

Carol P. Woodcock. Choosing Morality: comparing children's book choices with adult-chosen children's books. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in I.L.S. degree. April, 2006. 85 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm

This study investigates the differences in the kind of morality in children's books chosen by adults as opposed to the kind of morality in children's books chosen by children. In previous literature, two distinct views of children's moral thinking emerge: that children and adults think quite differently about morality, and that children understand moral content in books in ways similar to adults. Using these ideas, I investigated 22 children's books, half chosen by adults and half by children, identifying and analyzing moral themes regarding respect and responsibility. The results of this study identify ways adults and children think similarly about morality in children's literature. These similarities and differences are important for caregivers working with children, who strive to understand more fully the impact books can have on children's moral identity and choices, assessing ways educators, parents, and librarians can best serve children's interests.

Headings:

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CHOOSING MORALITY  
comparing children's book choices with adult-chosen children's books

by  
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**Research Question:**

What are the differences in the kind of morality in children's books chosen by adults as opposed to the kind of morality in children's books chosen by children?

**Description of Problem:**

Questions about moral values pervade society, influencing everything from presidential elections to personal relationships. Society is both an active influencer of its members and a reflection of individual members' values and ideas. In other words, society is both a product and producer of human values. One product, and possible producer, of human values is children's literature. The moral values found in these books both reflect society at large and inform the moral values espoused by their young readers.

The kinds of books recommended or chosen by certain groups in society may reflect a given subgroup's moral norms. Each group's book choices may be influenced by moral content in books, among other things. Looking at book recommendations by children compared with those of adult professionals, one will immediately notice very little overlap in the titles listed. This difference implies that children and adults interact with literature differently. As subgroups of Western society, children and adults may have different moral norms that inform the way each group thinks about the moral content in books.

In comparing the moral content in children's book choices to those recommended to children by adults, this study strove to discover whether adults and children think

about morality in literature differently, or if they are alike in their understanding of moral content in literature. This study may indicate one important element in choices regarding children's literature, and why children and adults seem to be attracted to different kinds of books. I also worked to discover possible moral motivations children and adults have for choosing literature, particularly whether these moral motivations are similar.

### **Description of Prior Studies:**

Much research informs questions regarding morality and moral development. While defining "morality" is difficult, many have ideas about what "good character" or "virtue" implies. Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget, among others, have studied the development of morality in children, recognizing that moral values are learned over time. As a result, many educators and parents hope to influence children's moral development with literature, presuming that exposure to positive virtues in literature will influence children for good. On the other hand, Darcia Narvaez has done studies showing that children interpret the moral values in literature on their own terms, often missing the message adults hope to impart. This may influence the reasons children and adults choose different books for pleasure reading, as is shown by the disparity in books receiving Newbery Awards and various Children's Choice Awards over the last ten years. Research into morality, moral development, and the impact of literature on children affect caregivers' practice significantly.

Abdusalam Guseynov, in his article "On the Concept of Morality", used Immanuel Kant and David Hume to inform his description of morality. For Guseynov, "morality, which is the last quality control after all other motives have been assessed, marks as good (correct, obligatory) those motives which have passed the quality inspection" (95).

Morality interprets and directs one's behavior, saying which motives or actions are admissible and which are not. Guseynov wrote that "morality is an ideal reference point from which, and thanks to, the individual identifies himself as a person and responsible behavior becomes possible" (101). For Guseynov, morality is entirely an internal, mental process, where people evaluate behaviors, motives, and ideas outside of any specific social construct. This mental evaluation then informs how a person acts, how they think of others, and how they think of themselves. By dislodging morality from specific socially-situated actions, Guseynov provides an impetus for arguments that children's mental constructs of morality must be formed in a manner that ensures good behavior, choices, and motives. Educators and parents, given Guseynov's understanding of morality, feel obligated to influence the cognitive moral development of children to reflect their ideas of "good," which may inform their book choices for children.

In contrast, Willem Wardekker, in his article "Moral Education and the Construction of Meaning" presents an idea of morality as "a quality of actions within a social activity, and of their outcomes" (185). He believes that "morality... is not a separate subject or a separate field of human activity. As it rests in the valuation attached to the knowledge of objects, persons, situations, and practices, and those valuations are formed when learning about these, any reflection on the moral quality of actions has to be related to the original knowledge and its personal valuation" (189). Guseynov presents morality more as a separate mental activity, whereas Wardekker suggests that morality is more fluid, adjusted and lived out in every aspect of human life. Morals are not dislodged from specific situations, and in his belief, "need to be related to actual experience of learners" for moral growth to take place (189). For Wardekker, moral education is linked to real

life, incorporating meaning and application to learners. With this view, meaningful children's literature (stories that relate to children's lived experiences) can act as a powerful tool in helping children develop moral character, supporting the use of children's literature in school character education programs, for example.

Thomas Likona is one such supporter of teaching children values in schools, influencing their mental moral construct in order to help them become better members of society. In his book, *Educating for Character: how our schools can teach respect and responsibility*, Likona tackles the question of "what is good character?", in other words, what do adults want children to believe is "good". Likona believes schools need "a concept of character – and a commitment to developing it in their students" (49). For Likona, good character is composed of "moral knowing..., moral feeling..., and moral action" (52). Moral knowing involves using "intelligence to see when a situation requires moral judgment" (54), and informing oneself about moral issues, knowing "how to apply it in various situations" (55), looking at situations from others' perspectives, understanding why it is important to be moral, making moral decisions, and reviewing personal behavior (56). Moral feeling covers the "emotional side of character" (56), which involves having a conscience (knowing and feeling obligated to do what is right), valuing self and other people, having empathy, "being genuinely attracted to the good" (59), having self control, and being humble. Moral action involves "the ability to turn moral judgment and feeling into effective moral action" (61), as well as having the will and the habit of acting morally. Likona believes "good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good – habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action" (51). Similar to Wardekker, but unlike Guseynov, Likona describes

morality as involving more than an exercise in the mind, instead claiming morality is lived in mind, feelings, and behavior. Wardekker and Likona may provide insight into the motives adults may have in choosing children's literature for children – the hope of inspiring “good” morality in children.

Morality, for these three authors, is a vitally important part of social and personal life, informing people of good and bad behaviors, thoughts, and motives. According to their description, morality is the reason people do what they do, the root of good or bad decisions in a person. A lot is at stake in impacting another's moral values. In fact, a person's entire life (mental, emotional, and behavioral) could change as a result of an ability to influence a child's morality. This understanding of what morality is informs a possible motive, the hope of inspiring “good” moral values, adults may have when they recommend books to children.

In contrast, Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget imply that children think in morally different ways than adults do, in their studies of the developmental process of morality. Kohlberg, in his dissertation from the University of Chicago, “The Development of Modes of Moral Thinking and Choice in the years 10 to 16” (found in *Kohlberg's Original Study of Moral Development*), studied 84 boys aged ten, thirteen, and sixteen. He chose these children while controlling for class by choosing equal numbers of children in both upper and lower class America (78). He also included 12 delinquents, 9 of whom were interviewed in a detention home where they awaited trial, and 6 of whom came from broken homes (80-81) to control for various life choices. Most of the sample was either Catholic or Protestant, with two Jewish students. He also used IQ tests to control for intelligence. These children were interviewed, an assessment of

“independence of judgment, and...validation of developmental levels” using moral dilemma questions Kohlberg created (86). Kohlberg then had the students discuss in groups the questions asked in the interviews, telling them to come to an agreement about answers. The boys were then asked questions regarding occupational roles/goals and about the ideal self. Kohlberg’s results imply “an order of increasing internalization and an order of increased cognitive adequacy or “rationality” in the moral area” (363). In other words, Kohlberg believed children develop morally incrementally over time, stage by stage, meaning most adults will be morally different from children – having better internalized moral values and developed more cognitive and rational moral abilities.

Kohlberg used this study to develop a six stage theory of moral development, which is better described in his book *The Psychology of Moral Development: the nature and validity of moral stages*. Stage one, “heteronomous morality” (624), describes a person whose moral orientation is about obedience and avoidance of punishment. “Individualistic/instrumental morality” (626), Kohlberg’s stage two, is based on satisfying a person’s needs (and occasionally others’). In stage three, “interpersonally normative morality” (628), people are looking for others’ approval with their actions, trying to conform to social or familial norms. This differs from stage four, “social system morality” (631), in that people in this stage conform to societal norms out of a sense of duty to the overall social order. Stage five, “human rights and social welfare morality” (634), describes people who perceive duty in regards to violating others’ rights or the will/welfare of the majority. “Morality of universalizable, reversible, and prescriptive general ethic principles” (636), stage six, describes people who base their morality on universal, as well as social, rules/values, using a conscience to direct actions. Kohlberg

doesn't specify ages he believes people move from stage to stage, but he believes that people do move sequentially from stage to stage, over time at various rates. Kohlberg's stage theory informs research regarding children's and adults' book choices in that it implies a difference in the way most adults will think about morality in books and the way most children will think about morality in the same books. According to Kohlberg, they're in different moral stages.

Kohlberg's original study had some obvious limitations, however. He mostly studied Christian boys from the suburbs surrounding Chicago, neglecting girls and other world, religious or geographical (urban or suburban) cultures. Two studies have been done to support Kohlberg's theory as universal. Mordecai Nisan tried to copy Kohlberg's study in Turkey (a mostly Muslim country), which he wrote about in "Cultural Universality of Moral Judgment Stages: a longitudinal study in Turkey", which is published in Kohlberg's book *The Psychology of Moral Development*. He, too, chose only boys, proposing adapted versions of Kohlberg's dilemmas to twenty-four 10-17 year olds from a rural town, a seaport, and the capital city in 1964, then again to fifteen of these males in 1966, adding 10 village and 26 urban boys. He retested six of the village participants in 1970, and added 15 college students. Then, fourteen of the original participants were tested in 1976. This means some of the participants were interviewed up to four times while others were interviewed only once (584). Nisan not only claims his study found support for "universal structures in moral reasoning" (591), but also "presents a consistent picture of sequential advance in the stages of moral development up to stage four" (592). He does mention that there were differences "between Turkish and American responses, as well as between city and village. However, these differences

did not interfere with the identification of basic structures which framed the responses” (592). According to this study, Kohlberg’s theory can be universalized across cultural, religious, or geographic differences, the basic structure of his stages are evident despite variance in types of answers given.

Similarly, John Snarey and Joseph Reimer discussed universality of Kohlberg’s stages in “Cultural Universality of Moral Judgment Stages: a longitudinal study in Israel”, also published in Kohlberg’s book *The Psychology of Moral Development*. They specifically addressed not only possible cultural differences, taking note of the religious and geographic limitations of Kohlberg’s study, but also the gender limitation. Snarey and Reimer studied ninety-two Jewish adolescents (sixty-nine boys and twenty three girls), grades 7-10, in a kibbutz in Israel, using Kohlberg’s moral judgment interview as their instrument. Interviewers questioned thirty two subjects three times, thirty two twice, and twenty eight only once over years, to show developmental stages in individuals. The researchers found that “each subject reached his or her highest stages at the last interview time by going through each of the preceding intermediate stages between the first and last interview stage scores” (602). They also noted that “there were no significant sex differences in moral judgment between male and female subjects” (614). Both these statements support Kohlberg’s claim that his stages are universal and sequential, again supporting the idea that most adults interact with the world using a different moral perspective than do children.

