

**Bibliotherapy and its Potential Applications
in the Foster Care Environment:
*Something a Child Can Understand***

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I. What is Bibliotherapy?

Bibliotherapy involves the use of books to help children and young adults deal with the psychological, emotional and other personal issues that arise in their lives. Technically, it has been defined as the use of “literature to bring about a therapeutic interaction between a participant and facilitator.”¹ This method of helping those who face new and often traumatizing life experiences is known by many names in addition to bibliotherapy: biblio-counseling, biblio-guidance, biblio-psychology, book matching, literatherapy, library therapeutics, reading therapy, and many more. As a method of promoting therapeutic interaction between reader and child, bibliotherapy has become more widespread in recent years. Organizations such as the National Association for Poetry Therapy² have even developed specific guidelines and certification processes for the use of bibliotherapy at both developmental and clinical levels.

For children, one of the most effective ways to bring them face to face with their fears and worries is to present characters (for example, in a book) who face situations analogous to those in the child’s own life. The child is able to see how the character deals with such situations, and can hopefully apply the same methods of resolution to his or her own personal problems.³ Books can provide a “safety net” for emotionally intense issues, thus placing the issues at a “safe” distance away from the child and allowing the child to comfortably analyze and resolve them.⁴

Relating to the plight of others is an important step in the emotional growth of a child, and becomes even more significant in efforts to help a child “adapt” to a new set of circumstances (such as a foster family). Bibliotherapy, which can be used alongside other, more

¹ A.M. HYNES, BIBLIO/POETRY THERAPY, THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS: A HANDBOOK (1994).

² See The National Association For Poetry Therapy, www.poetrytherapy.org (last visited April 26, 2009).

³ See Bibliotherapy, *The International Child and Youth Care Network*, Issue 50 (March 2003).

⁴ Pehrsson, D.E., Bibliotherapy evaluation tool: Grounding counseling students in the therapeutic use of literature, *The Arts in Psychotherapy* (2005).

traditional methods of helping children deal with emotional issues, operates by allowing the reader to understand that they are not alone. Essentially, reading a children's book to a child, when the child can see that certain characters face similar problems to himself or herself, is one way to spark a conversation about the problems that the child might otherwise be hesitant to discuss.⁵ This, in turn, releases emotional pressure that might have been building inside the child.⁶ The process ensures that "children have an opportunity to identify, to compensate, and to relive in a controlled manner a problem that they are aware of."⁷

In addition to helping a child confront emotional issues, bibliotherapy can be used to strengthen the bonds between reader and child. When an adult reads to the child, this forms a trusting bond as the two share interests and discuss the story.⁸ However, bibliotherapy is much more than just "storytime."

Bibliotherapy is a structured process and involves more than simply reading a particular book to (or together with) a child. The first step in the bibliotherapy process is "identification," during which the reader asks the child questions related to characters in the book, or events and ideas present in the story.⁹ Alternatively, the reader can answer questions raised by the child him or herself. The next step following identification is "catharsis," during which the child's own emotions become tied up with the story and the child is able to release those emotions. Finally, "discussion" allows the reader to help the child understand his or her own behavior and

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Aiex, N.K., *Bibliotherapy fact Sheet*, ERIC Clearing House on Reading and Communication skills (1982).

⁷ Olsen, H.D. Bibliotherapy to Help Children Solve Problems, *Elementary School Journal* (1975).

⁸ RICHARD A. GARDNER, *THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUES OF RICHARD A. GARDNER* (1992).

⁹ See Bibliotherapy, *supra* note 3.

emotions, and the best ways to deal with or approach them.¹⁰ Discussion helps children understand not only their personal feelings, but also the fact that they are not alone.¹¹

Using bibliotherapy at an early age, even when a child is so young that he or she has difficulty expressing emotions, can have benefits that last into a child's older years. When children are exposed to some sort of trauma (such as being removed from their biological families and places with a foster family), responses that can last into adulthood, and in turn lead to other problems, include "feelings of sadness, confusion, guilt, loneliness, and abandonment."¹²

While the benefits of bibliotherapy have been recognized, researchers have been quick to caution would-be bibliotherapists about certain aspects of the process. For example, a child often views books as part of the unpleasant "schooling" or "testing" process and can thus be frightened or turned off by the suggestion of reading.¹³ Therefore, efforts should be made to avoid presenting bibliotherapeutic materials as "homework" or "assignments." This can help predispose the child to participating in the activity rather than shutting down and ignoring the story. Another important issue that can arise is children's various responses. Different children can react to the same book in different ways, so a reader should try to anticipate the child's reactions and address them. This and other aspects of bibliotherapy, specifically as they relate to the use of reading in the foster care environment, are discussed in more detail below.

Despite all its recognized benefits, bibliotherapy does have its detractors.¹⁴ At least one librarian has questioned the value of placing children face-to-face with some of their deepest

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ J.E. BERNSTEIN, BIBLIOTHERAPY: HOW BOOKS CAN HELP YOUNG CHILDREN COPE (1989).

¹² Cole, D. Relation of social and academic competence to depressive symptoms in childhood. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (1990).

¹³ Pehrsson, Elizabeth, Bibliotherapy With Preadolescents Experiencing Divorce, *The Family Journal* (2007).

¹⁴ See, e.g., Maeve Visser Knoth, "What Ails Bibliotherapy?" available at http://www.hbook.com/magazine/articles/2006/may06_knoth.asp (last visited April 26, 2009).

problems.¹⁵ For example, she asks, “What if, after thirty-two pages, the reader does *not* feel better? What if he feels worse? . . . Similarly, does the child who is living through his mother’s breast cancer treatments want to revisit them in fiction? Would he not rather escape to Narnia?”¹⁶ Despite these valid questions about the overall benefit and efficacy of bibliotherapy for children, it is our belief, for the reasons stated below, that bibliotherapy can help foster children cope with and adapt to their new environments.

