's over when I leave the theatre . . . . But I know as I'm reading, I become that character for some length of time." Another reader suggested that books engage us more emotionally because we must employ our own imagination to a far greater extent with books than with movies. Participants mentioned the element of time spent with the story as an advantage books have over movies. Both Birkerts (1994) and Hernandi (1980)

suggest that the pace at which the story is assimilated makes a difference in the ways books and movies engage us.

I believe I know something about the effect of time spent with a story from a personal experience. I read *Les Misérable* (Hugo, 1862/1951) in French as a second-year high-school French student. I read it very, very slowly. During the time I was reading it, I became emotionally involved with the story. Perhaps at least in part because the period of engagement was so lengthy, I can still see and feel the sewers of Paris. I am still outraged at the injustices described. I am still involved with the story. The story changed me.

Personal Transformations

Every reader said that stories read had effected personal changes. The degree of personal change expressed, and the degree of certainty about that change, varied considerably. Data cited in the previous chapter give many specific examples of these changes. Representative responses, one from each participant, follow:

- "Perhaps the books had an influence on my moral development."
- "Maybe I let [a book] influence me too much."
- "My writing skills are improved . . . because I steal."
- "We all have our opinions on things; but reading does tend to, one way or another, sway those opinions."
- "They kinda shaped my life style."
- "I've relied on books to give me different viewpoints so that I can choose a course instead of blindly following one."

- "What I've read is the essence of who I am and what I hope to become."
- "That's what it's for. . . . Have understanding that I didn't have before."

The specificity with which the readers described changes effected in their lives by literature varied as widely as the degree to which they perceived those effects. Even the rate of perception and acknowledgement of that change differed. One reader said initially that he "*didn't know*" if he had gotten the idea of the importance of relationships from Tolkien's (1965) *The Lord of the Rings* series. In the second interview, he said, "*perhaps* the books had an influence on my moral development." In a conversation I had with the participant weeks after the second interview, he said he had thought more about it. Now he was *quite sure* the books indeed had made a difference in his perception of the importance of relationships and in his moral development. In contrast, another participant mentioned early in the initial interview several specific stories that she credited with making explicit changes in her life. She seemed to have no doubts at all about the extent of the influence of these stories.

One of the clearest indications of a reader's belief in the importance of literature as a potential agent for change was voiced by the mother who shared the literature of her own childhood with her young daughter. She directed this plea to the publishing industry: "Pay attention to children's books. They form children. They make people."

Each participant was able to verbalize ways in which salient stories had a very personal effect. All the participants were able to voice the story of the legacy of reading in their lives. Their collective stories reinforced my personal experience, my perception of the significance of story in my own life. Pound (1951) said that in discussing books or any other works of art, ". . . our faculties or memories or perceptions are all too 'spotty'

to permit anything save mutual curiosity" (p. 85). After carefully reflecting on the participants' memories of their significant stories, I must disagree. Our findings were not limited to mutual curiosity. We found some common answers. We found questions as well.

New Questions Raised by the Research

While I did find answers, a credible set of truths, I found even more new questions. A participant raised the most perplexing of these: "Which is it that comes first, that you read something and you connect because you like it or you hold on to it because it connects with something in you, or that you read something, and it creates something in you?" I have no answers here—speculations, but no answers.

I have new questions about specific differences in readers' responses that were generated by my data. For example, I wonder whether there are gender differences in the perception of the impact of literature on participants' lives. With one exception, the females in my study verbalized more specific and more intense emotional responses to the literature than did the males. What does this mean? How does the one exception modify that meaning?

My research showed me that others feel that they have been changed by the stories they have read, that I am not alone in that perception. If many of us are changed by the stories we read, what is the agent of change? How do our significant stories create changes in us?

Freud (1907/1959), in an analysis of the dreams that were described in the story *Gravida* (Jensen, 1903), says that creative writers intuitively understand much of what

science is just beginning to grasp about the psychological nature of humans and their dreams, their fantasies. He says, "...it is science that cannot hold its own before the achievement of the author" (p. 53). He says that the author ". . . directs his attention to the unconscious in his own mind . . . listens to its possible developments and lends them artistic expression" (p. 92). Is it the recognition of common human themes not readily accessible to our conscious minds that enables us to forge strong connections with a book, connections that can change us?