Jean Piaget’s studies agree with those done by and based on Kohlberg’s theories in many ways. Piaget, in his book *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, writes about a study of children playing marbles. Piaget defines morality as “a system of rules, and the

essence of all morality is to be sought for in the respect which the individual acquires for these rules” (13). He points out that while children learn most moral rules from adults, in the game of marbles (and other games where children are sole agents), one can get a glimpse of children’s unique perspective of morality. He, too, presents a staged development of morality, based on his conversations with children ranging from toddlers (around 2 years of age) to 12 years old, regarding their games of marbles. His first stage describes children who act for themselves, who “cannot call forth that submission to something superior to the self” (35). In stage two, children between the ages of two and five begin to conform to the examples outside themselves, but are not interacting with others much. Children aged 7-8 begin to display features of stage three, where their focus has turned to social conformity/cooperation in developing rules. By 11 or 12, children begin codifying these rules and ensuring conformity to them. Piaget’s study again supports the idea that children think in morally different ways than adults do, despite the differences in the types of stages children go through. In fact, Piaget’s theory suggests an even stronger difference by proposing age levels by which children have developed more advanced moral thinking. He also mentions that children’s morality is influenced by the adults around them, adding weight to the arguments presented by educators and parents who use literature to improve the morality of children.

Gertrude Nunner-Winkler, in her article “Children’s Understanding of Moral Emotions”, posits more firmly that children think differently regarding morality than adults. Winkler studied sixty 4-8 year olds (27 boys and 33 girls), giving them two stories where characters “committed an identical act of stealing”, only differing in their emotional reactions (joy or sadness) (1325). She divided these students into three age

groups to ask them “How does the [protagonist] feel now?” (1326), while she read a story and showed children pictures relating to the story. She found that “even children of the youngest age group understood that the protagonist was forbidden to steal and could give adequate reasons for this rule” (1327). However, Winkler noted a “clear change between the ages of four and eight years from outcome-oriented toward morally oriented attributions of emotions to a moral wrongdoer” (1335). These results imply that while children may be able to verbalize the wrongness of something, their moral motives or emotional response to wrongdoing changes as they grow. Young children believe that anyone whose intentions were met will be happy, even if their actions were wrong, while older children evaluate and attribute emotions to wrongdoers based on complex moral judgments, allowing for more complex emotional responses. Winkler’s study suggests that children’s cognitive and emotional development influences their ability to analyze moral situations, even those presented in stories, which could impact the kinds of books children choose for themselves, as well as their ability to understand moral content in books the same way adults do.

Piaget, Kohlberg, and Winkler’s studies on children’s development are vitally important studies for suggesting possible differences in the way children think about morals and the way adults understand morality. Thinking of morality as something which develops in individuals over time suggests a possible divergence in the kinds of morality in books children choose for themselves and those adults choose for them. Children, because they may most likely be at a lower developmental stage than the adults in their lives, might be attracted to literature which discusses morality differently than children’s literature chosen by adults.

However, many adults do choose books for children, exposing children to books in the hopes of influencing their moral development. Darlene L. Witte-Townsend and Emily DiGiulio, in their article “Something from Nothing: exploring dimensions of children’s knowing through the repeated reading of favorite books” discuss the possible impact of reading on children’s lives. Townsend and DiGiulio contend that “children’s books seem to be especially able to provide pathways for thought that are flexible and responsive to the multiple and concurrent human issues that continually create and recreate, flow, form, and re-form the inner and outer frames of our being, every day of our lives” (130). As they studied the possible impacts of the book *Something from Nothing*, they note that “both known and unknown realms are explored by children and all others who search for ways of describing emerging awareness, an order that is sensed but not quite seen” (131). In other words, reading may be a uniquely powerful way children explore and form who they are in relation to the world, developing their moral constructs and attitudes through encountering ideas in fictional literature. In other words, Townsend and DiGiulio contend that books change people, shape who they are as “social, practical, moral, ethical and philosophical dimension are explored, including those which are explicitly stated as well as those which are implied” (133). Reading books with moral content, according to Townsend and DiGiulio, can have a profound effect on the personalities and moral sensibilities of children. These researchers believe adults exposing children to literature with specific moral content can powerfully impact children’s lives. This may be a motive adults have if they are choosing literature based on their own moral sensibilities for children to read.

With this theoretical framework regarding the impact of books on children, educators create character education programs in schools that use children's literature as a vehicle through which morals can be discussed and learned. Lindsay Clare and Ronald Gallimore, performed a case study "Using Moral Dilemmas in Children's Literature as a Vehicle for Moral Education and Teaching Reading Comprehension", in a classroom of fourth grade students making the transition from Spanish-reading to instruction in English. In the style of character education used in this classroom, discussion is a major player in helping children access the moral ideas in the books children read. The goal of these lessons was "to create joint explorations of the meanings of stories and through these to assist students in practicing and developing higher order comprehension functions" (326). Lessons were taped over the course of the school year, transcribed, and conversations were analyzed based on Kohlberg's theories. When the class read *Charlotte's Web*, for example, the teacher "advocated for the students to consider [Kohlberg's] Stage 3 perspective of the individual's commitment to significant others" (329). Basically, the teacher used literature to encourage students to move from their current moral stage to the next one, asking questions to encourage them to higher level moral thinking. As a result, "students in the ... group that engaged with the moral issues posed by Mrs. Fiske were more than four times as likely to mention more subtle or problematic aspects of friendships in essays written after the lesson than were those students who did not" (333) after discussing friendship in a class read. Through discussion of a book, Mrs. Fiske was able to bring students to a higher moral stage. This study suggests that with literature providing the content of "proposed moral lessons" (334), teachers are able to influence the moral development of their students.

Bonnie Rives, Tamara Smith, and Gail Staples, in their study “Improving Student Social Skills through the Use of Children’s Literature”, discuss the idea that children’s moral lives, not just their moral thinking, may be influenced through reading children’s books. They suggest that “children’s literature provides a positive resource for instruction of social skills that incorporates academic skills as well (10). Selecting 59 students from 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Rives, Smith, and Staples surveyed the students at the beginning of the study to assess their awareness of societal mores regarding respect, empathy, self control, responsibility, and resolving conflict (13). Students then participated in 14 weeks of bi-weekly 30 minute lessons based on children’s books covering these areas. They were given the same survey at the end of the 14 weeks and researchers observed student behaviors and analyzed individual student reflections. Thirty teachers were also surveyed about social skills instruction and the extent of behavior problems in classrooms (11). While students may have been influenced by the prior survey, the results of this study suggest that children’s moral behavior is positively influenced by children’s literature. Rives, Smith, and Staples concluded that a “positive transfer to interpersonal behavior in daily situations” (28) had taken place because of the use of literature as a “meaningful and enjoyable way to learn new skills” (29). In other words, this study implies that children’s moral behavior changes as a result of reading books chosen as moral examples by their teachers, again suggesting that adults may choose books for children in order to socialize children toward more adult moral thinking.

Darcia Narvaez disagrees with Clare, Gallimore, Rives, Smith, and Staples, having done two studies to insinuate that children are not impacted in the way adults think they are by the books they read. In her article “Does Reading Moral Stories Build

Character”, Narvaez challenges the idea that: “reading is passive, that every reader gets the same information from a text, that readers get the information the author intends, that themes are readily accessible to the reader, [and] that moral messages are just another type of information conveyed in a text” (157). Instead, she posits that “readers are not passive assimilators of textual content, ...instead it is likely that the children will actively construct story meaning based on prior knowledge” (159). She claims that “moral schemas provide guidance in interpreting social experience. It is reasonable to expect that these [moral] schemas affect information processing in other contexts, such as when reading moral texts” (160). In other words, Narvaez believes that reader moral development impacts their ability to interpret moral content in stories. She suggests that children understand moral themes based on their own moral context, based on their individual experiences, and that often, these do not match adults interpretations. Narvaez even intimates that “adults are more expert at many tasks than children. A common characteristic among experts is the inability to remember what it was like to be a novice” (167-168). In other words, Narvaez questions the ability of adults to fully understand the way children analyze moral content in books, and therefore choose books that best relate to children’s moral thinking.

Narvaez’ studies support the ideas she presented in this article. In her study, “Moral Theme Comprehension in Children”, she asks the question, “do readers understand a moral text in the manner intended by the author?”, comparing 132 third and fifth graders with 28 adults’ interpretations of moral themes in children’s stories (479), whom she used in order to represent the themes authors may have intended readers to encounter. Four stories were written, two about helping strangers and two about helping

family or friends. Stories were read and heard by students, who then completed tests that assessed reading comprehension and selection of a vignette that matched the message in the original story. They also selected two messages they thought the story was most about (481). In the results of this study, Narvaez contends that “reading moral stories does not guarantee that they [children] will understand the moral message or theme as intended by the author”, or that “a curriculum that works with one age may not work for another” (483). She advises adults to be “aware of children’s differential interpretations of stories that seem perfectly clear to adults” (483). Much like Kohlberg’s and Piaget’s, Narvaez’ study suggests that children’s moral development stage influences their interpretation of moral themes in books they read.

She developed this idea further in her study “The Influence of Moral Schemas on the Reconstruction of Moral Narratives in Eighth Graders and College Students”, where she studied 80 private school and 81 public school eighth graders and 62 undergraduates in introductory psychology courses (16). Students read four moral dilemmas and answered questions about the events in the story and the protagonists considerations in making their decisions. These students were given a DIT test, which is a written measure of moral judgment based on six moral dilemmas to assess their moral developmental stage (17). Narvaez noted that students in college better answered questions based more on Stage 5 of Kohlberg’s moral development theory, while the eighth grade students tended to be more comfortable with Stage 4 and below (20). With this study, Narvaez suggests that “just as teachers attempt to match the reading level of a text with the student’s level of reading skill, moral and social education programs should attempt to match the moral reasoning level of a text with the student’s level of moral reasoning”

(21). She intimates here that moral content in stories will have little effect on children's moral growth, but instead will be interpreted by children according to their current level of moral development.

Narvaez' writings call into question educators who believe they can morally educate children using children's literature. She questions children's abilities to interpret and understand these texts in the same way as adults or authors intend them to. She believes the differences in children's moral reasoning shapes the messages they will see in texts, and that children's moral reasoning about texts is influenced by their moral development stage. This argument has serious implications for possible differences in moral content in children's books they choose for themselves and those adults choose for them.

Guseynov, Likona, and Wardekker point to the importance of morality to shape thinking, motives, and actions. Because, according to these theorists, morality informs people of how to behave in society and helps them discern right from wrong, discussions about teaching morality can be very heated. Because many believe that morals shape every aspect of human life, adults are highly concerned with how to impart moral constructs to children. How to best do this is often discussed in terms of book banning or character education using children's literature. In general, these theories and research studies impact the kinds of choices adults make regarding any kind of media they allow children to be exposed to, since they suggest more than just pleasure reading is at stake.

Understanding that children's morality develops sequentially, based on the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg, had important implications for this study. The idea that people are changing morally as they grow implies that adults think about morality

differently than children do, as Winkler, Narvaez and their studies also suggest. Children will actually interpret moral themes in literature differently based on their moral stage growth, according to these researchers. This research calls into question the ideas postulated in Townsend and DiGiulio's article, as well as the studies done by Clare and Gallimore and Rives, Smith, and Staples, who believe that moral literature can and should be used to teach students morality, that children can be guided through reading literature to understand moral ideas above their developmental level. Adults disagree on whether moral values presented in literature can be interpreted and appreciated by children and adults in a similar manner. In fact, these different opinions as to whether children and adults would choose to recommend similar books propose a question: What are the differences in the kind of morality in children's books chosen by adults as opposed to the kind of morality in children's books chosen by children?

