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Question 2- Analyse the work of illustrators and, particularly, author-illustrators who tackle difficult, sensitive, and sometimes shocking themes.

This essay will explore whether the use of animals in children's literature can be considered one of the most useful devices in children's literature. It will delve into the psychology of children's minds and the profound impact that the relationships forged between children and animals exert on the child's mental health development. To explore this idea, the essay will explore the historical integration of animals within children's literature and the significance of their presence in modern stories. It will inspect original illustrators such as Randolph Caldecott as well as modern illustrators' works such as Laurel Molk. By dissecting the visual narratives of these illustrators, it becomes easier to interpret the nuanced ways in which animals serve as companions, mentors, and mirrors for younger readers. Moreover, this exploration extends to psychological theories, particularly John Bowlby's attachment theory, which helps to unravel the intricate threads that form the bonds between animal and child. Scholarly insights from Temple Grandin's "Animals Make Us Human" and Lisa Zunshine's "Why We Read Fiction" will also help to draw these ideas together.

As children grow there are instances in their lives where certain things need to be explained to them, however, it's a common occurrence for adults to underestimate the child's capacity for understanding. According to Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology and affiliate professor of philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley, "children are more capable of learning obscure concepts than adults or even

AI.” Jean Piaget, a leading figure in child psychology, had a theory that child development progressed through several stages with each stage correlating with an age range (Thompson, 2019). During these stages, children learn to understand what emotions are, as well as how to manage them.

A theory developed by John Bowlby, another influential figure in the world of child psychology, indicates the importance of early relationships between the child and their caregiver. In his book “Attachment and Loss” he puts forward the notion that these secure attachments between child and caregiver are the foundation of emotional development. However, child development has a multitude of layers and is influenced by several factors. One of these factors includes the child and their relationship with pets and animals. In the book “Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows” the author, Melanie Joy, highlights how children often develop strong emotional bonds to their pets, which can sometimes mirror the characteristics of human attachment. This means that alongside their relationship with their caregiver, children can develop bonds that provide a source of comfort and emotional support. This then allows assistance in helping the child to develop empathy, compassion, and social skills as they may turn to their pets for companionship, sharing of thoughts and feelings, as well as a sense of security (Liu-Pham, Patterson, and Keefer, 2022).

The books “Animals Make Us Human” by Temple Grandin and “Why We Read Fiction” by Lisa Zunshine, both explore how animals affect children’s emotional states. Lisa Zunshine specifically explores how narratives involving animals elicit emotional responses and can help foster a deeper understanding of others’ perspectives, while Temple Grandin discusses the calming influences that animals have on children.

Grandin explains the way in which the non-judgmental companionship of pets can help support a child in times of stress, anxiety, or difficult life transitions.

As previously discussed, the human brain is constantly developing, and the early development seen in childhood is particularly important to developing a strong foundation for future learning, health, and life (CDC, 2022). Many children grow up surrounded by stories whether that be in the form of film, literature, or games, and these stories can have a great impact on the development of that child. In various studies such as “The Pleasures of Children’s Literature,” by Nodelman (2003) it’s argued that animal characters can engage with children’s imaginations and help them to understand more complex concepts by bridging the gap between the familiar and unknown. These animals can become metaphors that are more easily comprehended, and children can explore emotions, relationships, and moral dilemmas.

Children’s literature has a long and evolving history, with its growing popularity throughout the years. Although the form of children’s literature that we see today took time to develop, children’s stories have existed in many different forms for centuries.