II. The History of Bibliotherapy

The history of bibliotherapy (or what formed the early roots of bibliotherapy), stretches back to ancient Greece¹⁷, where some of the world’s first libraries came into existence.¹⁸ The widespread use of books to address psychological and emotional issues specifically as a science dates back nearly a century. A theory that evolved out of Dr. Sigmund Freud’s research suggested that one method of treating mental disorders was by bringing fears and anxieties to the surface. Doing so elevates the subconscious to the level of the conscious, and thus the roots of anxieties and other emotional problems can be confronted and resolved.¹⁹

In the United States, the beginnings of bibliotherapy go back even further. In the early part of the nineteenth century, scholarly articles began to appear that promoted the use of reading as a therapeutic measure. Specifically, reading was viewed as one of the best ways to treat mental patients. By the mid-nineteenth century, every major mental institution in the country had a “patient’s library” with carefully selected books for use by the patients.²⁰ While it was not

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Lauren Myracle, “Molding the Minds of the Young: The History of Bibliotherapy as Applied to Children and Adolescents,” (accessed April 24, 2009), *available at* <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/winter95/Myracle.html>

¹⁸ Nola Kortner Aie, “Bibliotherapy,” (accessed April 26, 2009), *available at* <http://www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/digests/d82.html>.

¹⁹ See Bibliotherapy, *supra* note 3.

²⁰ Weimerskirch, Philip, *Benjamin Rush and John Minson Galt, II: Pioneers of Bibliotherapy in America* (1965).

treated as a science then, the actual concept of “bibliotherapy” – and the term itself – was described in a 1916 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. The article, by Samuel Crothers, discussed the technique of prescribing books (much like medication) to patients who needed help understanding the problems they faced.²¹ By the 1930s, librarians were beginning to actively select certain books to address certain “issues” or “conditions.”²² At this point, counselors were beginning to work with librarians to develop reading lists and even viewed such lists as a “prescription” for those suffering from maladies.²³

Prior to the 1900s, children’s books were generally used as teaching tools, a method of instruction in the ways of proper behavior that was not meant to “connect” with the child, but only to teach him or her.²⁴ It was not until classics such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *The Wind of the Willows* were published in the 1900s that people began to realize that books could be used to entertain and instruct simultaneously – that instruction did not need to take the form of rigid didacticism but rather could be presented in entertaining story form.²⁵ While bibliotherapy has been used to help specific populations of children, such as those living through the divorce of their parents, its use in the foster care environment has been somewhat limited. This is an area, however, where many children stand to benefit from bibliotherapy.

III. The Foster System, Nationally, Statewide, and Locally

The population of foster youth who could potentially benefit from bibliotherapy is growing, according to statistics. Across America, more than 500,000 children are in the foster

²¹ See Crothers, S.M., “A Literary Clinic,” *Atlantic Monthly* (1916).

²² Mardzia Hayati Abdullah, “Bibliotherapy,” (accessed April 26, 2009), available at <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-4/bibliotherapy.html>

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Agnes, S.M., “Bibliotherapy for Socially Maladjusted Children,” *Catholic Educational Review* (1946).

²⁵ *Id.*

care system, a number that represents a ninety percent increase since 1987.²⁶ Within twelve to eighteen months after leaving foster care, twenty-seven percent of males and ten percent of females had been incarcerated, thirty-three percent of foster care children were receiving public assistance, thirty-seven percent had not finished high school, and fifty percent were unemployed. Children in the foster care system were found to be three to six times more likely than children not in care to have emotional, behavioral and developmental problems such as behavioral disorders, depression, and difficulties forming social relationships.

In California alone, there are more than 100,000 foster children.²⁷ Of those who leave foster care, sixty-five percent do so without a place to live, and as many as half become homeless within the first eighteen months of emancipation. Youth in foster care are forty-four percent less likely to graduate from high school and between forty and fifty percent never receive a high school degree, even after emancipation.

In Santa Clara County, nearly 3,000 children required some sort of out-of-home care in 2009, according to county statistics. More than 1,200 of these children required foster care.²⁸ However, the county had fewer than 400 licensed foster care homes. According to the county, forty-seven percent of Santa Clara County's foster children are Latino, thirty-one percent are white, sixteen percent are African American, and five percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Given this diversity, it is important for bibliotherapists to not only acknowledge a child's age when reading or choosing literature, but also to acknowledge his or her culture and linguistic abilities. As the statistics show, the size of the foster youth population nationwide, statewide and locally is significant. Bibliotherapy is one of the easiest, cheapest and most effective methods to help these

²⁶ *And How are the Children?*, Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support, <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/2007AnnualReport.htm> (last visited April 26, 2009).

²⁷ See National Foster Care Youth Statistics, www.onthemovebayarea.org/node/561 (last visited April 26, 2009).

²⁸ See The County of Santa Clara – Foster Parent Recruitment, www.sccgov.org/portal/site/fpr (last visited April 26, 2009).

children confront the emotional problems they face, and it could ultimately improve their emotional maturity and well-being as adults, something that can help them beat the statistics.