At the heart of this issue is whether children and adults think alike morally. Examining the morality in children's book choices and that in children's books chosen by adults helps answer questions of if and how children and adults differ in moral understanding. This study provides evidence to support the idea that children and adults will evaluate moral content in literature similarly, as Clare, Gallimore, Rives, Smith, and Staples propose. This question, and the results of this study, can inform adults' interactions with and choices on behalf of children.

### **Method**

Qualitative research was well suited to this research study, because the moral content in children's books is often implied. This method allowed me to access the latent content (the moral values implied or discussed) in these books, because moral content is

interpreted by understanding what a given book is promoting. In my study, I compared the treatment of various moral characteristics in books, interpreting each instance based on its portrayal in the book. Using this analysis method, I looked for major themes regarding the morality promoted in books recommended by children, and then did the same for books recommended by adults.

Three main issues will be the focus of this research: age, morality, and children's books. Above, I mentioned that children's books for this study are represented by those given The Newberry or Young Readers / NC Children's Book Awards, chosen by or for children aged 9-12 years. These books, a list of which is in the appendix of this proposal, will represent books written with children in mind, or those marketed to children in Western society.

Adults, or people who are older than 18 years of age, are represented by professionals serving children in some capacity in the United States. "Children", or those people under the age of 18, are represented by those who were allowed to vote for the awards, or any children living in North Carolina, Alaska, Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington aged 9-18 years. My focus is on children aged 9 and up because these children generally read chapter books, which are the focus of my content analysis.

Defining moral content in a book is a bit more problematic. According to *The Merriam Webster Dictionary*, "moral" is defined as "of or relating to principles of right or wrong" (481). For a more operational definition, Thomas Likona, in his book *Educating for Character*, discusses specific moral values he believes every school should teach. I am using his moral characteristics to operationally define "morality". He

mentions: respect, which he says encompasses “honesty, fairness, [and] tolerance” and responsibility, which involves “prudence, self discipline, helpfulness, compassion, cooperation, [and] courage” (45). Using his description of these two terms, I will define “respect” as having high regard for others, which will be evidenced by honesty with others, fairness in treatment of others, and tolerance for others’ differences.

“Responsibility” will be defined as using one’s resources sensibly, being able to control one’s own behavior, willingness to help others, caring about other’s feelings, being willing to cooperate with others, and being strong in convictions and facing fears. I will be looking for moral content, defined as moral characteristics, events, or actions promoting or questioning respect and responsibility as described by Likona.

### **Measurement**

As I read these books, I noted page numbers, direct quotes, and positive or negative description of each moral characteristic, event, or action mentioned in these books. I then analyzed my notes, looking for overarching moral themes, based on Likona’s description of respect and responsibility. In order to assess whether each characteristic, event, or action is presented positively or negatively in a book, I noted consequences and character’s reactions. I also paid attention to whether incidents were part of the plot problem or its resolution. After looking for overarching themes, I compared the moral messages in the adult-chosen books against those in the children-chosen books.

### **Sample**

My sample consisted of 22 children’s chapter books, which are listed in the appendix. A purposive/judgmental sampling technique was used in creating the list in order to reflect both children’s and adult’s choices of “best/distinguished” chapter books for

children. Books on these lists were either chosen by, or for children aged 9-12 years. The eleven books representing adult choices were chosen by adults serving on Newbery committees between 1995-2005. The Newbery Award committee of the Association for Library Service to Children chooses one “distinguished” children’s chapter book every year as its winner.

The child-chosen books were chosen by children as either Young Reader Choice Award winners or North Carolina Children’s Book Award winners between 1995-2005. Some books from the children’s lists were not included in this study because they were not chapter books (as all Newbery winners are), and preference was given to more recent books as the study list was compiled. Two of the books, *The Boys Start the War* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor and *Frindle* by Andrew Clements, were on both children’s choice lists, while *Holes* by Louis Sachar and *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis were on both the Newbery and Young Reader Choice Award lists.

The North Carolina Children’s Book Award, which began in 1992, begins each year with children’s suggestions, which is narrowed by a North Carolina Library Association committee. This list is then distributed to school and public libraries where children can read and vote for their favorite books. The Young Reader’s Choice Award works much the same way, but children, teachers, parents, and librarians from the Pacific Northwest United States send nominations to be narrowed down by a committee, who then distributes a ballot to children in the region. I chose these lists because they make a concerted effort to represent children’s choices of their favorite books. It is unfortunate that, in both cases, adults winnow nominees, and particularly unfortunate that the Young Reader’s Choice allows adults to nominate books. However, children are the end voters

for each list, so the end sample represents children's, rather than adults', book choices. I chose these two lists because they come closest to reflecting actual children's choices and represent children from both coasts in the United States. This means the sample is a bit more representative of children across the United States' choices.

Rather than choose books chosen specifically for their moral content, I chose to study books that represented characteristics both adults and children were naturally attracted to. Children's and adults' choices regarding these books focused on the quality and attractiveness of the story, which included the underlying moral themes, but did not highlight them. Because the focus in these choices is not morality, these books represent the kind of morality that is naturally attractive to children and adults, an important element when trying to assess possible moral similarities and differences in adult and children's book choices.

### **Description of Study:**

I read books one at a time over two months, starting January 3, 2006. As I read, I took extensive notes on every moral characteristic, event, and action in each book, making notes of page numbers, quotes, and the book's portrayal of each moral characteristic. Starting February 28, 2006, I began coding the information, indicating whether each instance was an example of respect or responsibility, and counting numbers of each instance to determine major themes. I then separated this information into two categories, those that pertained to children-chosen books and those pertaining to adult-chosen books.

### **Ethical Issues:**

Because this study consisted of content analysis of books, which are public property, ethical issues in conducting the research process are sparse. In order to prevent my

personal biases from misrepresenting the intent of authors, Newbery Committee members, and child voters, I was very careful to limit my analysis of information based on the perspective given in each book, rather than judging moral characteristics, events, or actions based on my own personal moral values. In writing about the study, I have been careful not to describe the moral perspectives in these books as those of the authors, Newbery Committee members, or child voters because any given member or voter may not espouse the moral values presented in these books. This was particularly important for Newbery Award Books, where it would be possible to access individual committee member's names. So, by being careful to represent the moral characteristics, actions, and events as the perspective of these books rather than any individual, I avoided misrepresenting the perspectives of any individual author, committee member, or voter. Because I looked for common moral themes in these books, many of which were implied, it would have been unethical for me to propose that any given committee member or voter ascribed to these moral values.

#### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Study Method:**

Validity can be a problem with content analysis, especially given the purposive sampling I've done. The results of this study would be hard to universalize, given the limited sample of books, representing two relatively small regions in the United States. What I found may not be the same in other cultures, or with other, or more, books chosen from other award lists. This study can only claim to be one picture, a suggestion, of differences or similarities in children's and adults' book choices.

Also, the children's choice sample, including both the Young Reader's Choice Award and the North Carolina Children's Book Award, allow adult involvement, which

also posed a problem for this study. While these awards do limit adult influence, the fact that adults were involved may have influenced the kinds of books awarded each year. This, too, may influence the validity of the research, because these lists may not accurately reflect children's book choices.

My personal biases regarding moral values may also have impacted the validity of the study, as well as the reliability. I was careful to analyze book perspectives objectively, focusing on the way each book presents moral characteristics, events, and actions rather than subjectively judging them based on my own moral values. Had I failed to do this, the validity of the study could be questioned, as someone else doing the same study may find completely different perspectives regarding the moral values in the same books. Also, this study would not be repeatable if I were to analyze these books using my own moral values.

### **Results and Analysis**

Children and adults seem to be attracted to a similar kind of morality, regarding both issues of respect and of responsibility. Both children and adult chosen books present similar images of caring and concern for others, family loyalty, issues of honesty, tolerance, stealing, perseverance, and manners. However, adult chosen children's books often deal with these issues on a more complex level, and have more instances of moral certain characteristics, events, and actions than children chosen books. The results of this study show that children and adults, while thinking about morality differently, may be concerned with the same moral issues.

## Respect

Respect, characterized in these books through representations of honesty, intolerance and cruelty, authority, and stealing, is marked by a high regard for others. Characters in both children and adult chosen children's books work out issues of respect, presenting an interesting, yet rarely conflicting image of what it means to treat others with respect.

## Honesty

When it comes to issues of honesty, however, both adult chosen and children chosen books present a similar picture. Overall, children's books value honesty. In *Shiloh Season* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, a child chosen book, for example, Marty Preston struggles to regain his father's trust after lying about secretly keeping Judd's dog. When his father says, "But how do I know you're telling the truth? Because you say so?" (54-55), Marty realizes that to restore his relationship with his father, he has to earn his father's trust back with obedience and honesty. Marty finally comes completely clean with his father (104), and his relationship with his father is restored. Clearly, the message in this book is that honesty is vital to relationships.

Similarly, *The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funke, another children's choice book, shows the value remaining honest in relationships. Upon learning that their friend Scipio was "the only one who lied" (160), Hornet, Prosper, Bo, Mosca, and Riccio tell him "we are finished, you lying toad. You don't belong with us anymore" (181). Later, Prosper is sad about the group not including Scipio anymore, especially when he sees Scipio's "pale face, his look of misery, and the tight lips – probably holding back tears" (213).

According to this book, honesty is vital to friendship, leading to acceptance and trust in a group. Again, honesty here is represented positively.

In *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* by Louis Sachar, the idea of honesty as a good quality is reinforced as well. Mr. Kidswatter, the school principal, lies to the students over the PA system, saying that “it was wonderful to see all your bright and chipper faces this morning. I missed every single one of you”, reminding students that they were his friends (9-10). Later, he mistakenly leaves the PA system on and says, “like I would really want to be friends with those little snot nose..” (10), before he realizes it. Mr. Kidswatter is ignored by the children throughout the book, having been portrayed so negatively at the start. In these children’s books, honesty and the ability to trust people is important. These books promote honesty as essential to good relationships, whether with principals, parents, or friends.

While honesty is represented positively in these children’s choice books, adult books present a more complex picture of honesty, portraying instances where lying and deception are necessary, or at least tolerable, attributes. In *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, recommended by both adults and children, one of Bud’s “Rules and Things” is “if you got to tell a lie, make sure it’s simple and easy to remember” (11). Bud is admiring his foster brother’s abilities to lie, and has created this rule, recognizing that he’s not bragging when he says he’s “one of the best liars in the world” (11). Bud has to lie to get by with the adults in his world. He knows that sometimes adults’ ears are “not set to believe anything [he] said. And if [he] didn’t lie good enough [they] was going to use that strap on [him]” (17). Basically, for Bud, lying is a survival strategy, and in this case, something good to be able to do. Later, he proves lying really can be beneficial, when he tells Mr. Lewis a “perfect” lie – that he’s just run away from Grand Rapids (104). This lie earns him a free car ride to Grand Rapids, and Bud is thrilled that he

“wouldn’t have to do any more doggone walking” (104). So, while Bud feels “kind of bad about lying to Mr. Lewis” (141), he is presented in this book as a sweet character. In his case, because lying is linked to his survival, it is redeemable.