In "Writers and Daydreaming" (1908/1959), Freud continues to hypothesize on the ways in which writers reach us. He refers to, ". . . the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes" (p. 150). Is it possible that readers recognize pieces of themselves in these "part-ego" characters, and respond strongly to this recognition? Are we aided by the author, the story, in our search for completion?

Others have also suggested that reading a story can be a way we see clearly for the first time something we may have known at some level all along. Novelist Nick Hornby (Montagne, 2003) was speaking of his autistic son's response to music, but he also voiced the reason we respond to literature with such intensity: "Somebody who is more expressive than we are can get something out that we feel." And when we know our feelings, when we understand some part of ourselves, we are changed. Our stories can change us.

Implications

The study began to answer my research questions about the ways in which stories linger in the mind of the reader. Through reading the relevant professional literature and listening to the voices of the people I interviewed, I have a clearer understanding of the ways a story affects the lives of those it touches. For the most part, I found what I expected to find, what the literature and my own personal experience predicted. As Schwartz (1996) suggests of our use of resonant literature, perhaps "I brought it with me" (p.107).

There were some surprises. Some of my findings contradict Birkert's (1986) assertion that factual and fictional information are assimilated differently. I felt that one of the readers I interviewed used his extensive collection of facts about a topic of great interest to him, the War Between the States, to fabricate his own vivid, factually accurate stories. I saw evidence that he reflects on those stories in ways similar to the ways I believe most readers reflect on and internalize fictional stories. Because the facts available cannot provide the complete extent of the impact of that war on the people who lived through it, I believe he uses the facts to structure a recreation of the events themselves. In effect, he writes his own internal historical fiction.

My study reaffirms the widely held belief that stories are perceived as important by readers, and that many, though not all, become a part of the conscious memory of the reader. The ways in which readers perceive the nature and extent of their impact vary widely, of course. I found a broad range of opinions among the participants about the degree to which the stories they remembered have affected their lives.

One reader told me that he had never been affected in any way by a fictional story. Then he explained, at length, the way he had been changed by a specific work of fiction, an allegory. I think the contradiction here is only apparent, not real. I suggest that when we respond strongly to a fictional story, we cease to view it as fiction. Its verisimilitude and its personal significance make us perceive it as real, if real only to ourselves. This degree of acceptance of fiction as reality is unlike anything I found in the literature.

Readers in my study affirmed the importance of their reading in ways that confirm, perhaps even extend, the perceptions of the intensity of reader response in the literature. One reader said that the books she has read represented the essence of who she is. Another said books have been as instrumental to her development as were her parents. Most of the readers I interviewed gave examples of specific changes in their lives, changes they characterized as their response to a particular story.

Several participants commented before or after their interviews that they felt as if they were sharing very personal, very intimate information. One compared the process to watching her life pass before her as though in a dream. I saw this as a measure of the degree of importance the participants attached to their responses to story.

In this study, I collected and analyzed data that reflected the importance of story in the lives of readers. Most, but not all, of these data echo themes already presented in the field. My study offers two contributions to the knowledge base. The first contribution relates to the participants' emotional response to literature. The ability of story to engage the reader emotionally and to create a legacy of emotional involvement, an on-going response to the story, was greater, across a greater variety of readers, than I had imagined

it could be. The participants' enduring emotional engagement with their significant stories was greater than anything I have seen described in the literature. The second contribution of this study is its methodology: By adhering closely to the qualitative research model, the study's development and implementation are transparent, completely accessible to participants as well as other researchers. Other scholars engaged in addressing similar questions can use the data for their own analyses, or they can use aspects of the design as a point of departure for their own work. Much remains to be learned.

Recommendations for Further Study

There are ways in which this study could be extended, and there are different approaches to the same research questions that could add additional knowledge. Possible approaches are described in the following sections.