IV. Foster Care and its Effects on Children

Foster care is defined broadly as “any situation in which children live with people who act as substitute parents.”²⁹ Children placed in the foster care system live with either a family relative or a nonrelative adult who has been specially trained and certified to care for foster children.³⁰ Children are placed in the foster care system for a variety of reasons, the most common being attributable to parental behavior and circumstances such as abuse and neglect, abandonment, substance abuse, physical and/or mental illness, and incarceration.³¹ Statistics indicate that a disproportionate number of children placed in the foster care system tend to be from poor, minority families.³²

Foster care is meant to be a temporary solution; the ultimate goal of the foster care system is to see that biological parents and their children are able to rectify the problems that created the need for foster care placement in the first place and reunite the natural family unit. Thus, the typical foster care plan includes parental visitation rights and encourages parents to seek out needed services such as parenting classes, drug and alcohol dependency classes, and anger management classes so they can be reunited with their children.³³ When it comes time to decide the permanent placement of the child, the court will decide whether the child is to be reunified with his or her biological family or, alternatively, whether it is appropriate to terminate

²⁹ JOHN T. PARDECK & JEAN A. PARDECK, CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION: A GUIDE TO BIBLIOTHERAPY 49 (Greenwood Press 1998).

³⁰ Child Welfare Information Gateway – Family Foster Care, http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/types/fam_foster.cfm (last visited April 19, 2009).

³¹ Foster Care, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/foster_care (last visited April 19, 2009).

³² *Id.* (stating that, nationwide, African American children make up two-thirds of foster care youth and tend to remain in foster care for longer periods of time); *see also* PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 50.

³³ Foster Care, *supra* note 31.

parental rights.³⁴ If parental rights are terminated, the court will select another permanent plan, usually adoption or legal guardianship.³⁵

Being removed from the home and placed in the foster care system is a significantly traumatic experience for most children.³⁶ Children in the foster care system commonly feel a significant sense of loss and will yearn to be reunited with their biological parents. Long-term foster care may pose additional problems; children in these situations often do not feel a sense of permanency that is critical to their maturation as human beings.³⁷ It is estimated that about thirty percent of children in the foster care system nationwide have severe emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems.³⁸ Moreover, the vast majority of children in the foster care system – approximately eighty-five percent – have been abused or neglected during their lifetimes.³⁹

Children going through the foster care system typically experience a series of emotions that evolve over time. This series of emotional reactions closely mirrors common human reactions to other traumatic and sudden life changes. The initial reaction is one of shock; the child has no idea why she has been taken away from her biological parents and is unfamiliar with her new surroundings.⁴⁰ During this stage, children will react in a range of different ways. Some children actually have a “honeymoon period” and behave very well during the first few days of placement, while others will suffer from lack of sleep, nightmares, and loss of appetite.⁴¹

³⁴ Caregivers and the Courts – A Primer on Juvenile Dependency Proceedings for California Foster Parents and Relative Caregivers 4, <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp/family/juv/documents/caregiver.pdf> (last visited April 19, 2009).

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 49.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Foster Care, *supra* note 31.

³⁹ PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 51.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

During the second stage, many children go through a period of protest, where they will express anger and resentment.⁴² The child will commonly direct her anger toward the foster parents, intentionally misbehaving with the hopes of changing her situation.⁴³ Sometimes the child will direct the anger at herself, blaming herself and feeling guilty about causing the situation in which she finds herself.⁴⁴ Commonly, foster children have a strong desire to be reunited with their biological family, even in cases where they were significantly abused or neglected. This feeling, too, can be expressed by way of hostility or ambivalence toward the foster parent.⁴⁵ Foster children often will have attachment issues because they feel that their biological parents “don’t want them,” and thus they may find it difficult or frightening to get to close to the foster parent for fear of being rejected again.

Third, foster children typically go through a period of despair, meaning that their original feelings of hostility may transform into a feeling of “giving up.”⁴⁶ During this stage, children may act younger than their age and mope.⁴⁷ Fourth, and finally, the foster child goes through the adjustment stage, meaning that she may begin to feel better about her situation, although she will typically still feel a deep and permanent sense of loss over being removed from her biological family.⁴⁸

The feeling of loss is a ubiquitous and extremely predictable experience for children in the foster care system.⁴⁹ Obviously, separation and loss are a part of the human experience. It is critical for children to learn to cope with these feelings as a normal part of growing up and maturing. Young children, although typically very attached to their parents, need to learn to

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ See Foster Care, *supra* note 31.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 52.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ See *id.* at 54.

separate at a young age to, for example, go to the babysitter or to school. These types of everyday experiences are, for most children, relatively uneventful and painless. Foster children, however, experience separation and loss that are not part of the typical life cycle of a young child, akin to the feeling of losing a parent.⁵⁰ This experience entails considerable psychological pain and can create problems that carry on into adulthood.⁵¹ Furthermore, “[s]eparation and loss cause disruption in the continuity of relationships that children have with significant adults, particularly parents.”⁵² Consequently, significant separation and loss during a child’s formative years often means the child will suffer significant stress and anxiety and will have trouble forming normal, healthy relationships in the future.⁵³

V. Bibliotherapy: How it Works and Why it Should be Used with Foster Children

Used effectively, bibliotherapy can be an extremely effective way to help foster children understand and cope with their significant feelings of loss and separation. Bibliotherapy serves many functions, including the following: to provide information, to provide insight, to stimulate discussion, to communicate new values and attitudes, to create awareness that others have similar problems, to provide solutions to problems, and to provide realistic solutions to problems.⁵⁴ Most importantly in the foster care context, it is important for foster children to know they are not alone and to be able to relate to others in similar situations. Different labels have been used to describe the processes of bibliotherapy, but the procedure can be broken down into four steps: (1) identification, (2) catharsis, (3) insight, and (4) universalization.⁵⁵ Before

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.* at 56-57.

⁵² PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 57.

⁵³ *Id.* (citing A. FREUD, J. GOLDSTEIN & A.J. SOLNIT, BEYOND THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD (New York: The Free Press 1973).

⁵⁴ JOHN T. PARDECK, USING BOOKS IN CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE 5 (Haworth Press 1998).