In the book *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, Sal describes her grandparents as being “full up to the tops of their heads with goodness and sweetness” (6), yet her grandfather tends to lie. When Gramps grabs a parking space from someone else, and then doesn’t have change for the parking meter, he lies, telling people he’s “a World War II veteran with German shrapnel in his leg” (54) to legitimate his actions. In this case, lying is presented as no big deal, something harmless, just a personality quirk. Later, Sal’s friend Phoebe lies and tells people her mother is in London (135), though she has no idea where her mother is. Sal “knew exactly why she lied. It was easier sometimes” (135). Sal knows her friend is worried about her mother, and that she’s lying because she can’t face the truth herself, let alone admit it to others. In this book, lying is not wrong, but can be tolerated in some situations, especially if the lies play on the sympathies of others in minor ways, or are a coping technique for someone.

*Kira Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata provides more examples of the moral complexity of lying. While Katie and Lynn’s parents tell them that lying is the third “worst thing you could do” (13), Katie lies throughout the book, for what’s presented as legitimate reasons. Katie lies about her real name, saying “I wasn’t exactly precisely telling a lie, because even though my birth certificate said Katherine, Lynn had always told me that my real name was Katarina” (107). This instance is presented as minor, and there are never any consequences for this lie. Later, Katie admits to “sometimes...[playing] hooky to be with Lynn” (170). She admits that she “wrote fake excuse letters from my mother to show the

teacher, and sometimes when the teacher asked me directly what was wrong with me, I lied and said I'd had a fever the previous day" (170). This is presented as being acceptable, considering Lynn's sickness, and Katie's motivation – to be with Lynn. Lying is not immoral, given Katie's family situation and her intentions to help her sister. A similar motivation impels Katie to lie, when she feels "a protective surge" when a police officer is questioning her father (211). She lies, telling the officer she and her father are going out for tacos, when in reality, they were the ones who'd "busted up [Mr. Lyndon's] Caddy" (212). Again, lying here is presented as a legitimate expression of Katie's care for her family, rather than as something wrong.

In this same book, we find a case where honesty, while being a good attribute, ends up costing a character a lot. When Katie's father tells her that "we're going to apologize for what I did to Mr. Lyndon's car" (231), months after he'd bashed Mr. Lyndon's windshield with a two by four, she says, "but he doesn't know it was you! Dad! He doesn't even know. You don't have to apologize" (231). Mr. Lyndon fires Katie's father, and Katie is upset. Her father responds by saying, "I don't ever want you to be afraid to apologize" (235). Katie comments that she "saw her father was not intimidated by Mr. Lyndon. And that was how I learned that even when you're very, very wrong, if you apologize, you can still hold yourself with dignity" (235). Honesty, though sometimes costly, is quite valuable and dignified, according to this book.

Louis Sachar's book *Holes* also mentioned possible benefits in dishonesty. Stanley Yelnats is sent to jail for stealing shoes, but he realizes that though "he told the truth, . . . perhaps it would have been better if he had lied a little" (25), because no one believes the truth. Again, lying would have helped Stanley in his situation, showing children that at

times, lying can be beneficial. Later in the book, Stanley writes letters to his mother, lying about his camp experiences. Instead of telling her about digging holes, he tells her he's been "out on the lake all day", and that he has to pass the swimming test to learn to water ski (46). Stanley explains that he doesn't "want her to worry about me" (46), as his reason for telling these lies. In this case, lying is portrayed as being an act of kindness and concern for others, indicating that dishonesty can be a good thing at times.

*Holes* actually presents a rather complex view of honesty. While including cases where lying is, or would be, beneficial, the story also includes a negative example of lying. When the Warden falsely claims that Stanley and Zero stole a suitcase from her house, the Attorney General and Stanley's lawyer catch her in that lie (214), taking the suitcase away and closing her camp. She, "in desperate need of money, had to sell the land which had been in her family for generations" (229).

*The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funke was the only children chosen book that presented this more complex view of lying. When Bo and Prosper receive a note through sneaky Barbarossa, who will do anything to get the treasure they children are looking for for himself, Bo lies to him, saying the treasure is "made out of huuuuge diamonds. And pearls!" (191). Later, Prosper tells Bo that "that was quite good, about those diamonds and pearls. Did you see Barbarossa's eyes?" (193). In this case, it is good to lie to the enemy, leading them off track as they pursue the same goals. Another instance where lying is portrayed well is when Signora Spavento lies to the nuns at an orphanage, telling them that "the name of [their] anonymous girl is really Caterina.. [her] goddaughter" (237). This lie gets Hornet out of an orphanage, and is described as being the act of a

friend. This children chosen book presents the complexity of the morality of honesty and lying.

Interestingly, children's books tend to present lying and honesty in rather black and white terms. In all the books except *The Thief Lord* and *Bud Not Buddy*, lying is presented as wrong. These books never include instances where lying can be tolerated, or are the best option in a given situation, like books chosen by adults. Overall, adult chosen books present a bit more complex morality than do children chosen books when it comes to issues of honesty. Adult chosen books are more likely to show the complexity and necessity of interpretation in understanding whether an action, such as lying, is good or bad. Basically, adult chosen books are more likely to expose gray areas, presenting children with a more complex view of moral issues, which may reflect a more adult moral perspective on the world.

### Tolerance and Cruelty

Another aspect of respect discussed in children's books is the issue of tolerance and cruelty toward those who are different than you. Both adult chosen and child chosen books quite often address this issue, but adult chosen books are more likely to specifically mention racism. However, the overarching message in all these books, child chosen and adult chosen, is to treat people different than yourself with courtesy and respect, and that cruelty toward others based on their face value or a first impression is inappropriate.

*The Secrets of Ms. Snickle's Class* by Laurie Miller Hornik is a story about tolerance and acceptance of differences. Eva, a new girl, suddenly appears in Ms. Snickle's class, evoking two very different responses from two girls in the class. One,

Hayley, “instantly decided she liked this new girl” (4), while Lacey “was instantly suspicious” (5), noting the strange entrance and odd hair Eva has. Lacey disapproves of any differences in others, and works to discover her peers’ secrets. For example, when she learns that Dennis does not lose his teeth because of his genetic makeup, she says genetic means “‘stupid’” (72). As Lacey exposes the differences, the secrets, of her classmates, they become “groucher and groucher. They teased each other and called each other names like Featherhead, Blabbermouth, and Sneeziface” (102-103). Basically, “all the children were unhappy and grouchy. Nobody got along with anyone” (103). Lacey’s exposing her friends’ differences, and everyone making fun of each other’s distinct qualities was supposed to make her happy, but, in the end of the story, she realizes doing so did not make her happy. Ms. Snickle helps her students “learn to forget” (131) their peers’ secrets/differences, and students go back to appreciating and getting along with each other. The message of this book is about tolerating differences, looking beyond things that may seem strange to you, and instead being kind and considerate to everyone.

In much the same way, *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* by Louis Sachar, another child chosen book, promotes acceptance and tolerance of differences. When Miss Nogard takes over Mrs. Jewls’ class, she cruelly sets forth to point out each child’s failures to the others. For example, when Miss Nogard first enters the classroom, she listens to the secret worries and fears of her students, using her ability to hear thoughts. She calls Dana a “handsome young man” (131), knowing that Dana was afraid her new haircut “made her look like a boy” (130). Everyone laughs at her, and Dana feels ugly. “One by one, she made every child in the class feel miserable,” pointing out

characteristics each child has that others may make fun of. By the end of her stay, “nobody had any friends. Everybody hated everybody” (162). Miss Nogard acts this way because a man she’d loved had made her feel bad about her third ear, making her “a bitter and evil person. She was unhappy, and she wanted everyone else to be unhappy, too” (128). She makes others unhappy by making them focus on others’ faults, others’ differences. However, after listening to the heart of an infant, hearing “pure love. And trust. And faith” (166), Miss Nogard begins to realize just how wrong it is to promote people judging the differences and imperfections in others. Finally, Louis, the yard teacher, tells her “it doesn’t matter how many ears [she] has” (168), he likes her anyway. This story of Wayside School and Miss Nogard is a great example of the benefits of treating other people with tolerance and acceptance, despite their differences or faults.

Still another example of the importance of tolerance and acceptance of others, of respect for differences, is in *My Teacher Fried my Brains* by Bruce Coville. Duncan responds with violence whenever someone laughs at him. Duncan tells us that he “could hear kids snickering” when he went into the wrong classroom on the first day of school, and “that really fried [him]. [He] hate[s] it when people laugh at” him (6). Later, Duncan is labeled by his peers as “the Mad False Alarmer” (39), for trying to warn them about a new alien invasion. Duncan responds, punching one of the boys making fun of him “in the nose” (39). People prejudge him, assuming that since he’s often a trouble maker, having pulled the fire alarm on the first day of school, that he is dishonest. When he’s being beamed away from the planet, Duncan realizes that he’d “been pretty unhappy down here” on Earth (135), realizing it will be hard for him to defend the planet to an alien council because of the way people treat him.

Reinforcing this idea, when Duncan realizes his home economics teacher is an alien, he automatically assumes she's part of an evil plot to take over Earth. After she kidnaps him, using his brain as a communicative device, she tells him to "stop judging people by their looks, [or he'll] never get along in the galaxy" (131). Kreeblim, as his home economics is called, is actually "almost on [his] side" (132), being a member of a committee that will present earth's case to an interplanetary council, hopefully saving it from annihilation. Again, the lesson in this child chosen book is that it's unfair to prejudge people, based on their looks, their species, or their actions.

Another example of learning to value someone you originally disliked occurs in *The Boys Start the War* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. The four Hatford boys call their new neighbors "aliens, all right" (5), when they realize it's a family of all girls. Their first reaction is to burn the bridge between their homes, vowing that they "won't have anything to do with them" (7) because they are girls. Basically, the Hatford boys assume that girls are no fun, and they vow to do everything they can to make them want to leave Buckman. As the war against the girls rages, the boys slowly realize they're having more fun with the girls than they ever had with their male neighbors. When Wally suggests ending the war, Jake replies, "but we can't stop now! If we're not bugging the girls, what will we do?" (88). The boys point out that they may have to go to camp, or take violin lessons, which would be boring in comparison to playing with the girls. The book ends with the boys hoping "the Bensons (their old neighbors) stay in Georgia long enough for [them] to do everything [they've] planned to do to the Malloys" (118), because they just have too much fun waging friendly war against these girls. These boys

learn that assuming girls are no fun was wrong, that they prejudged the situation. Instead, they find their friendly war fun, and end up appreciating the girls' presence in their lives.

*Because of Winn Dixie*, another child chosen book, is all about taking the risks necessary to truly get to know other people, rather than being intolerant of their differences or failings. When Opal first meets the dog she'll call Winn Dixie, she notes that "he was kind of limping like something was wrong with one of his legs. And [she has] to admit, he stunk. Bad. He was an ugly dog, but already, [she] loved him with all [her] heart" (14). She looks beyond Winn Dixie's appearance, and finds a friend as a result. This trend continues throughout the book, and when Opal begins visiting Gloria Dump, a reported witch, she faces the criticism of the Dewberry boys, who holler "'there goes the preacher's daughter, visiting the witch'" (89). Opal knows Gloria is not a witch because she's taken the time to get to know her, to find out the truth. As a result of her being open-minded about others, Opal finds a new friend. Gloria Dump teaches Opal more about judging people, saying "you got to remember, you can't always judge people by the things they done. You got to judge them by what they are doing now" (96). Opal befriends Otis, whom others call "retarded" (123), not being willing to reject someone because of they may not have the same abilities. *Because of Winn Dixie* is all about finding out the true nature of people, taking the time to look beyond the initial appearances or past actions of those around you. Because Opal does this, she discovers a town full of new friends.