More Readers

Each of the eight participants in my study made unique contributions. It seems reasonable to believe that additional participants would bring new perspectives, new data to contribute to the understanding sought.

Multiple Responses to the Same Piece of Literature

A study comparing and combining the responses of many people to the same work of literature could add a great deal to the understanding of the attributes that make a story significant and the ways in which the story is shaped by readers' perspectives. An

interview study could maintain the individuality of these perceptions in ways a focus group, or a literature class discussion, cannot.

Grounded Theory

In one sense, my study incorporated a step of the grounded theory approach, a model often used by post-positivist researchers. Grounded theory studies require constant comparison and repeated confirmation of emerging patterns in the data. (Hatch, 2002, p. 26). I interviewed each participant, reflected on the interview, read some of the participant's salient literature, and conducted another interview guided by the reflections and the literature, giving the participant a copy of the first interview transcript. Perhaps a full grounded-theory study could produce additional participant response generated by the recurring reflection and co-construction of knowledge.

Longitudinal Studies

It would be interesting to interview a reader about perceptions of the same piece of literature at recurring intervals over a long period of time, perhaps ten years.

My study should certainly not be the last to seek answers to the nature of the interaction between readers and their stories. It has generated questions as well as answers; but it has supported my belief that the effect of a story can be similar to that of a real, lived experience in a reader's life.

Coda

In his reflection on the origin of knowledge, Gadamer (1999/2001, p. 32) describes Heraclitus' construct, "heat that kindles…." He says, "The phenomenon being described here is clearly the sudden flaring up of flames from the heated log." My study supports the perception of story in readers' lives as akin to that heat that kindles. I believe that my data contain many examples of changes in readers' lives, changes for which the reader was ready, or almost ready. And these potential changes were kindled into flame by the hearing or reading of a story.

6. REFLECTIONS

Designing, executing, and reporting the results of this research have contributed far more than I would have thought possible to the process of my becoming educated. Through hearing participants' stories, I learned more about my own stories, more about how I became the person I am.

Doing the research provided a growth opportunity. As I transcribed my first interviews, I wished passionately that I could edit out my own stammering, circuitous approach to the questions I wanted to ask the participants. In many cases, the ideal follow-up question, the question that would have accessed data the participant had that I needed for my study, formed clearly in my mind—hours after the interview concluded. Some of the best data in the earlier interviews had to be discarded because it came as a response to a leading question I had asked, so I could not be sure whether the data represented the participant's own perception or their acknowledgement of mine. And some of the most insightful, the most profound, the most provocative statements were made by the participant just after I turned off the tape recorder. I got better. I learned to wait in silence after a participant answered a question. Sometimes the answer was extended or expanded. New insights were shared when I learned to stop cutting them off with the next question. I learned to follow up on some of the intriguing statements participant made. I learned to say less and hear more. But I never really perfected my interview techniques.

I had to come to terms with the idea that the interviews would not be perfect, the data set would not be complete, the interpretations of the data would not be infused with wisdom. Once I accepted my limitations, I was free to enjoy what I could learn from the

work. I learned quite a lot. I learned that each of the participants had an attachment to stories that were similar to my own. And I learned that, in spite of these common feelings, each participant had a unique perspective on the power of literature.

The best part of the project was getting to know the eight participants. Four of them I already knew, but the other four were new to me. I came to truly respect and appreciate each of them as they graciously shared with me the stories that were important to them, the stories that were part of their lives. I emerged from the process with four deepened friendships and four new friends.