⁵⁵ See American Counseling Association – Competent Bibliotherapy: Preparing Counselors Who Use Literature to be Culturally Responsive, www.library.unlv.edu/faculty/research/bibliotherapy/documents/ACA_2006.ppt (last visited April 20, 2009).

working through these steps, however, it is critical to take several other factors into account: (1) the bibliotherapist must choose the appropriate book that meets the child's specific needs, (2) the bibliotherapist must consider the appropriate time to start the bibliotherapeutic process, considering the child's specific needs and circumstances, (3) the bibliotherapist herself must be appropriately suited to facilitate the bibliotherapeutic process, and (4) the bibliotherapist should carefully consider a plan that meets the specific child's needs in order to maximize the value of the bibliotherapeutic process.

In choosing an appropriate book, the facilitator must always keep in mind that the child must be able to see the similarities between herself and the characters in the book.⁵⁶ For younger children, the characters' roles and the problems presented in the book should be readily apparent; use of simple metaphors and elements of fantasy are appropriate, however. The facilitator must also consider the child's specific problems and whether the book in question presents realistic, attainable solutions for the child.⁵⁷ Various cognitive factors should also be considered, such as the child's age and intellectual ability, the child's interest in reading, and whether the child has any developmental disabilities that might affect the bibliotherapeutic process.⁵⁸ If the child demonstrates a low interest level in reading or is unable to read, for example, then the bibliotherapist should consider reading the book aloud to the child or utilizing an audio-book.⁵⁹ These activities can be performed in conjunction with presentation of pictures and other visual aids so the child can benefit from a fully therapeutic experience.

⁵⁶ PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 14.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 34.

⁵⁸ *See id.*

⁵⁹ *Id.*

In addition to choosing the appropriate book, another important factor to take into consideration before beginning the bibliotherapeutic process is timing.⁶⁰ Often, a child faced with a traumatic experience will not be emotionally ready to deal with the problem immediately.⁶¹ Thus, in foster care situations, it is usually not preferable to begin the bibliotherapeutic process right away as the child may not understand or be ready to handle the range of emotions with which she is dealing. Furthermore, waiting to see how the child reacts to foster care in order to tailor a bibliotherapy plan is preferable; each child's situation is unique and each child will deal with and externalize her problems differently. If a book is presented to a child at an inappropriate time, the child's problems may be exacerbated or the child may become defensive.⁶² Consequently, "[t]he child may respond to the book in such a way that he or she misses the point of the book and the positive strategies it offers."⁶³

The bibliotherapist, whether he or she is a mental health professional, social worker, foster parent, or other responsible adult, should demonstrate qualities of empathy, respect, and genuineness.⁶⁴ Empathy is defined as "the capacity to understand intellectually or imaginatively another's feelings or thoughts without actually experiencing them oneself."⁶⁵ Obviously, it is critical that the bibliotherapist be able to understand the range of emotions the particular child is going through. There must be a certain level of connectedness and rapport between the bibliotherapist and the child in order for a truly trusting and therapeutic relationship to develop. This is especially important when conducting bibliotherapy with foster children; children in the foster care system may be inherently distrusting of adults and wary of revealing their thoughts

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 29.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 29-30.

⁶² PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 30.

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ ARLEEN MCCARTY HYNES & MARY HYNES-BARRY, BIBLIOTHERAPY – THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS: A HANDBOOK 118 (Westview Press 1986).

⁶⁵ *Id.*

and emotions. Thus, the bibliotherapist must also demonstrate qualities of respect, meaning the bibliotherapist “val[ues] both the feelings and the inherent worth and uniqueness of the [child],” and genuineness, meaning the bibliotherapist is “sincere and capable of being spontaneous and open.”⁶⁶ When the bibliotherapist demonstrates these qualities, the chances of the child’s success in the bibliotherapeutic program are maximized.

Finally, before embarking upon the bibliotherapeutic process, the bibliotherapist must craft a specific plan that takes into account the child’s needs and circumstances. When the bibliotherapist feels the child is ready to start the bibliotherapeutic process, he can initially take a “hands-on” or a “hands-off” approach.⁶⁷ This means, that, depending on the child, it may be better to affirmatively initiate the process by “prescribing” one or more books and guiding the child through the reading and discussion process, or it may be better to simply make the books available in the child’s foster home, giving the child the decision to read the book when she is ready.⁶⁸ It is important to consider timing in initiating the process because, as discussed above, the child will most likely derive maximum benefit from the process when she is emotionally ready to deal with her situation through the lens of bibliotherapy. In addition to considering how to initiate the process, the bibliotherapist should also consider how to most effectively discuss the book with the child. For young children, it may be best to pick a book that has appropriate illustrations, or to allow the child to draw her own pictures or to make puppets of the characters so she can reenact scenes from the book.⁶⁹ Older children may be able to engage in slightly more complicated activities, such as creative writing, where the child can create an alternate ending to

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 121, 123.

⁶⁷ See PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 30, 34.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ See *id.* at 35-36.

the story or compose a diary for a character in the book.⁷⁰ There are multitudes of creative ways to work with a good children's book and many activities, other than simply reading, that can help a child understand and cope with her situation through bibliotherapy.

With all the aforementioned considerations in mind, the facilitator is ready to begin the bibliotherapeutic process. In the first stage – the “identification stage” – the goal is to help the child identify with a character in the book.⁷¹ The character can be a child of similar age facing similar circumstances, or sometimes it may be more appropriate to present a story in which the characters are animals. The latter type of story can enable the child to recognize the similarities between her situation and the story through the use of metaphor. For younger children, the problems presented in the book should be rather obvious and it is usually a good idea to choose a book with many vivid pictures that will maintain the child's interest.⁷² During the identification stage, “it is critical . . . that the ‘something’ being recognized is the understanding of a person or an experience rather than of the piece of literature as such.”⁷³ Thus, although the child may not be able to articulate it at first, something inside the child should say, “I’ve felt like this” or “I know what it’s like to go through that.”⁷⁴ In other words,

Bibliotherapy is made possible by the “shock of recognition” the reader experiences when he beholds himself, or those close to him, in a story or some other piece of literature. When we read[,] . . . we perceive selectively in accordance with our needs, goals, defenses and values In its direct and concrete representation of experience which differs in degree from that of the reader, fiction . . . induce[s] the reader to re-live his own experience. Since he cannot remain neutral in the presence of human beings in action, he will express feelings of anger and contempt, sympathy and understanding.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 35.