In *A Mouse Called Wolf* by Dick King-Smith, we find another example of prejudice in Wolf's brothers, who "were not very nice to him, partly on account of his lack of size, partly because it seemed to them that he was his mother's favorite, but

mostly on account of his long name” (9-10). Wolfgang Amadeus, affectionately called Wolf, “never gets more than halfway across (the piano). He can’t get up enough speed” (12), so his brothers make fun of him, “not caring, as usual, whether his feelings were hurt” (13). These brothers come to nothing, just living normal mouse lives, but Wolf becomes friends with a retired piano teacher, learning to sing. The brothers, in this book, look like fools, and the clear message is not to underestimate other people based on one’s initial reactions.

Probably the clearest example of prejudice in a child chosen book is *Crash* by Jerry Spinelli, where Crash instantly decides he hates Penn Webb because “he was walking like he owned the place, both hands in his pockets,... strolling and gawking at the houses and whistling a happy little dorky tune like some Sneezzy or Snoozy or whatever their names are” (2). Crash, when he sees that the boy has the audacity to wear a very unstylish button on his shirt, decides he will not let him pass as he walks down the sidewalk. In fact, Crash “plucked the silly button off his shirt, dumped it in the hole [he] was digging, and covered it over with dirt” (4). This is just the beginning of the torments, taunts, and tricks Crash plays on Webb throughout the book, doing everything from stealing his turtle (8) to shooting him with a water gun (13-14) and leaving a meatball on the vegetarian’s doorstep (27). When Penn decides to try out for the cheerleading team, Crash and his friend Mike, along with many other boys in the school, laugh and torment him, at one point leaving a “sign saying sissy boom bah” on his locker, along with a “lacy black bra” hanging from the locker clamp (79). Crash enjoys making fun of Penn, and is annoyed at how different he is.

However, after Crash's grandfather suffers a stroke, he begins to change his opinions of others, becoming less interested in tormenting Penn. He doesn't participate in shooting Penn with a water gun, and wonders, "did that make [him] a dud? Did others see [him] that way?" (127). Crash ends up appreciating Penn, even allowing him to star in an important track meet. This book is all about learning to appreciate others, even if they are different from you – Crash, for whom life is all about competition, learns to appreciate Penn, a Quaker vegetarian. Each child chosen book is similar in this theme, encouraging children to look past initial judgments of others, of people's superficial faults, to who they really are, learning to respect and appreciate others' differences.

Adult chosen children's books also promote this idea, some promoting the simple idea that it is wrong to be cruel to those who are different from you, and others encouraging children to resist social norms themselves, rejecting the criticism of others because those who are different are destined to do great things.

An adult chosen example of the more simple moral lesson that it is unfair to treat people cruelly for being different is found in *The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman. Alyce comments that "in every village there were boys, teasing, taunting, pinching, kicking. Always they were the scrawniest or the ugliest or the dirtiest or the stupidest boys, picked on by everyone else, with no one left uglier or stupider than they but her" (3). This book points out that cruelty toward others may be the result of one's own insecurities, but still makes it clear that cruelty based on someone's appearance or status in the community is wrong, much like in many child chosen books.

In *A View from Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg, being cruel to people because of their differences is again presented as wrong. First seeing Julian Singh on the first day of

school, Ethan notes that “no one introduces himself and then extends his hand to be shaken while wearing shorts and knee socks and holding a genuine leather book bag on the first day of school” (66), and realizes he doesn’t want to have anything to do with Julian. However, he takes pity on Julian as “other kids...make his life miserable” (71), even saving him from two of his tormenters. These tormenters write ““I am a [sic] ass””(73) on Julian’s backpack, but Julian continues to dress and act as he always has. Ethan eventually becomes good friends with Julian, and they serve on the quiz bowl team together.

Along the same lines, these boys, along with the other Souls, decide to give their teacher, Mrs. Olinski, “a lift” because “there are some in the school who try to get her off balance” (97). These people had “erased paraplegic and written cripple instead” (71) on her classroom board. With Mrs. Olinski coming back to work for the first time since the car accident that caused her to be confined to a wheelchair, the Souls decide she may need a lift, some support, as she tried to deal with the cruel comments of others. Again, this adult chosen book reinforces the idea that it is important to look beyond initial reactions or prejudices against someone, and to appreciate those different from oneself.

*Holes* by Louis Sachar has a similar message regarding prejudice against people who appear less able. Many, even the adults running the camp, consider Stanley’s campmate Zero a nothing, “because there’s nothing inside his head” (19). People believe this because he is quiet, not answering questions or adding to conversation. Stanley begins believing Zero is nothing, too, until he begins to teach him how to read. As he begins to teach Zero, Stanley is “amazed that he was able to figure all that out” (98), and Zero explains, “I’m not stupid. I know everybody thinks I am. I just don’t like answering their

questions” (99). Stanley begins to wish that “the Warden was watching them, with her secret cameras and microphones, so she’d know Zero wasn’t as stupid as everyone thought” (117). Stanley and Zero become friends, Stanley saving Zero’s life. The clear value here is that people are often more than you think they are at first, and, again, it is well worth getting to know people who seem different, rather than judging them prematurely.

*Holes* also discusses racism as a form of prejudice specifically, in the love story of Miss Katherine and Sam the onion man. Sam and Katherine kiss, not realizing that “it’s against the law for a Negro to kiss a white woman” (113). Katherine tells the sheriff that “we’re all equal under the eyes of God” (114), and, when they kill Sam for his “crime”, becomes an outlaw, robbing and killing men throughout the west. Clearly, this book proposes that treating someone differently based on race is wrong, commenting on a time in American history when people did so, and condemning it.

Another adult chosen book discusses racism specifically. *Kira Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata, describes a “bad lady” who makes Katie’s family stay in the back rooms, which are “two dollars extra” (28-29) because they are not white. When Katie explains that “We’re not Indian... [and] we’re not Mexican” (27), the woman insists that they stay in the back rooms. Later, Katie notices that “restaurant signs said things like COLORED IN BACK” (34), not knowing where to sit because she’s Japanese. Lynn, Katie’s older sister, tries to prepare her for the racism she’ll face at school, telling her that “the rest of the people are ignoring them. They think we’re like doormats – or ants or something” (51). Katie sees her sister’s anger, and sees that what she’s been told is true, that “the girls at school ignore her” (88). The racism and mistreatment Katie and her

family endure in this book is portrayed very negatively, reinforcing the idea that judging someone based on racial differences is wrong.

Children and adult chosen books agree on the moral issue of tolerance, promoting the idea that everyone should be treated equally, and that it is beneficial to get to know people beyond first impressions – that many of those you initially judge are possible friends. Even if one doesn't take the time to develop friendships with those different than oneself, treating others with respect by tolerating their differences is an important moral value in each of these books.

### Stealing

Stealing is another way respect is discussed in children's books, characters understanding respect for others' property. Adult and child chosen books provide a similar picture of stealing – not ideal, often condemned as wrong, but at times considered necessary (or at least tolerable).

*Skeleton Man* by Joseph Bruchac provides an example of the duplicity in the morality of stealing. Molly, who's being forced to live with a man she knows is not her uncle, steals tools from the workmen at her school (90) in order to orchestrate her escape (92). She also steals "the whole stack of pictures from his computer desk" (96), in order to prove her "uncle" has kidnapped her parents. In these cases, stealing is necessary, and therefore tolerable. This uncle, however, is evil because he "doctored photographs, the phony identification papers... [and hacked] into banks and databases to get money and information about people" (112). He ruthlessly steals from people, having a complete disregard for others' lives and property. In this book, the morality of stealing is based on

the situation, indicating that a person's motivation influences the morality of one's actions.

*The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funke deals with the morality of stealing throughout the story. Prosper and Bo, the protagonists, ran away from home, and "since they had begun to fend for themselves, Prosper had learned how to steal. Only food at first, but then money too. He hated it" (19). Prosper struggles throughout the book with what living on their own requires, and insists that Bo, who's enamored with the idea of stealing, not participate. He doesn't want his brother tainted by the act of stealing (20). Prosper remains silent on his disapproval, realizing "he could hardly say ... [he doesn't] think much of stealing. After all, he lived off Scipio being such a master of it" (59). In this book, stealing is tolerated in light of these children's need for survival. However, it is clear from Prosper's reticence to steal, or to allow his brother to steal, that it is not morally right. The children are quite aware of societal, and adult, perspectives on stealing, Scipio stating that "if [my father] ever caught me stealing just a single one of his cufflinks, he'd make me walk around with a big sign around my neck saying: I'm a rotten little thief" (185). In fact, Scipio allows his parents to accuse his nanny of thefts he's committed, in order to avoid his father's reaction. Later, Scipio steals his father's boat, "his pride and joy," bragging that "and just now it got its first scratch" (249). Scipio's father doesn't treat him with respect, so stealing from his parents is presented in this book as excusable, as his only way of asserting his independence. Again, this book presents a rather complex view of stealing – at times something excusable, but at the same time, wrong in most cases.

Adult chosen books also present the complexity of the morality of stealing. A *Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park, however, strongly presents stealing as immoral. Crane-man tells young Tree Ear that “stealing and begging...made a man no better than a dog” and that “work gives a man dignity, stealing takes it away” (6). Tree Ear struggles with this, wondering if his waiting to tell a man about fallen rice until more had collected on the ground was stealing. Crane-man asks Tree Ear what the man would have done if he’d known Tree Ear had waited while more rice fell. The issue is resolved when Tree Ear realizes the man would have laughed, and “would not have minded” (7). In this scene, we see that stealing is about taking from someone else – whether they mind that something is stolen is part of determining the action’s morality.

Later, Tree Ear watches Min the potter work, and sneaks into his yard to touch a beautifully crafted box. Min attacks him, saying “thief! How dare you come here! How dare you touch my work” (16). Tree Ear insists he was not there to steal, but to watch, and when he realizes he’s broken the clay box, he asks if he “could ... work for you, as payment?” (18). Tree Ear respects this man, and his property, and wants to make up for taking the man’s work from him, even if it was accidental.

Tree Ear remains consistent in his feelings about stealing, asking Crane-man for help later in the book. Tree Ear, who’s seen another man’s inventive new way of doing pottery while spying on him, asks “is it stealing to take from another something that cannot be held in your hands?” (62). This presents a more complex idea of stealing – stealing ideas, intellectual property – for the reader. Crane-man responds that “if a man is keeping an idea to himself, and that idea is taken by stealth or trickery – I say it is stealing. But once a man has revealed his idea to others, it is no longer his alone. It

belongs to the world” (64). As a result, Tree Ear keeps this special pottery technique to himself, waiting for the competing potter to share his idea with the world. The message is clear. It is wrong to steal someone else’s idea, unless they intend to share it with the world.

Tree Ear is a stark contrast to “the dreaded *toduk-nom*, the bandits who hid throughout the countryside and on the outskirts of cities, emerging only to rob weary travelers” (122). When he is attacked by two of these robbers, Tree Ear fights to protect his master’s workmanship, and is beat up, called “worthless one” (123), and devastated by the loss of the vases he’s transporting. These robbers show a complete lack of respect for both Tree Ear and his master’s magnificent work, laughing as they throw the splendid vases off a cliff, proclaiming them “nothing” (124). These robbers are portrayed as cruel, inhuman, no better than dogs. *The Single Shard* clearly portrays the immorality of stealing, with characters discuss and encounter stealing and its effects.