I learned to appreciate the participants' courage in sharing such intimate information about their thinking, their feelings, their responses to the literature. When I attempted to formulate my own list of literature that I remember as having changed me, I was astounded at the difficulty of the task. The thought of sharing such a list makes me feel vulnerable to potentially critical scrutiny. The literature I have allowed into my life is such a close reflection of my private self. It is only to honor the participants' courage that I present this, my own list of salient literature: *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (Wilder, 1929); *Les Misérables* (Hugo, 1862/1951); *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Paton, 1948); *The Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 1939); *Travels with Charley* (Steinbeck, 1962); *The Sunflower Garden* (Udry, 1969); *The Story about Ping* (Flack, 1933/1961); *The Bible, The World Book Encyclopedia, Joan of Arc* (?); *The Good Earth* (Buck, 1931); *War and Peace* (Tolstoy, 1869/1994); *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1877/1946); *Crow Boy* (Yashima, 1955); *Black Like Me* (Griffin, 1961); *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 1966); *The Screwtape Letters* (Lewis, 1946); *The Great Divorce* (Lewis, 1946); *Tell Me a Riddle* (Olsen, 1961); *Look Homeward Angel* (Wolfe, 1957); *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1899/1971); *A Death in the*

Family (Agee, 1957); "The Road Not Taken" (Frost,1915/1969); and "Nothing Gold Can Stay" (Frost, 1923/1969). I leave the formulation of this list with regret, knowing I will think of other significant stories tomorrow.

I came to know the ideas of many good thinkers in the field of literacy, some through personal contact and some through books and articles they have written. While I work hard at acknowledging the sources of the new ideas I have acquired, I do not always succeed. I am afraid I now claim as my own a body of knowledge and insight developed by these other scholars. Their thoughts have become part of the way I think.

One part of the process was especially hard for me. I was very uncomfortable with using my voice, sharing my ideas, my perspectives. I do so now only at the insistence of the doctoral committee that supports me. I would have preferred to share only the participants' perspectives. As I attempted to fuse the data into a comprehensible, reportable unit, I worried about losing the voices of the participants. I was afraid that ideas cut from their contexts and placed adjacent to similar ideas lose some of their brilliance. I acknowledged the need for organizing over two hundred pages of transcripts into a logical, somewhat concise presentation; but in some cases, I felt as if I were trying to condense a poem. Some of the participants' ideas need to be seen in their original setting to be fully appreciated. Because of this, I would like to offer digital copies of the transcripts to any scholar who wants them. I can be contacted now at caro@utk.edu and after my affiliation with the university concludes at carolynboswell@comcast.net

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Yorinks, A. (1986). *Hey, Al.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Informed Consent to Participation in Qualitative Research

Residual Reader Response: An Interview Study of the Enduring Effects of Salient Literature

I agree to participate in two long interviews as part of a research project designed to construct knowledge about the long-range impact of literature that I have judged to be significant to me. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. The transcription will be used to provide data for the study. I understand that the researcher plans to publish any significant findings the study may generate.

It is my understanding that my name will not be used in any shared versions of my interviews. It is also my understanding I may elect to withdraw from this study at any time.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

I agree to accept the participant's interview statements as valid and to use great care in making statements or generalizations about them. I agree to answer questions about the study both during and after the interviews and to provide the participant with a copy of the finished study.

I may be contacted at this e-mail address: caro@utk.edu or at this telephone number: (865) 457-4013.

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Initial Interview Protocol

Work toward establishing rapport with participant:

- Get acquainted, emphasizing my role as a student.
- Explain my purposes for the research:
  - What do you remember about what you have read?
  - How did you react to it?
- Make sure participant is comfortable with setting, interview parameters, my expectations.

Begin interview and taping, drawing questions from this bank:

- What sorts of reading might you do in a typical week?
- How long have you been a reader?
- How far back can you remember reading something specific, or having it read to you? (Prompts) Preschool? Elementary? Middle/High School? Later? What do you remember?
- Are there books and stories you still think about having read from time to time?
- Do you ever re-read stories? …own copies of significant stories?
- What is really important to you in life?
- Can you think of anything you've read that relates to these themes?
- Are there stories you remember that addressed big questions, meaning-of-life kinds of questions?