Figure 1: Caldecott. R (n.d). *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon*

Early in the history of children's literature, stories tended to originate from folktales or religious texts, and it wasn't until the 18th and 19th centuries that the trend of illustrating children's books grew, "It was in the 1920s that books could be mass-produced in colour, and literacy became sufficiently widespread to make children's picture books a true industry unto its own." (Masters, 2012). The 19th century is also regarded as the "Golden Age of Illustration" in children's literature. "Randolph Caldecott's name is often linked with those of Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway, forming the triumvirate of illustrators who began the new era of picture books for

children in the 1870s.” (Dalby, 2002). These illustrators contributed to the visual richness of 19th-century children’s books, and a common theme seen throughout a lot of the illustrations at this time is the use of animals as central figures. The book “History of Illustration” by Susan Doyle covers these early illustrators and their work in detail. Caldecott’s work (See Fig.1) is mentioned frequently and his playful narratives in which he depicts charming anthropomorphic animals contributed to the engagement in the early works of children’s literature.

It was during the 19th century when children’s literature started to truly embrace using animals as central characters. Some of the timeless classics that originated in this period include “The Tale of Peter Rabbit” by Beatrix Potter, and “Black Beauty” by Anna Sewell. These stories as well as many others were contributors to the widespread popularity of animal-centric children’s tales.

The following 20th century saw a significant development in the portrayal of animals in the story’s narratives. This was primarily due to the shift in several trends in cultural, societal, and literary landscapes. “The early half of the twentieth century saw more of a transition into the “adult” children’s stories, with one foot on each side.” (www.mykabook.com, n.d.) A prominent trend seen at this time was the anthropomorphism of animal characters. Some classic works include A.A. Milne’s “Winnie-the-Pooh” and E.B. White’s “Charlotte’s Web” which feature animals with distinct human-like qualities. These stories also often delved into themes of friendship, loyalty, and empathy. In Seth Lerer’s book “Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History from Aesop to Harry Potter” the author discusses how these characters are tools for conveying complex emotions and relatable experiences to young readers.

The idea of creating children's literature to be more "adult" continued into the mid-20th-century when children's literature began to reflect more awareness of diversity and inclusion. In "Children's Literature: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends," Heather Montgomery discusses how authors and illustrators had an increased emphasis on diverse cultural perspectives. Animals from various regions began to be integrated into stories allowing for an appreciation for global perspectives in young readers.

Moving into the 21st century, children's literature kept its focus on more diverse perceptions and exploring sensitive themes in nuanced ways. Contemporary authors such as Katherine Applegate with "The One and Only Ivan" deal with these nuanced themes and invite the reader to empathise with animal characters, creating a deeper understanding of emotions and relationships. The development in technology also saw a new way for authors and illustrators to explore narrating their stories by experimenting with different aspects of the story such as "non-linear plots that are organised not by a typical beginning, middle, and end, but tell the story out of order and/or lead readers in multiple directions through the text" (courses.lumenlearning.com, n.d.)

In contemporary literature the deliberate use of animals has become a tool for imparting moral lessons, encouraging empathy, and fostering discussions on diversity and understanding. Examples of these contemporary works include "There Might Be Lobsters" by Carolyn Crimi, illustrated by Laurel Molk, and "The Rabbit Listened" by Cori Doerrfeld. Examining these works can showcase the nuanced ways in which animals have become conduits for emotional connection and valuable life lessons.



Figure 2: Molk, L and Crimi, C (2017). *There Might Be Lobsters*

In the children's book "There Might Be Lobsters," Carolyn Crimi skilfully uses the character of Sukie the Dog to channel the feelings of anxiety and fear to the reader, employing various methods throughout the narrative. Sukie is constantly portrayed as smaller than the elements that surround her and frequently placed in the corner of the page (See Fig.2). These compositions contribute to the depiction of anxiety throughout the story, and it is only at the pinnacle point in the story that these aspects change. At this point of the story, the focus changes slightly to put both Sukie and her toy Monkey as the focal point of the story. Sukie's toy Monkey has thus far been one of the only elements on the page that appear smaller than Sukie. When Sukie overcomes her fears to save the monkey the rest of the elements are removed from the page, leaving Sukie and the monkey as the focus. Once Sukie returns to the beach these elements once again return but Sukie is placed in a more central position on the page, portraying the stability now felt by the character.