*Holes* by Louis Sachar presents a bit more complicated view of the morality of stealing. On the one hand, Stanley and his family blame all their trouble on “his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather” (7), and they deal with the consequences of this ancestor’s accidental theft. The judge at Stanley’s trial tells him “he couldn’t imagine what kind of horrible person would steal from homeless children” (23). Stanley is upset that his hero thinks he is a “no-good-dirty-rotten thief” (23). These comments indicate to readers that stealing is essentially wrong, and often leads to serious consequences.

On the other hand, Stanley later steals a camp truck, “the image of Zero crawling across the hot dry dirt remain[ing] in his head” (146). He steals hoping to save his friend,

who may be dying in the desert. Zero also admits that “when I was little, I didn’t even know that it was stealing. I don’t remember when I found out. But we just took what we needed, never more” (184). Zero was stealing for survival, not even realizing that taking what he needed was wrong until faced with consequences – arrest. The book presents his stealing as a survival skill, acceptable because it is not only necessary but because he did not even know it was wrong. So, this book, while discussing ways stealing is wrong and can lead to terrible, lasting consequences, also provides examples of cases where stealing is tolerable – when absolute need or a motivation to help others exists, stealing is acceptable.

*A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck continues this complex view of stealing. Despite Grandma’s initial condemnation of stealing, when she mentions that “Mildred’s paw stole every horse he ever had” (18), she steals from many of her neighbors. So, after taking the stolen horse from Mildred’s family and returning it to its original owners, Grandma forces Mary Alice to accompany her as she raids her neighbor’s farms for provisions. For example, Grandma runs a tractor into a pecan tree in Old Man Nyquist’s yard, making many more pecans fall to the ground than were originally there. When Mary Alice asks “that wasn’t stealing, was it?” (32), her grandmother responds that Old Man Nyquist “said I could have any pecan that fell” (32), implying that no, it wasn’t stealing. That same night, they walk through the Pensinger’s pumpkin patch, where Grandma “cut free two nice big ones, and another, medium sized”, telling Mary Alice they’d “leave a pie on their porch” (33). Keeping in mind that Grandma’s motives in stealing these items is to make pies for a town gathering, these thefts are not portrayed as

all that wrong in this book. Grandma's thefts are considered minor, part of her quirky, spunky personality, and because she has good intentions, not a big deal.

In *Kira Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata, one of the worst things you can do is steal (13), but Katie steals. When her dying sister wishes for "some glittery pink polish" (170) for her nails, Katie heads to the five-and-ten store and "stuck some beautiful pink polish I [her] pocket and walked calmly out" (171). Despite being punished, feeling guilty for upsetting her mother later (174), Katie mentions that she "didn't regret what [she'd] done" because her sister had seemed so pleased (171). Again, we see that while stealing is essentially wrong, and can lead to serious consequences, at times, when good motivations are behind theft, it is acceptable – not something to necessarily regret.

### Authority

A last area where children's books work out the issue of respect is in respect for authority, rules, and laws. Conforming to what those in authority say is not necessarily a moral good in either child chosen or adult chosen books – it is actually, according to these books, good to question and rebel against the status quo if your moral convictions differ from those of whatever group currently defines and enforces rules/norms.

There are excellent examples of rebelling against authority in the child chosen books read. One, *Frindle* by Andrew Clements, is a story about a boy who challenged the current word "pen", replacing it with the word "frindle". When the battle for change takes on a life of its own, Nick's principal visits his parents, telling them that there was "a general feeling that there was a rebellion at school, with no one respecting the rules anymore" (52). She is concerned about "the lack of respect for authority" (53). Nick's mother comes to his defense, asking the principal if "there [has] to be a rule that a word

like this may not be used” (53). This book proposes that some rules may not need to exist, that they should be challenged because they serve no real purpose and end up causing problems for all involved. In this case, students are spending afternoons in Mrs. Granger’s classroom writing a punishment for a “silly” rule.

Basically, this book is about, what Nick described as “a difference of opinion” (60). Even the principal admits that she doesn’t “think the children have really been trying to be disrespectful” (60) with promoting the word “frindle” at her school. However, limiting Nick’s freedom to question has serious consequences for a while. When he comes up with a new idea to improve the food in the school cafeteria, he stops when he remembers “what had happened with frindle. It stopped him cold” (89). He almost gives up his desire to change his world for the better, until the same teacher that he thought was against him the whole time tells him that his “idea was a good idea, and [she has] been very proud of the way [he] behaved – most of the time” (92). Later, she sends him a letter telling him that his attempt to change the word “pen” “is the kind of chance that a teacher hopes for and dreams about – a chance to see bright young students take an idea they have learned in a boring old classroom and put it to a real test in their own world” (99). This book encourages readers to defy authority, the old order of things, even rules, in order to change things they are convicted about.

The book *The Secrets of Ms. Snickle’s Class* has many examples where characters reject the status quo, specifically the rules of the school. When the book begins, Oliver, a student whispers that the first day of school test is “stupid” (7), and Ms. Snickle agrees, asking Oliver to throw the test booklets out. Later, when Mrs. Hevelheed, the principal, is on her way, sniffing out gum in the school building, Ms. Snickle tells students, “I think

this would be a good time for anyone who is chewing gum to dispose of it properly” (38), removing her own gum from her mouth. Ms. Snickle and her students defy the school rule against gum because they believe, like beginning of the year tests, that it is stupid. Mrs. Hevelhed later uses another rule to fire Ms. Snickle – one that says “a principal may fire a teacher for staying overnight in school without permission” (112). The school rules are presented as “silly”, to be disregarded, rather than treated with respect. In fact, they are limiting, only existing to keep Ms. Snickle and her students from having fun.

On the other hand, Ms. Snickle’s one classroom rule – No Telling Secrets – is very important. When Lacey breaks this rule, the consequences are horrible. All the students argue, friendships are ruined, everyone felt miserable, but “Lacey felt the most miserable of all” (116). Lacey goes to great lengths to make up for breaking the rule, learning that some rules should be respected and obeyed, because they offer protection and make friendships possible.

*Crash* by Jerry Spinelli offers much the same view, that, for the most part, authority should be challenged, especially if they keep you from living out your convictions. For example, Penn feels convicted about the new mall being built, making his cheerleading coach angry. When the coach tells him that “enough is enough. You want to be cheerleaders or you want to be crusaders, it’s up to you. But if you want to keep being cheerleaders, just don’t miss any more games” (90). Penn is kicked off the team, having left for a mall march in the middle of a football game.

Abby, Crash’s sister, also resists her parents’ authority, attempting to create a wildlife refuge in their backyard. When her father tells her to remove a woodpile she

hopes will be a home for mice, “Abby planted herself in front of the pile and folded her arms. The wood was going over her dead body” (105). Abby loses this battle, but later the “spark plug was gone from the mower” (143) to prevent her father from mowing the grass that could provide refuge for wild animals. Abby, feeling convicted about protecting wildlife, defies her father’s authority. *Crash* provides another example of the need to defy authority – that it need not be respected and obeyed – to stay true to one’s beliefs.

Three child chosen books, *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* by Louis Sachar, *The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funke, and *My Teacher Fried my Brains* by Bruce Coville show that authority and rules are something often forced on children, but that these rules and the authority figures enforcing those rules need not be respected. For example, in *My Teacher Fried my Brains* Duncan calls a teacher a “pinhead”(12) when he gives him a lecture on being late for class, telling him that should he be late again, he can “plan to spend the period in the office” (11). This teacher rigidly enforces the rules, not caring that Duncan was late because he was lost in a new school. Later, the principal treats Duncan similarly, forcing him to take part in a science experiment in class “unless [he] want[s] to spend the next five days in my office learning a new definition of misery” (42). Duncan participates in the experiment, but the clear message here is that he does not respect the teachers in authority over him, and that he really has no reason to – they don’t treat him well. In this book, we see that respect for authority is contingent on their ability to treat others with respect.

Esther and Max Hartlieb, in *The Thief Lord*, never garner the respect of the children in the book, because they don’t really like children, believing they are “fidgety

and loud, and often quite dirty” having “no idea what of what’s really important” (198). When Bo is put in their care, he behaves horribly, pulling “a tablecloth off the table, right in the middle of the best restaurant in town”, screaming, and cutting “holes in the curtain with my scissors”, and pouring “coffee from the balcony” (259). Bo has no need to listen to these two because, as presented in the book, they do not respect or truly care about him. His disobedience ends up saving him from his horrible aunt and uncle, and he’s thrilled to live with a kind old woman in Venice instead.

Similarly, in *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger*, no teacher shows up one day, and Myron “climbed on top of his desk. ‘ Look around, folks! There’s no teacher! We’re doing all this work for nothing!’” (56). Another student asks him to get down before all of them get in trouble, but the students realize that there’s no need to follow the rules with no authority figure around. Their commitment to rules has little to do with respect for them, but everything to do with the threat of punishment for not following them.

Later, in the same book, Louis the yard teacher goes rule crazy, telling students to “‘stay off the grass. No running on the blacktop. No eating. And no excessive shouting’” (92). Students call him a “booger brain” (92), and recess is no longer fun. Students also ignore the rule against “way high up ball” (147), and the yard teacher Louis even joins in the fun. The message here is that too many restricting rules can ruin fun, so rules that get in the way should be overlooked – they should not be respected.

As in child chosen books, adult chosen children’s books discuss the need to obey some authority figures, but mostly comment on the moral choice to rebel against, rather than respect and submit to, authority. Some of these books discuss the way authority figures at times force children to respect them. For example, in *Out of the Dust* by Karen

Hesse, Billie Joe submits when her mother saying she couldn't play the piano for the play *Sunny of Sunnyside* (28), saying "I do as she says. I go to school, and in the afternoons I come home, run through my chores, do my reading and my math work at the kitchen table and all the while I glare at Ma's back with a scowl foul as maggoty stew" (29).

Billie Joe, while upset with her mother, respects her authority enough to do as she's told.

In *Kira Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata, on the other hand, Katie gets great pleasure out of defying her mother's authority at times. When driving with her uncle, she decides it "might be fun to learn how to spit like a master" even though her "mother would kill" her (22). Lynn, too, defies her mother, wearing "lipstick when [their] parents weren't around" (66). At one point, Katie resists her parents' orders to clean the bathtub, until her mother "started crying...[and her] father looked at [her] sternly. 'I want you to clean the bathtub now'" (103). In fact, Katie and Lynn obey their mother and respect her rules only because their mother seems so fragile. When the girls "pretended to smoke cigarettes like floozies", they stop before their mother gets back to the car because "it might make her so upset that she would need to take an aspirin" (25). Katie explains that "that's why, even though I liked being bad all the time, I tried hard to be good" (25). Basically, Katie and Lynn do not respect rules and authority as much as they worry that their disobedience will harm their mother – they obey because they care, not because they have any particular respect for rules governing their behavior.

Noah, in *A View from Saturday* by E. L. Konigsburg, also obeys his mother because she "gave [him] such a negative look that [he] knew" he'd better write his thank you note well (6). Again, authority is not so much respected as submitted to, based on a

parent's threat, or in the case of *Kira Kira*, on the threat that a parent may be hurt if faced with defiance.

*A View from Saturday* also provides a positive representation of disrespecting or challenging authority, much like in child chosen books. When Julian Singh challenges the authority of the state official moderating the Academic Bowl, the official is immediately taken aback. However, Julian's challenge helps the team win the Bowl, because "the panel of experts looked up from a heavy volume and sent a signal to the commissioner", saying that they had "an adjustment to make on the score" (146), giving Julian the points the commissioner had originally taken from him. Challenging authority when you know they are wrong, which Julian did respectfully, is morally correct.