- Are there stories you remember that clearly depict period or location, what it is or was like to live in a particular place and time?
- Do you remember stories dealing with issues of fairness, justice?
- Are there story characters that remind you of people you know? Of yourself?
    - What is similar? ...different?
    - What was it like for you to relate to someone in the story, to be able to put yourself in that person's place?
- Are there characters that raise questions you still wonder about? If so, how did they do that?
- Do you have vague memories of stories that created a particular feeling but you can't remember any specific details? Tell me as much as you can.
- The stories you've told me about—do they ever come to mind when you're thinking about things?
- (If yes) How? Why do you think they stayed with you?
- Why did you read these stories? Did you choose them, or were they chosen for you or recommended to you? By whom?
- How has your reading changed over the years?
- Are there things about your reading I haven't given you a chance to tell me?
- Of the stories you have mentioned (read list) which are particularly meaningful to you? (Any configuration, including *all* or *none* is acceptable.) Why do you think these were meaningful?

Conclude the interview with invitation to further comments by participant. Leave phone number, e-mail address, and self-addressed stamped envelope. Set tentative date for a follow-up interview after allowing time to read literature relevant to the initial interview.

Appendix C

Participant 3 February 19, 2004
Follow-up interview

In our first interview, you mentioned *Rebecca* as a favorite book. Would you tell me as much as you remember about that book, not just details but how you responded to it, how it made you feel.

What aspects of *Doctor Zhivago* do you remember?

Are there any books you've read that you wish everyone you care about would read?

You said that when you read romantic fiction, you become the main character. Please describe what this means to you and tell me what aspects of a work of fiction enable you to do this. (i.e., plot, setting, character development)

Could a good writer make a romantic novel out of your life story?

Do you identify with the main character when you're reading a mystery?

If you're reading fiction, how important is it to you that it seem as if it could be real?

What makes a book real to you? Story? Character development? Setting? Your prior knowledge?

The books you remember having read—what do you think it is that makes you remember them, while others are forgotten?

Have you ever read anything that made you see things differently?

Have you ever read anything that changed a course of action?

Do you think the books you read to your students and to your grandsons will change them in any way?

Are there books you would avoid reading because you think they might create changes you would see as negative? (You mentioned espionage books in our first interview that told you more than you wanted to know about our government's dark defense secrets....)

Describe how you feel when you're reading a good book.

If you could only have a dozen books to read next year, what would they be?

Is there anything else you can tell me that will help me understand you as a reader?

Participant 7 February 18, 2004
Follow-up interview

In our first interview, you said there were books you had read multiple times. You mentioned I *War and Peace* among these. How do your memories of the book compare to the text itself? Are they well aligned? How do subsequent readings differ from the first?

Is this different for rereading of stories from *The Bible?*

In our first interview, you mentioned two stories from *The Bible*, David and Goliath and Noah. Please choose one of them, tell me the story, and tell me the impact, if any, the story has had on you.

Are there any books you've read that you wish everyone you care about would read?

You said that you prefer reading fiction to nonfiction because you enjoy entering the world of the main character. Please describe what this means to you and tell me what aspects of a work of fiction enable you to do this. (i.e., plot, setting, character development)

If you're reading fiction, how important is it to you that it seem as if it could be real?

What makes a book real to you? Story? Character development? Setting? Your prior knowledge?

Please choose one of these books: *Squanto and the Pilgrims, The Last of the Mohicans,* or *Vienna Prelude.* Tell me as much as you can about how the book made you feel and why it is important to you.

The books you remember having read—what do you think it is that makes you remember them, while others are forgotten?

Have you ever read anything that made you see things differently?

Have you ever read anything that changed a course of action?

Are there books you would avoid reading because you think they might create changes you would see as negative?

Tell me everything you remember about *Green Mansions,* and, as much as you can, why you think it disturbed you so.

If you had to limit your library to a dozen volumes, what might you choose? Why?

Is there anything else you can tell me that will help me understand you as a reader?

Appendix D

Books and stories, in the form cited by the participants, are listed alphabetically below. Numbers following listings identify the participant who cited the book. Numbers match the participant numbers on interview transcripts. Letter designations *a* and *b* indicate that the book was initially cited in either the first (*a*) or second (*b*) interview.