⁷¹ *See* PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 14-15.

⁷² *See id.* at 16.

⁷³ HYNES & HYNES-BERRY, *supra* note 64, at 45.

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 13-14 (citing C. Shrodes, *The Dynamics of Reading: Implications for Bibliotherapy*, 18 ET CETERA: A REVIEW OF GENERAL SEMANTICS 22-23 (1961) (second alteration in original)).

In the foster care context, the child can see the story's protagonist go through the same range of emotions as she goes through in her own life, including shock, rebellion, despair, and finally hope and emotional reconciliation. The therapeutic effect will begin to take place as the child begins to see more and more of her own life between retold in the story. The child will not only hopefully see herself in the story, but will also recognize parallels between people in her life and the other characters in the story, including her foster parents, biological parents, social workers, and peers. Recognition of each parallel will make the story more realistic for the child and strengthen the bond between the child and the skilled bibliotherapist, who can help the child discuss the characters and the different components of the story.

After the child is able to identify with a character or situation in the book, next is the "catharsis stage." At this stage, the child should become emotionally involved in the story. Catharsis is defined as "the release of thoughts and feelings that have been suppressed; the surfacing of unconscious materials is accompanied by an emotional response and a release from tension."⁷⁶ Children, however – especially young children – are not able to experience catharsis in the traditional sense. But a child can "see solutions to problems without the burden of in-depth verbalization" and can "see how the character in the book resolves a confronting problem, thus recognizing possible solutions to his or her own problem."⁷⁷ At this point, the bibliotherapist should engage the child in discussion, as this will help the child explore the issues in greater deal and will help the child externalize her feelings.⁷⁸ For younger children, this may be the appropriate time to encourage the child to draw pictures, which will help her release her feelings in much the same way as older children would otherwise do verbally.

⁷⁶ HYNES AND HYNES-BERRY, *supra* note 64, at 46-47 (citing B. SIMON, MIND AND MADNESS IN ANCIENT GREECE: THE CLASSICAL ROOTS OF MODERN PSYCHIATRY (Cornell U. Press 1978).

⁷⁷ PARDECK & PARDECK, *supra* note 29, at 15.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at 30-31.

Next, after catharsis, is the “insight stage.” After recognizing and acknowledging her feelings, the child realizes that her situation is not hopeless, and that, although she may still feel apprehensive about her situation, a brighter future is on the horizon. At this point, the story acts as an “agent for examination,” the child is able to make “fresh connections among external stimuli and previously held attitudes and feelings[.]”⁷⁹ In addition, the child can uphold the protagonist of the story as a role model for how the child might handle problems in her own life.⁸⁰ The bibliotherapist should continue dialogue with the child, drawing out the child’s feelings about the story’s different characters and how the child relates her own situation to the story’s protagonist.

The final step in the bibliotherapeutic process is the “universalization stage.” This final stage logically follows from the insight stage; the child should realize that her problems are not hers alone and that others are facing similar circumstances and emotions. The child has experienced some sort of emotional relief, has had the opportunity to examine her own situation vis-à-vis the situation presented in the story, and can now evaluate her situation from a fresh perspective. Thus, “[t]hrough recognition, but also through affirmation of a uniquely personal meaning and understanding, the participants can come to terms with the implications of the feelings for themselves.”⁸¹ Obviously, young children, given their lack of life experience and emotional maturity, will be unable to acknowledge the same in-depth insight and understanding as an older person would; but children at any age can realize the fundamental benefits of bibliotherapy: a better life situation achieved by recognition and discussion of problems and emotions from a fresh perspective.

⁷⁹ HYNES & HYNES-BERRY, *supra* note 64, at 51.

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ *Id.* at 54.

Although it should not be used as the exclusive method to help foster children, bibliotherapy is a fun, relatively easy way to substantially benefit foster children of all ages. Good children's books can be used as a starting point for discussion between social workers or mental health professionals and foster parents, and between foster parents and children. In addition, bibliotherapy is a relatively non-threatening way for foster children to confront their problems and fears. Almost invariably, foster children will go through a period of shock after being separated from their biological family, followed by a period of anger and confusion, as they feel isolated from not only their family but also from their peers, many of whom may still live with their biological family. Bibliotherapy helps children feel less isolated and helps them understand that other children are facing similar situations.

Conversely, bibliotherapy can also benefit foster parents. Many foster parents may not fully comprehend the range of behaviors their foster children will exhibit or what they mean. Through working the bibliotherapeutic process with a child, a foster parent should be able to readily see the parallels between a story's character and the foster child. Thus, the foster parent can gain a new understanding of why the child is behaving in certain ways from the child's perspective.

Finally, bibliotherapy should be used with foster children – and all children – simply because children should be encouraged to read at every available opportunity. Bibliotherapy thus serves the dual purpose of helping a child with difficult life situations while also enhancing the child's reading facility. This can ultimately help the child perform better in school, which will in turn increase the child's self-esteem and confidence. Ultimately, then, the benefits of bibliotherapy are multi-fold. It is a powerful tool to help children, foster parents, social workers, and mental health specialists alike.