Other extenuating circumstances make disrespecting even the law as an authority acceptable. For example, in *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, Sal breaks the law, with her grandfather's permission, to go see her mother's grave (259). While "the sheriff gave [Sal] a lengthy and severe lecture about driving without a license" (269), Sal had needed to see her mother's grave, to say "'Happy birthday'" (268) to her mother on her birthday, as she tried to heal from her mother's death. Because she'd needed to do this, police, and Sal, overlook that she's broken the law. This book proposes that respecting the law can, in some situations, be overlooked for a higher purpose.

*Crispin: the cross of lead* by Avi is an example of civil disobedience, where characters choose to disrespect and disobey the law because they believe the laws are wrong. Bear has no respect for the government in authority over him, "because the officials of this most holy kingdom are all corrupt gluttons. [The king's] councilors and parliaments – all dressed in that new Italian cloth, velvet – sit upon the backs of the poor

and eat their fill of venison and sweetmeats... poor souls like you and I are not part of his daily reckoning” (75). Because he doesn’t feel his government cares about him, Bear participates in a rebellion against these rulers, even though “mere talk of such things was considered a hanging offense” (210). Again, there are some instances where it is morally necessary to defy those in authority – when they aren’t doing what you believe is right.

Along these same lines, Crispin defies his master’s authority, disobeying him to save him. Multiple times, Bear tells Crispin to “remain here until I return” (180), but he leaves, exploring the city and hearing more about the government officials plans to harm his master. He finally disobeys his master, slipping out of their room and following Bear to a house where rebels are meeting, running into the meeting to warn them that “soldiers are coming” (231). Crispin saves many of the men meeting there, and later, saves his friend Bear, too. His disobedience, and disregard for his master’s rules end up helping both him and his friend. Again, rebelling against authorities is presented here as being good, in fact necessary for success.

*The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo also presents nonconformity, a form of disrespect of the status quo/current laws, as something to be cultivated. The narrator of the story, tells the reader to “know that an interesting fate... awaits almost everyone, mouse or man, who does not conform” (25). Despereaux rejects traditional mouse interests and behavior, instead listening to music, appreciating beauty, and reading stories. When Despereaux hears the king playing music to his daughter, he slowly forgets “the most basic and elemental of all mice rules: do not ever, under any circumstances, reveal yourself to humans” (27). When he’s brought before the mouse council, it is clear he’s rejected their authority and rules, which says “a mouse who consorts with humans, a

mouse who would sit at the foot of a man, a mouse who would allow a human to touch him... cannot be trusted. That is the way of the world, our world” (43). He tells the council that “it felt good” (53) to have a human princess touch him, and that he “broke the rules for good reasons. Because of music. And because of love” (54). The other mice are afraid of Despereaux’s behavior, believing it “endangers us all... and that [he] cannot be trusted” (43). This story presents the idea that respecting the laws of the land, the rules of society, is not always morally right. Despereaux, the hero of this book, breaks mouse rules for higher moral goods – music, beauty, and love. The message of this book is clear – it is morally right to act against authority should your moral values conflict with it.

Respect for authority, rules, and laws is a complicated issue that child chosen and adult chosen books seem to agree on. In both sets of books, we see examples of characters defying authority for the greater good or due to special circumstances. We see both sets of books address the issue that some authority figures and/or rules do not deserve to be respected, and that it is morally acceptable to defy their authority in one’s life.

Respect, being exhibited in these children’s books through situations involving honesty, tolerance and cruelty, stealing, and respect for authority and rules, is seen similarly by both children and adults, according to these findings. While at times, adult chosen books will push children to think about these moral issues at a higher level, more often examples of both higher and lower level moral thought exist in both sets of books.

### **Responsibility**

Responsibility describes the other set of moral values I looked for in the books I read. In these books, characters encounter situations involving hard work and

perseverance, caring for others, and loyalty to one's family. Children and adults seem to have similar ideas regarding these moral values, including many instances where characters act responsibly, or deal with the consequences of acting irresponsibly.

### Hard Work and Perseverance

The benefits of hard work and perseverance are one way responsibility is discussed in children's books. This is more commonly a theme in adult chosen children's books than those chosen by children, but the few instances in child chosen books that mention this form of responsibility complement the message in adult chosen children's books.

One theme we find in adult chosen children's books is the value of perseverance and hard work at school or in learning. In *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck, Grandma tells Mary Alice, who's offered to help with cleaning the cobhouse, to "go on up to the house and study for them exams" (124). In *Kira Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata, Lynn, on her death bed, repeatedly asks Kaitie to "try to get better grades" (242). Lynn even writes, in her diary will, that "to Katie, I leave my diary, my dictionary, and my encyclopedia, which she had better use" (242). As Katie is encouraged to do well in school, to work harder, her parents pour their lives into their own work. Katie's father is described as "the most determined man in the world...he accepted hard work" (210). Katie's parents work all the time. "My father's hours changed sometimes. His newest schedule was to work for ten to twelve hours, then eat and sleep a few hours at the hatchery, and then get up and work six hours. When he wasn't working at his main hatchery, he worked at a different one in another town. My mother's current shift ran from 4:30 am to 1:30 pm, plus three hours of overtime" (84). Katie's father and mother

are “honor bound to think of the living...If he stopped working for three days, that might mean we would not eat fish one night or could not pay the mortgage on [the] house” (240). Working hard, doing whatever it takes, even if it sucks the life out of you, is a good moral value, helping make life better for yourself and those you are responsible for.

In *Crispin: the cross of lead* by Avi, Bear offers Crispin his own penny, asking him, ““did you work hard?”” (151). When Crispin tells Bear he tried, Bear replies, ““then you deserve it. Now come, we need to earn some more”” (151). The message here, which is similar to that in *Kira Kira* is that hard work will bring benefits to improve life, and one can take pride in earning one’s own way.

Similarly, in *Bud not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, Bud is pleased to prove himself through hard work. When he stays overnight in Hooverville, Bud is perfectly willing to help by “pulling KP” because this seems “like a good trade” (69) for the dinner he’s allowed to share. Later, in trade for being allowed to live at Grand Calloway Station, Miss Thomas tells Bud he’s “going to have lots of chores and things to take care of around here... you’ll be expected to pull your own weight the best you can” (189). Bud cheerfully goes about his work, cleaning the Log Cabin, and is rewarded when Miss Thomas tells him ““you’ve done a great job, the place is sparkling”” (201). Bud’s willingness to pitch in and do his part of the work is an important part of earning others’ respect and acceptance. He’s welcomed both in Hooverville and at Grand Calloway Station because he’s willing to earn his keep, doing whatever he can to help those providing for him.

*The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman is an excellent example of this moral lesson. When Alyce first meets Jane the midwife, she's told that "those who don't work don't eat" (4). She quickly offers to work for food, and thus begins her relationship with Jane Sharp. Alyce works hard for her food and shelter, but eventually gives up and leaves Jane after failing in a birth – having to call in the midwife for a delivery rather than being able to do it for herself. She overhears Jane mention why Alyce's going may have been for the best, "because she gave up... I need an apprentice who can...try and risk and fail and try again and not give up" (88). Alyce realizes the value of perseverance in hard work, not just being able to provide for yourself, but forcing yourself to keep working through failures and difficulties. Alyce returns to her master's home, telling her, "Jane Sharp! It is I, Alyce, your apprentice. I have come back. And if you do not let me in, I will try again and again. I can do what you tell me and take what you give me, and I know how to try and risk and fail and try again and not give up. I will not go away" (116-117). Alyce is welcomed back because of her perseverance in work, her commitment to continue trying, despite failure.

The value of hard work is a major moral theme in *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park. "Work gives a man dignity" (6) drives much of Tree Ear's work under Min the potter. Tree Ear is "ashamed that he had not finished the work properly" (25) when he hadn't realized he needed to unload the wood from a cart, and he works tirelessly to please his master, constantly trying to do exactly as asked. Tree Ear is thrilled that as he learns to load clay, cut wood, harvest clay, and drain glazes, he is earning his meals. As he's offered a meal at his new job, "of one thing he is certain: the feat day banquets in the palace of the King could never better the modest meal before him, for he had earned it"

(34). Tree Ear gains great pleasure in knowing that he has provided this meal for himself through hard work – he is proud of what he’s accomplished. He works tirelessly to provide for himself and Crane-man. “Tree Ear rose before first light now, spending an hour or so in the fields before going to work. At the end of the day he returned to the fields again, collecting rice even after darkness had rendered his eyes useless” (53). Tree Ear exhibits his responsibility with his hard work.

Tree Ear also exhibits perseverance in his duties to Min. When Min is working late every night preparing vases for the emissary’s second visit, “Tree Ear remained at the house until well after dark to assist Min however he could” (78). His dedication and willingness to work hard, persevering through long work hours is admirable. Later, Tree Ear doesn’t balk at the arduous task of taking his master’s work to Songdo to show the emissary. When robbers attack him, ruining the vases, Tree Ear perseveres, making up his mind to “journey on to Songdo and show the emissary the single shard” (130). Tree Ear’s hard work and dedication is rewarded when his master is given a commission to work for the emperor. Tree Ear, showing such hard work, determination, and perseverance, is finally welcomed into Min’s family. As in *Bud not Buddy*, Tree Ear’s hard work leads to acceptance, bringing him success and friendships.

*Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse is all about perseverance in the light of great trials, with Billie Jo and her father trying to survive in the drought and dust of Texas. Billie Jo’s father, when his wife and baby dies, begins digging a hole, even though people “think my father is crazy digging such a big hole...the water will seep back into the earth. It will never stay put in any old pond. But my father has thought through all that and he’s digging anyway” (78). He is determined to stay on his land, to make his farm work,

motivated by his dead wife's will to do so. Later, Billie Jo walks "with Daddy around the farm and see that the pond is holding its own, it will keep Ma's apple trees alive, nourish her garden, help the grass around it grow... We'll have something to show in the spring for all Daddy's hard work" (219). Her father's hard work and determination provides for her and her father, giving them hope, along with food to make it through another year. Again, the value of providing for one's family, of being responsible through hard work, is represented positively in this book.

Billie Jo shows perseverance and hard work in this book, as well. When her hands are seriously burned, it becomes painful for her to play her beloved piano. Her father and others encourage her that "they could play the piano again, if [she] would only try" (89). When she hears about a talent contest, "each day after class lets out, each morning before it begins, I sit at the school piano and make my hands work. In spite of the pain, in spite of the stiffness and scars. I make my hands play piano. I've practiced my best piece over and over till my arms throb" (127). Billie Jo's perseverance wins her third prize, and "the applause made [her] forget the pain, the audience roared when [she] finished, they came to their feet" (132). Billie Jo realizes that her talents require her perseverance, so she begins the habit of "playing a half hour every day, making the skin stretch, making the scars stretch" (225). In this case, the value of perseverance and hard work does not result in better provision, but is essential for Billie Jo's healing. In other words, perseverance and hard work are good characteristics for any part of life, not just in providing for oneself or one's family.

In contrast to these adult chosen children's books, child chosen books mention hard work and perseverance less often. Responsibility marked by perseverance and hard

work was not a theme in any of the child chosen books, but a few books mention this characteristic in a minor way.