Books and Stories Cited by Participants	Books and Stories Cited by Participants
1001 Arabian Nights, The 3a	*Ben Hur 2a*
A Streetcar Named Desire 3a	*Bible, The 2a AND 3a, 5a, 6b, 7a, 8a*
Abraham Lincoln biography 7a	*Big Brown Box, The 6a*
Across Five Aprils 6a	*Book of Amos, The 7a*
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The 1a	*Book of Arabian Proverbs 8a*
Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The 1b	*Book of Daniel, The 2a AND 7a*
Aesop's Fables 2a	*Book of Job, The 7a AND 8a*
Agincourt 1a	*Book of Revelation, The 2a AND 7b*
Aida 2a	*Boundaries of the Soul 2a*
Akiak: A Tale from the Iditarod 1a	*Boy Who Owned the School, The 7b*
All Creatures Great and Small 1b	*Calvin and Hobbes 1a*
Almost a Famous Person 6a	*Canterbury Tales, The 3a*
Anna Karenina 7a	*Caps for Sale 6a*
Babylon Revisited 2a	*Carmen 2a*
Baseball Saved Us 7b	*Chamber, The 3a*
Be the Book 7b	"Cinderella" *7a*
Behold Your King 8a	*Citizen Soldiers 8a*

Books and Stories Cited by Participants	Books and Stories Cited by Participants
Client, The 3a	*FDR: A Biography 1a*
Clutch of Constables 1a	*Firm, The 2a*
Cold Sassy Tree 1b	*Five Little Peppers and How They Grew 7a*
Color of My Words, The 7b	*Forging Freedom 7b*
Color Purple, The 6a	*Fourfold Way, The 1a*
Corduroy 6a	*Frosty the Snowman 7a*
Crictor 6a	*Future Edge 1a*
Crime and Punishment 1b AND 7a	*Getting to Yes 1b*
Crow Boy 6a	*Ghost at Home Plate 3a*
Crucible, The 6a	*Giant 7a*
Daddy 3a	*Golden Compass, The 1a*
"David and Goliath" *7a*	*Gone with the Wind 3a*
DaVinci Code, The 1a	*Good Earth, The 2a*
Deerslayer, The 3a	*Grand Crevasse, The 1a*
Doctor Zhivago 3a	*Grapes of Wrath, The 2a*
Dreams Are a Way to Listen to God 2a	*Green Mansions 7a*
Dumbo 4a	*Habakkuk 7a*
Epaminondous 3a	*Halley's Commentary 8a*
Evergreen 3a	*Happy Hollisters, The 7a*
"Ezekiel and the Wheel" *2a*	*Hawaii, 7a*
Fall of Pompeii, The 2a	*Henry Huggins 7a*
Fathers and Sons 7a	*Hey, Al 6a*

Books and Stories Cited by Participants	Books and Stories Cited by Participants
Hiding Place, The 7a	"Little Red Riding Hood" *2a*
Hinds' Feet on High Places 7a	*Longest Day, The 8a*
Hiroshima 7b	*Look Homeward, Angel 2a*
Hornet's Flight 1b	*Loving v. Virginia 6a*
How to Argue and Win Every Time 6a	*Macbeth* 8a
"Humpty Dumpty" *2a*	*Madame Butterfly 2a*
Hunchback of Notre Dame, The 3a	*Matthew Henry Commentary 8a*
If 3a	*Memories, Dreams, Reflections 2a*
In Fisherman 1a	*Midsummer Night's Dream 1a*
It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It 1a	*Mikado, The 2a*
"Jack and the Beanstalk" *2a*	*Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel 7a*
Jackdaws 1a	*Mother Goose 2a*
Jane Emily 7a	*Mountains of Spices 7a*
Jane Eyre 6a AND 8a	*Mr. Popper's Penguins 7a*
Jehovah's Witness 8a	*Mystery of the Moss-Covered Mansion, The 7a*
Kon Tiki 1b	*Naked and the Dead, The 2a*
Koran, The 6b	*Nancy Leiberman biography 6a*
Last Ditch 1a	*Nanny Dairies, The 3a*
Let God Be True 8a	*New Testament, The 8a*
Let Justice Roll Down 1a	*Nibble, Nibble, Jenny Archer*
Lie Down with Lions 1a	*Night 7b*
Light and the Glory, The 7a	"Noah" *7a*