VI. What's in a Story?

Storytelling is the ancient art of conveying events in words, images, and sounds often by improvisation and imagination.⁸² A story, at its simplest, is the narrative telling of an event or experience that links events in a logical sequence. Human memory itself is story-based. Most people find it a lot easier to remember what other people have said if they tell it as a story and we learn from these stories, as others learn from the stories we tell.⁸³ While the techniques used within stories and storytelling may vary, most effective stories use similar basic elements: *setting* – where the story is happening; *character* – who the story is about; *plot* – what happens in the story; *backstory* – what happened before, to create and inform this situation; and *detail* – which specific things your audience should notice.

Effective stories introduce the setting at the beginning of the story to provide the audience with useful information about the characters and a glimpse of what conflict may occur in the future.⁸⁴ As settings change, a writer will provide the reader with information so as to inform them of the overall feeling of the place to aid the plot and action.⁸⁵ For example, “[i]f a living room is furnished with priceless antiques, your audience will draw certain conclusions about the people who live there.”⁸⁶ Settings often provide the reader with base elements such as location, time, season or weather. Authors frequently present the setting through the protagonist’s senses (sight, sound, touch, taste and smell) so as to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of

⁸² Cheryl Mosley “Storytelling Thru Songs...Sounds from Slavery to Freedom,” *allacademic.com* (accessed March 2, 2009) available at, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p208350_index.html.

⁸³ Kendall Haven, *Story Proof*, 69 Libraries Unlimited (2007).

⁸⁴ Laurie Rozakis, “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Creative Writing,” 141 Alpha Books (2004).

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ Kimberley Applecline, “Dynamic Settings,” *skotos.net* (accessed April 20, 2009), available at, <http://www.skotos.net/articles/DynamicSettings.html>.

the characters and how they view their settings if it may differ from a reader's typical observation.⁸⁷

In "A New Home for Finaloo," the setting is initially described as a "small yellow house." Providing too detailed of a setting may confuse children and could take away from the prose of the story. The simple setting aims to provide the reader with a comfortable feeling, perhaps setting the reader up for a surprise at the change of scenery and conflict Finaloo may face in future pages. The time period of the story is ambiguous as the story begins "Once Upon a Time.." as do many children's stories and fairy tales. The ambiguous time period of the story is intentional, making the story applicable to any time, any place and any season. As settings change, Finaloo provides his perspective as to how he feels about the different "view from the window," "the sounds of the neighborhood" and "the feel of the carpet." Finaloo also provides the reader with further perspective as Finaloo feels "cold and lonely" as he hides under Sally's bed. All five of Finaloo's senses are addressed at different times throughout the story making the settings come alive for the audience.

Effective stories also have believable characters that make the story happen, perform actions and make choices that push the plot forward. Characters should be interesting and identifiable as an audience will not care about what happens to a boring character with no personality.⁸⁸ The primary characteristics writers use to distinguish characters are names, appearances, props, mannerisms and actions.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Rozakis, *supra* note 84.

⁸⁸ Kendall Haven, "Write right!: creative writing using storytelling techniques," 15 Libraries Unlimited (1999).

⁸⁹ Kimberley Applecline, "Vivid Characters," *skotos.net* (accessed April 20, 2009), available at, <http://www.skotos.net/articles/VividCharacters.html>.

A successful character should have a unique name that distinguishes them from other characters in the story.⁹⁰ Character names that are too similar may confuse the reader, especially a child. A writer may diversify and spice-up their characters through appearance and dialogue. A character's appearance may provide the reader with important information about the character. For example, a character with dyed green hair and tattoos all over his body paints a vastly different picture than a ballerina wearing a tu-tu.⁹¹ Also, a character's dialogue or mannerisms can provide the reader with a better understanding of the character's age, culture or sentiments. For example, a character who continually cries or fumbles over his words may stick out in the mind of the reader over a character that possesses no unique mannerisms. Finally, a character's actions and choices throughout the story provide the reader with insight to the character's thoughts and emotions.⁹² A character's actions should not only be recognizable, but they must behave in ways the audience can understand and the motivation for such actions must be established by the writer.⁹³

In "A New Home for Finaloo," the main character is immediately distinguished through his unique name, Finaloo. Finaloo is described numerous times throughout the story in great detail as having a "white fuzzy face," a "silly hat," a "button nose" and "floppy ears." Finaloo's appearance clearly sets him apart from the rest of the characters in the story. His appearance is geared toward the delight of the child reader who may feel more of a connection to a character with a humorous appearance as opposed to a character with no distinguishing feature. The character's dialogue also sets Finaloo apart as he does not utter a word, but internalizes and informs the reader through his thoughts. Meanwhile, in stark contrast, other characters express

⁹⁰ Haven, *supra* note 88, at 20.

⁹¹ Kimberley Applecline, "The Elements of Good Storytelling," *skotos.net* (accessed April 20, 2009), available at <http://www.skotos.net/articles/GoodStorytelling.html>.

⁹² Margaret Lucke, "Schaum's Quick Guide to Writing Great Short Stories," 33 McGraw-Hill (1998).

⁹³ *Id.* at 33-34.

thoughts and emotion through verbalization; for example, Bobby cries, “Please don’t take Finaloo,” and Thomas screams with excitement, “Can I bring him home mommy?” Finaloo’s actions also distinguish Finaloo as he continually acts out in an attempt to be returned to Bobby, his original owner. Finaloo’s appearance, actions and emotions are further enhanced through illustrations which provide the reader with a greater understanding of Finaloo’s goals and desires. Lastly, the motivation behind Finaloo’s actions are described numerous times throughout the story, as Finaloo believes that misbehaving will cause him to be returned to Bobby.