This storytelling approach could be particularly beneficial for children dealing with anxiety, as they may identify with Sukie's feelings of being overwhelmed. The narrative emphasises the idea of overcoming significant challenges by focusing on smaller tasks, offering a constructive method for battling anxiety.

As previously discussed, children can develop bonds with their pets that are similar to human attachment, so having an animal character as a central focus for the story can allow a child to connect with the story but still have the emotional distance that they feel safe in asking questions about the topics explored. "Having animals do the acting and mistake-making allows the face-saving emotional distance often needed to be able to join the conversation" (Burke and Copenhaver, 2004).



Figure 3: Doerrfeld, C. (2018). *The Rabbit Listened*

The benefits of using animals as metaphorical symbols also extend to the illustrators and authors, as they can rely on already existing motifs of certain animals, such as a lion who represents bravery, or a slow sloth (Runge, 2021). A good example of this is seen in the work of Cori Doerrfeld "The Rabbit Listened." The book uses established

motifs (See Fig.3) such as an angry bear, a sneaky snake, and an elephant who remembers everything to create a story revolving around the child Taylor's emotional distress, and underscoring the importance of having someone who would simply listen, an essential lesson on emotional support. The use of these motifs makes the story and lesson within easier to portray, but it also means it's accessible to a younger range of audiences who have yet to learn to read the subtle nuances of other children's books.

Although this essay has explored the effectiveness of using animals in children's literature there is also a need to give the subject a more critical examination, as there are potentially negative consequences and drawbacks to the prevalent use of animals in children's literature.

The way that children conceptualize the things around them often carries over into adulthood. While employing anthropomorphized animals enables children to engage with the stories and encourages them to inquire about challenging subjects, it also has the potential to detract from certain aspects of the child's learning experience. (RedRover, 2014) this means that if a child is applying human-like qualities to real animals then they stop learning what that animal actually needs and what it's saying.

However, this does not mean that animals need to be completely removed from children's literature, but it could be beneficial to change their roles in those stories. In the book "Duncan and Dolores," by Barbra Samuels a cat is used throughout the story but is portrayed with cat qualities instead of human ones. The story shows an example of a young girl starting to understand the needs of her cat through the help of a

relationship built with her sister. This change in roles does not necessarily mean that children will be unable to connect with the story or ask questions about difficult topics. Children are still able to interact with the book by being asked how the cat is feeling and why they think it feels that way, but this book gives a more balanced portrayal of anthropomorphism.

Another concern about using animals in children's literature is the negative impact it can have on diversity. The exhibit "Animals Are Us" which ran from 2021 to 2022 in the Harvard Library explored this idea and how "the growing resistance to anthropomorphism as the diversity gap in children's literature continues to gain traction" (Hyry et al., 2021). The essay based on the exhibition explores how the history of animal characters in children's literature has led to harmful stereotypes, as well as creating barriers for diverse authors and illustrators within the publishing industry. These are key factors that need to be taken into consideration when considering if the use of animals in children's literature can be considered the most effective tool.

In conclusion, the use of animals in children's literature as a tool for portraying sensitive topics seems to be an effective approach yet it does not stand without its problems. The use of anthropomorphism in stories allows for a safe and accessible space for young readers to explore more complex themes and can be tailored effectively for varying age ranges. This symbolic representation of animals can often serve as a bridge that allows children to connect with and comprehend sensitive subject matters in a relatable and harmless manner. While it is extremely important to acknowledge the potential limitations of this tool and the need for careful consideration

when it comes to topic matters, having a well-crafted narrative that incorporates animals can be extremely beneficial to young readers. Whether anthropomorphism can be considered the optimal tool for dealing with sensitive subject matter in children's literacy is still open to debate; however, as seen throughout the research in this essay its apparent effectiveness continues to be widely acknowledged.

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Figure 1- Caldecott, R. (n.d.). *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon*.

Figure 2- Molk, L. and Crimi, C. (2017). *There Might Be Lobsters*.

Figure 3 - Doerrfeld, C. (2018). *The Rabbit Listened*.

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