Books and Stories Cited by Participants	Books and Stories Cited by Participants
Notebook, The 8a	*Ruska 7a*
Nothing Is Impossible 1a	*Russians, The 7a*
Of Plymouth Plantation 7a	*Sammy Davis, Jr. biography 2a*
"Old Mother Hubbard" *2a*	"Samuel" *7a*
Oliver Twist 7a	*Scarlet Letter, The 6a*
Palmore v. Sidotti 6a	*Scarlett 3a*
"Parable of the Generous Employer" 8b	*Screwtape Letters, The 3a*
Parallel Bible 8a	*Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, The 3a*
"Paul on the Damascus Road" *7a*	"Sleeping Beauty" *7a*
Pelican Brief, The 3a	"Snow White" *7a*
Peter Pan 3a	*Song of Solomon, The 2a*
Piercing the Darkness 8a	*South Sea Island Love 8a*
Pilgrim's Progress, The 7b	*Squanto and the Pilgrims 5a AND 7a*
Ponder Heart, The 2a	*Story About Ping, The 6a*
Psalms, The 2a	"Story of Ruth and Naomi" *2a*
"Puss in Boots" *7a*	*Struggle for Intimacy 1a*
Rebecca 3a	*Stuart Little 1a*
"Rime of the Ancient Mariner, The" *7a*	*Swiss Family Robinson 1a*
Roadrunner 4a	"Tasmanian Devil" *4a*
Robinson Crusoe 1a	*Tess of theD'Urbervilles* 6a
Roe v. Wade 6a	*This Present Darkness* 8a

Books and Stories Cited by Participants	Books and Stories Cited by Participants
Time of Wonder 6a	*Walk Egypt 2a*
To Be a Boy, to Be a Reader 7b	*War and Peace 7a*
Trail of the Lonesome Pine, The 8a	*Where the Wild Things Are 6a AND 7a*
Valued Voices 7b	*Whitey, Blackie, and Brownie 7a*
Velveteen Rabbit, The 6a	*Who Moved My Cheese 8a*
Very Crazy, G. I. 5b	"Why I Live at the P. O." *2a*
Vienna Prelude 7a	*Winds of War, The 7a*
Waiting for Godot 2a	*You Can't Go Home Again 2a*
Walden Pond 3a	

Appendix E

Authors, in the form cited by the participants, are listed alphabetically below. Numbers following each listing identify the participant citing the author. Numbers match the participant numbers on interview transcripts. Letter designations *a* and *b* indicate that the author was initially cited in either the first (*a*) or second (*b*) interview.

Authors Cited by Participants	Authors Cited by Participants
Alcott, Louisa May 7a	Graham, Billy 8a
Anderson 2a	Grey, Zane 8a
Black, Shirley Temple 7a	Grisham, John 3a
Bradford, Barbara Taylor 3a	Hemingway 2a
Bradford, William 7a	Jung, Carl 2a
Brozo, William 7b	Keillor, Garrison 1b
Buck, Pearl S. 2a	King, Dr. Martin Luther Jr. 7a
Chaucer 3a	L'Amour, Louis 8a
Christie, Agatha 1a AND 3a	Lewis, C. S. 1a AND 3a
Clark, Mary Higgins 3a	Lucado, Max 8a
Cleary, Beverly 7a	Mailer 2a
D'Aulaire 7a	Marsh, Ngiao 1a
Dickens 1a	Michener, James 7a
Faulkner, William 2a	Mitchell, Margaret 3a
Ferber, Edna 7a	Morris, Gilbert
Follette, Ken 1a	Morrison, Toni 6a
Fulgum 1a	Parker 2a