No matter how dynamic the setting or characters, a story with a weak or slow-moving plot will not be successful. The plot of the story should develop as a result of the characters’ choices and actions and should include external events that shape those choices and actions.⁹⁴ Most plot-lines are broken down into five elements: 1) introduction, 2) rising action, 3) climax, 4) falling action and 5) resolution.⁹⁵

The introduction appears the beginning of the story and introduces the characters and setting, presents the situation in which the story begins and foreshadows the conflict that may occur.⁹⁶ The story should begin with an event, decision, or information that is crucial to the story as a whole and will immediately engage the audience. “A New Home for Finaloo” begins with a brief introduction to Finaloo and his owner, Bobby. The setting of the story is also briefly introduced as Bobby’s “small, yellow house.” Rather than focus on setting or character in the introduction, “Finaloo’s” introduction focuses on the relationship between Finaloo and Bobby. Establishing the relationship early in the story allows for surprise and suspense when Finaloo is

⁹⁴ Kimberley Applecline, “Plot Strategies,” *skotos.net* (accessed April 20, 2009), available at <http://www.skotos.net/articles/PlotStrategies.html>.

⁹⁵ Gustav Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas* (1863) (expanding Aristotle’s *Poetics* which breaks plot-lines down into three elements: a beginning, middle and end).

⁹⁶ <http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramatic> (accessed April 2009).

eventually removed from Bobby's care. Nonetheless, Finaloo's appearance and Bobby's house are described and even depicted in illustrations (depending on the version of the book), though they are not as crucial to the introduction as is the overall mood, existing conditions and the relationship between Finaloo and Bobby.

In a standard plot structure, the rising action follows the introduction. The conflict should be fully established during this part of the story.⁹⁷ The rising action consists of a series of events and crises in the story that lead up to the climax, providing progressive intensity and suspense for the reader. In "Finaloo," the rising action begins when Bobby has a birthday party and Bobby forgets to perform his ritual with Finaloo telling him that he is his "favorite puppet in the whole world..." and "putting him on a special spot on the pillow next to him." The story's intensity increases when Finaloo is taken away, placed in the second-hand store and subsequently adopted by Thomas. The conflicts in the story come clear once Finaloo is adopted by Thomas. Essentially, Finaloo is dealing with three separate conflicts: 1) Finaloo vs. Finaloo - as he struggles to accept Thomas's love and not betray Bobby, 2) Finaloo vs. Thomas - as he struggles to get away from Thomas and acts out in a way he thinks will help him accomplish his goals, and 3) Finaloo vs. foster care system - as he struggles to gain an understanding of why he was removed from Bobby and where he is being taken.

Following the rising action, an effective story should reach a turning point or climax where the protagonist and story moves toward its inevitable end. The climax may be an external action or internal choice the protagonist makes that pushes the story forward.⁹⁸ The climax is often a period of heightened suspense and serves to help bring the story to resolution. In "Finaloo," the climax occurs when Finaloo hides under Sally's bed and begins to miss Thomas. However, the

⁹⁷ Tracy Garder, "Teaching Plot Structure Through Short Stories," *readwritethink.org*, (accessed April 21, 2009) available at www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson401/PlotStructure.pps.

⁹⁸ *Id.*

story reaches its ultimate climax when Finaloo hears Thomas' voice, "There he is, under Sally's bed!" and feels Thomas' hand reach under the bed to grab him. It is at this moment, the audience gets a true sense of Finaloo's new outlook and the love he has for Thomas.

The climax of a story is followed by falling action and resolution. In the falling action, the main character reflects upon their journey and the events caused by the decision or crisis of the climax unfold.⁹⁹ The falling action is followed by the resolution where all the events are tied together and the main character either overcomes or succumbs to their conflict.¹⁰⁰ In "Finaloo," the falling action and resolution are tied closely together as both occur over the final two pages of the story. The falling action occurs as Finaloo realizes that he and Thomas are perfect playmates together, just as he and Bobby were perfect playmates at the introduction of the story. The similar rituals and refrains between Bobby, Thomas and Finaloo serve to show the audience that the love felt between Finaloo and Bobby is equivalent to the love felt between Finaloo and Thomas. Finaloo not only learns to properly receive love, but also realizes it is okay to give love with betraying his original owner Bobby. Finaloo's epiphany sets up a very simple resolution to the story, "And Finaloo was happy."

VII. What's in a Metaphor?

"A New Home for Finaloo" employs metaphors to represent different players in the foster care environment. The book uses simple metaphors to ensure that foster children/adopted children will understand the connection between themselves and Finaloo. The biological parent, the foster child, the foster care system and the foster parent were all represented by characters in the story. The following is a brief discussion regarding the metaphors in the book.

⁹⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰⁰ *Id.*

Bobby represents the biological parent. Bobby is sad and resistant to Finaloo's removal and cries as would a real biological parent. Through Bobby's emotional response, the reader should understand that Bobby is not simply choosing to give up Finaloo, but the choice is being forced upon him. Though Bobby is sad, the book contains the line "Bobby understood that new home was best for Finaloo" so as to make the child understand that a new home would be in their best interest despite the sadness of their biological parent. Though in the story Bobby receives new toys at his birthday party, it is important to tell a child that Finaloo is not being replaced by these new toys. Rather, the new toys should represent overwhelming responsibility and could be tied into a discussion of why children sometimes need to find a new home.

Finaloo represents the foster child/adopted child. Like many foster children who are removed from their home, Finaloo is scared, confused and saddened when he is removed from Bobby's home. Finaloo longs to be back in Bobby's care despite maltreatment, similar to foster children who wish to be returned to their biological parents. Also, he acts out in response to his new environment and pushes Thomas away despite Thomas' continual efforts to show Finaloo how much he loves him. Many foster children use this same tactic when they are placed in a foster home in the hopes that acting out will cause them to be returned to their biological parents.

Bobby's mother represents the social worker, taking Finaloo away due to Bobby's failure to live up to his responsibility. However, Bobby's mother is used to both represent the social worker and provide an explanation to the child reader for why a child may be removed from his or her biological parent. In the story, Bobby's mother explains that a child may have toys taken away "because [the toys] aren't get the care and attention they deserve," "[the child] may have too many toys to care for" or "sometimes [the child] is sick or not feeling well." This point in

the story may provide a good opportunity for the bibliotherapist to insert their own reason or explanation for why a child may be taken away from their biological parent.

The second-hand store represents a group home or the foster care system in general. The “old man” who works at the store provides some comfort to the foster child in that the system will find Finaloo (or the foster child) “a good home.” A minor drawback to the second-hand store metaphor is the speed and ease at which Finaloo is adopted by his new family. Often, it takes weeks, months and even years before a child finds a new foster home. An effective bibliotherapy book should deal with such issues, but not all books need to deal with every issue. “Finaloo” does not deal comprehensively with the trials of living in a group home, though that would make an interesting plot for a Finaloo sequel. Instead, “Finaloo” is geared towards children who have already been placed in a new home, which makes the group home experience a less crucial element of the book. Creative liberties were taken within the book’s second-hand store scene. The book uses a play on words with the “second-hand store” though it is doubtful a child let alone a parent would pick up on it. Essentially, the foster care system tries to find a “second hand” for Finaloo the puppet.

Finally, Thomas represents the foster parent. Thomas is excited to share his love with Finaloo, the new member of the family. He provides unconditional love to Finaloo regardless of the resistance Finaloo puts up. As foster children often test their foster parents with the expectation that a foster parent’s love and patience will run out, the book supplies the message that a foster parent’s love can be as strong as a biological parent’s love.

Though the metaphors in the book are simple, they still may require some explanation to a child reader. The hope is that the child will at least make a connection between himself or herself and Finaloo even if the child fails to pick up on other surrounding metaphors. To aid in

the child in connecting with Finaloo, the majority of the book is told through Finaloo's perspective so as to help a child feel and see what Finaloo feels and sees.

VIII. Different Versions of Finaloo for Different Settings

Four different versions of "A New Home for Finaloo" have been created for use in different settings. Because of the overwhelming number of Hispanic-Americans in the foster care system locally, we chose to have each version translated into Spanish so as to better serve the foster care population in Santa Clara County. The versions of Finaloo are as follows: 1) color storybook with Finaloo sock puppet, 2) coloring book, 3) draw-it-yourself coloring book, and 4) CD-Rom version with coloring book and draw-it-yourself formats.

The color storybook version appears as would most children's picture books in that it has vibrantly colored cartoon illustrations. Because the color storybook version lacks an activity that can help the child engage with the story, each colored storybook comes with a "sock puppet Finaloo." The puppet can be used for the child to act out the story, for the child to tell his own version of "Finaloo" or to give the child an opportunity to be a metaphorical foster parent. Further, the vivid illustrations also serve as a means to engage the child reader and allow them to engage with the story and characters.

The coloring book appears as would a typical children's coloring book. Each page has black and white picture outlines to be colored in by the child. Coloring is often used by child therapists as an activity to foster a child's development and reveal a child's sentiments. Thus, the coloring book version serves to engage the child with the story and the characters while also providing therapists insight into the child's psyche.

The draw-it-yourself version has text on each page with space set aside for the child to complete their own corresponding drawings and illustrations. As with coloring, drawing is also

employed by many therapists to help assess a child's mental state. Thus, the draw-it yourself version will yield many of the same benefits as would the coloring version. However, the draw-it-yourself version has a few additional benefits. Drawing pictures fosters creativity through image design and coloring and gives the child a chance to imagine the story and characters as they see fit. If a child draws his or her own pictures, the child may develop deeper emotional connections with the story.

The CD-Rom version includes the coloring book and draw-it-yourself formats in Microsoft Word format. The Microsoft Word format allows the user to insert new text or change parts of the story if the bibliotherapist or child sees fit. Also, the CD-Rom version provides the child and parent opportunities to edit the book and re-imagine the story. Our thought with the CD-Rom version is that parents can print and reprint whichever version of the book they desire so as to let the child enjoy and learn from the story over and over. It also allows the parent to mix and match the coloring book version and draw-it-yourself version into one book that uses both activities.

All version of the book incorporate activities to help the child engage with the story and connect with the characters. A parent or bibliotherapist may choose a version based on the child's likes or dislikes or on which version they feel will be the most effective for the child. Our aim is to distribute multiple versions of "Finaloo" to those places where children may benefit from reading Finaloo's story. The most obvious places to distribute "Finaloo" would be foster homes, group homes and adoption agencies. Next, we would distribute the book to local courts in which children frequent including family courts, dependency courts and delinquency courts. However, "Finaloo" need not be relegated solely to troubled youth. The story could just

as well thrive in libraries or schools. Ultimately, we would like our book to rest in the hands of parents who want to take the opportunity to read to and interact with their children.

We have numerous goals in writing and distributing “A New Home for Finaloo.” As mentioned above, bibliotherapy is one of the easiest, cost-effective and most efficient methods to help children confront the emotional problems they face. Reading “Finaloo” to a child is one step a foster parent or any parent can take to improve their child’s emotional maturity and well-being. No one knows their child better than a parent. Thus, we want to inspire parents to create their own bibliotherapy tools and to write their own behavior books so as to help their children overcome their battles. Though some believe that bibliotherapy should be left in the hands of therapists, we believe that all parents have the power and capability to affect their children through books and should be encouraged to do so. Further, through “Finaloo” we want to help children in the foster care system adjust to their new environments. When a foster child is lucky enough to be placed in a foster home, they often act out because they have never learned how to properly receive love. Through “Finaloo,” we want to help foster children learn to love and be loved in return. If nothing else, “Finaloo” provides children with a loveable character, truthful emotions and an entertaining story.