Authors Cited by Participants	Authors Cited by Participants
Paulsen, Gary 7b	Thoene, Brock
Perkins, John 1a	Tolkien 1a
Rivers, Francine 7a	Tolstoy 7a
Sandford, Carl 2a	Turgev 7a
Singer, June 2a	Twain, Mark 1a
Skinner, B. F. lb	Walker, Alice 1a
Spense, Jerry 6a	Warren, Rick 7b
Spock, Dr. 2a	Weisel, Eli 7a
Shakespeare 3a AND 8a; (as *not* read) 1a	Welty, Eudora 2a
Steele, Danielle 3a	Wilhelm, Jeff 7b
Stevenson, Robert Louis 1a	Wooten, Deborah7b
Taylor, Hudson 7a	Wouk, Herman 7a
Thoene, Bodie 7a	

Appendix F

Series or series-like-groupings cited by participants are listed alphabetically below. Numbers following each listing identify the participant citing the series. Numbers match the participant numbers on interview transcripts. Letter designations *a* and *b* indicate that the series was initially cited in either the first (*a*) or second (*b*) interview.

Series Cited by Participants	Series Cited by Participants
Bobbsey Twins, The 3a	King Arthur tales 3a
Books on relaxation techniques 4a	Lord of the Rings, The 1a
Boxcar Children, The 3a	Mark of the Lion, The 7a
Caldecott books 7a	Nancy Drew 3a AND 7a
Childcraft 3a	Newberry Award Books 7b
Chronicles of Narnia 1a	Sherlock Holmes 1a
Deerslayer series 3a	Stephanie Plum 3a
Hardy Boys, The 1a AND 3a	Zion Chronicles, The 7a
Illustrated Children's Classics 3a	Zion Covenant, The 7a

Appendix G

Genres, broadly construed, are listed alphabetically below. Numbers following each listing identify the participant citing the genre. Numbers match the participant numbers on interview transcripts. Letter designations *a* and *b* indicate that the genre was initially cited in either the first (*a*) or second (*b*) interview.

Genres Cited by Participants	Genres Cited by Participants
American history 4a	Liberation theology 6a
Autobiography 2a	Mysteries 3a AND 7a
Bible story books 7a	Native Americans 7a
Biographies 2a	Nursery rhymes 2a
Books about chess 1a	Oriental 2a
Children's books 6a	Plays 8a
Civil War history 5a	Poetry 2b
Devotional books 7a	Professional, education 7b
European history 1a	Professional, law 6a
Fairy tales 7a	Professional, medicine 1a
Fiction 8a	Professional, writing 2a
First Amendment cases 6a	Psychology 2a
Fishing books 1a	Reader's Digest condensed books 8a
Historical fiction 7a	Romantic fiction 3a
History 4 AND 5 AND 7 AND 8	Science fiction 3a
How-to books	Southern fiction 3a
Junk	Spy-espionage 3a

Genres Cited by Participants	Genres Cited by Participants
Supreme Court cases 6a	Trilogies 3a
Travel books 1b	Westerns 8a

Appendix H

Sources cited by participants are listed alphabetically below. Numbers following each listing identify the participant citing the source. Numbers match the participant numbers on interview transcripts. Letter designations *a* and *b* indicate that the source was initially cited in either the first (*a*) or second (*b*) interview.

Sources Cited by Participants	Sources Cited by Participants
Asheville Citizen-Times 4a	*National Geographic* 5b
Book of the Month Club 8a	Newspapers 4a
Books on CD1a	Online newspapers 4a
Comic books 4a	Opera 2a
Doubleday Dollar Book Club 1a	Operetta 2a
e-Bay 4a	*South Knoxville Times* 5a
Encyclopedias 1a AND 7a	*Sports Illustrated* 5a
Field and Stream magazine 5a	Sports page 5b
Footnoted volumes	Television 4a
Gettysburg video	The Internet 4a
Knoxville News-Sentinel 4b AND 5a	The Reader's Digest 8a
Look magazine 8a	*Time* magazine 4a AND 5a AND 8a
Movies 1a	

Vita

Carolyn Roberts Boswell, a native of Tennessee, received an undergraduate degree from Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee and a Master's Degree from the University of Tennessee. She has been employed by Clinton City Schools for the past 20 years as a kindergarten and first grade teacher. She is the mother of two daughters.

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