In *Frindle* by Andrew Clements, Nick's house rule is "homework first", which is presented as a good rule because Nick's older brother James "wrote home from college after his first semester and said, 'my grades are looking great, because when I came here I already knew how to put first things first'" (17). Being responsible about work, prioritizing work over fun, is quickly mentioned here, but definitely presented as a good quality, resulting in academic success.

Similarly, in *Shiloh Season* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Miss Talbot, Marty's teacher, gives him advice to help him accomplish his dream. She tells him that "'if he want[s] to go to college and become a veterinarian, then [he] has to learn to speak and write and spell correctly'" (82). Marty is pleased, feeling like "Miss Talbot really wants to see [him] make something of" himself (82). The implication of this minor incident in this book is that getting into college, or pursuing one's dreams, takes hard work. Marty is encouraged to improve himself and work hard academically to reach his goals.

Opal, in *Because of Winn Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo, offers hard work in return for a collar for her dog. She tells Otis, a worker at the local pet store, that she "could work for [him]...sweep[ing] the floors and dust[ing] the shelves and tak[ing] out the trash" (54). In this case, being responsible is reflected in Opal's desire to work for what she gets – for earning what she wants. In this book, Opal's hard work at the pet store is considered one of her many positive qualities.

Again, we see that perseverance and hard work are much more of an emphasis in adult chosen children's books. The few minor comments about hard work in child chosen

books reinforce the same ideas, but it seems adults are more attracted to books with this theme than are children.

### Family Loyalty and Commitment

Family loyalty and commitment is another way responsibility is discussed in these books. The responsibility to care for, love, and sacrifice for family is a major theme in many of these books, whether chosen by adults or children. Both sets of books present loyalty to family positively, encouraging children to act responsibly regarding the members of their families.

*Skeleton Man* by Joseph Bruchac, a child chosen book, is about a girl bravely saving her parents. Molly is committed to her parents, barely wanting to admit their gone at the beginning of this story. When she moves into the house of a man who claims to be her uncle, and is locked in her room, she “remember[s] wondering that night if the door would ever be unlocked again. [She] also remember[s] not caring whether [she] lived or died. [She] missed [her] parents so much” (46). When Molly hears that her parents are “buried but not dead” (62), she realizes “that [she has] to save them”(86). Molly risks her own life, breaking out of her room, and running to the tool shed, opening up a door in the floor, where “a hand reaches up to touch the grating. [She] recognizes that hand” (100). She’s discovered her parents, and then leads their captor away, allowing him to chase her through the forest so her parents can escape. When it’s all over, her father whispers to her, “You saved us, Molly... you’re our Warrior Girl” (111). Molly’s commitment to her parents saved them, giving her the courage to take on the man who’s kidnapped them all.

Marty, in *Shiloh Season* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, shows a similar commitment to his family, constantly trying to protect them from the mean drunk, Judd, who lives down the road. He tells the reader, “I love this dog more than I ever loved anything in my whole life, I think. Except Ma and Dad. And Becky. And... well, I suppose even Dara Lynn. One night I dreamed Judd Travers come to me with his shotgun, said he was going to shoot either Shiloh or Dara Lynn, which would it be? And I woke up in a cold sweat – still couldn’t decide. Suppose I’d save Dara Lynn, if it ever comes to that, but boy, she’d have to work the rest of her life tryin’ to make it up to me” (11). Marty realizes his family is even more important than his beloved dog. Later, when Becky is missing, Marty worries that “maybe one of [Judd’s] stray bullets found her, and I traded Becky for Shiloh” (62). Marty constantly worries about Judd hurting his family, not telling his father about Judd taking a shot at him because “Dad would go see Judd and end up making him madder, and maybe he’d shoot at Becky next” (93). Marty feels a real responsibility for the safety of his family, and every decision he makes in this story is a reflection of his concern for their welfare over and above his own.

Marty displays his care and concern for his family in other ways, as well. When Dara Lynn dislocates her toe while playing hide and seek, he offers to fix it. He “hold[s] her foot in [his] hand, then gently take[s] hold of the end of her bent toe and give[s] it a little tug” (59). Helping his sister is an expression of his care for her. When ferocious dogs run into his yard, Marty “grabs Shiloh up in one arm, Becky in the other, and run up on the porch” (72). He then “grab[s] his baseball bat from off the porch” and runs over to where dogs are attacking Dara Lynn, “swinging that bat out in front of me ninety miles an hour” until the dogs back off (72-73). Marty willingly puts himself at risk for his

sisters' sakes, saving them from serious wounds. Marty's loyalty to his family is his motivation throughout the book, and he repeatedly makes decisions showing his love and commitment to his parents and sisters.

Along the same lines, Crash, in the child chosen book *Crash* by Jerry Spinelli, learns the value of his family, and discovers the importance of his commitment to them. Crash, ever competitive, "dove, flew through the air, and tackled [his grandfather Scooter] at the knees and brought him down" (102). The whole family is appalled, and Scooter has to be hoisted to his feet, and Crash noticed that "his cheekbone was red" (103). A few days later, Crash looks out his window to see Scooter "sitting on the ground, his back up against the tree trunk" (108). "It was a stroke" (109), and Crash realizes how much he cares for his family as he realizes "they don't know how messed up he'll be. They don't even know if he's going to live" (109). He rushes out and buys "a pair of bright red high-heeled shoes with glitter all over and a red bow in front" because he believes since he "didn't buy him a present yet...[he doesn't] expect him to live" (111). The family leaves the Christmas tree up for when Scooter returns, Crash rooting Scooter on as he heals, saying, "Come on, Scooter" (114).

This incident changes Crash's perspective on his family, and he begins to show appreciation and love for them, living up to his responsibilities to his family members. On his sister's birthday, for example, he makes catfish cakes for her, since Scooter usually made them for her and she was upset he'd not be able to. Abby writes him a note, telling him "thank you for making catfish cakes... even if they didn't look like catfish" (128). Crash decides to do something to make his sister happy, showing loyalty and compassion for his sister.

Crash and his sister try to make their grandfather feel better, and “are still allowed to climb on the bed with him... [even though] now it’s turned around. We’re the captains” (147). Crash realizes that his grandfather needs him, and, while scared, he takes on a more protective caretaker role to help his grandfather. Crash’s mother goes through a similar transformation, realizing her children rarely saw her because of her work. She tells her children that she’s going part time at work, because she “was thinking how little I saw you kids and how little you saw me. And there was a minute back then when I actually was afraid you might forget what I look like” (160). By the end of this story, Crash’s commitment to his family has significantly grown, even “using his sneaker money to buy [his] mom a set of paints” (162), as has his mom. Crash’s mom bought tickets for the family to go to a ball game together, having refocused her attention on her commitment to spending time with her family.

*Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger* by Louis Sachar reinforces the idea that commitment and loyalty to family is important. One teacher, who’s presented as being quite mean in the book, steals the students’ voices. He uses these voices to call students parents, using their voices, and tell their mothers, “I just called to say I hate you! You’re the worst mommy in the whole world. You’re ugly and you smell bad! It’s not fair! Out of all the mommies in the world, I got stuck with you!” (65). As a result, students cry, being loyal to their parents, not wanting to hurt their family members. They know what responsibilities one has to those one loves.

Wolf, in *A Mouse Called Wolf* by Dick King Smith, goes out of his way to do nice things for his mother, evidence of his love and care for her. When he and his mom are stuck in a piano, and she begins to worry, he tells her, “cheer up, mommy... I’ll sing you

a song” (29). Later, he is thrilled to share his first musical composition with his mother, who “though she was proud of her son’s talents, ... derived little pleasure from most of the songs he sang” (85). She listens dutifully to her son, exhibiting her care and commitment to a member of her family. She considers her responsibilities to her son as including supporting his passion for music.

The same message is clear in adult chosen children’s books. For example, in *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech, Molly is impressed with her friend Phoebe’s family’s response to the discovery that her mom had an illegitimate son. Mrs. Winterbottom, Phoebe’s mom, comes home and tells her husband about a son she’d had before they’d met, but who she’s reunited with now. Mr. Winterbottom tells her, “it’s not respectable I’m concerned about. I’m more concerned that you couldn’t – or wouldn’t – tell me about any of this” (249). He wants the family to sit down and talk, and went over to this newly found son “and shook his hand and said, ‘I did always think a son would be a nice addition to this family’” (249). This incident in the story implies that one’s responsibilities to family include not only honesty, but forbearance and forgiveness.

In *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, Bud learns that one responsibility a person takes on as a member of a family is being patient with each other. Miss Thomas tells Bud to give his grandfather “some time. He really needs help with a lot of different things” (190). Bud remains sensitive and patient with his grandfather Herman Calloway. When he finds his grandfather crying, Bud “put his hand... on Mr. C’s shoulder and patted him and rubbed him a couple of times, then left the room” (220). Herman finally welcomes Bud, who’s the son of a daughter who’d run away. He’d “been hoping for eleven years that she’d send word or come home, and she finally has” (224).

Commitment and loyalty, being willing to forgive and be patient with each other is part of the responsibility this book would say we have as members of a family.

Mary Alice, from *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck, slowly realizing her responsibilities and love for her grandmother. When she first comes to live with her grandmother, she is ashamed of her grandmother (8), who tries to enroll her in school through the janitor. She begins to appreciate her grandmother, seeing her hard work and care for town members, despite her sassy disregard for social norms. When she goes out to check her traps in the late winter evenings, Mary Alice “began to want to be there with her, to make sure she’d come safely home” (64). Her grandmother begins to show her commitment, as well, making her “a halo so Carleen Lovejoy in all her tinsel wouldn’t outshine” (68) Mary Alice at the Christmas pageant. Grandma also saves all the money she earned selling skins to buy Mary Alice’s brother a ticket so he could see her in the pageant, and “after [they got home that night, Grandma showed [her] another ticket. It was a round-trip to Chicago for [her] so [she] could go on with Joey to have some Christmas with Mother and Dad. It must have cost Grandma her last skin” (73). Mary Alice’s grandmother shows responsibility in her care, her expression of love for her grandchildren in buying these tickets and wanting them to be with their parents for Christmas. By the end of the story, Mary Alice cares for her grandmother, helping her with the laundry and even helping her wash her hair (96-97). As a tornado rips through their small town, Mary Alice runs home, and her grandmother “knew [she’d] wanted to make sure she was all right” (118). When the time comes for Mary Alice to move back to Chicago, she “wanted to explain to Grandma how she needed [her] here. [She’d] fuss about her if [she] wasn’t here to see how she was” (127). Mary Alice feels responsible for

the safety and happiness of her grandmother, and wants to be sure she'll be alright when she leaves.

Billie Jo, in *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, goes through a similar change, strengthening her commitment and sense of responsibility toward her family. When her mother is engulfed in flames, Billie Jo tried to save her, “beating out the flames with [her] hands” (61), causing severe burns and scarring. She exhibits her love for her mother, feeling responsible for her safety, wanting to help her, sacrificing her own safety to try to save her mother's life. When her mother dies, she continues to feel compelled to please her, saying she can't let the housework rest “on account of Ma, haunting” (110). Billie Jo begins to feel more responsible for her father, as they look out for each other during the various dust storms. Caught in a storm, Billie Jo “kept along...[even though] everyone said to stay, but she guessed [her] father would come out to find [her] if [she] didn't show, and get himself lost in the raging dust and maybe die and [she] didn't want that burden on [her] soul” (143). She feels responsible for her father's safety, so much so that she risks her own safety to ensure his. Later, having run away from home, Billie Jo returns, realizing she needs her father, and that as a member of the family, she is partly responsible to him, to help him. When she returns, she tells “him how scared [she is] about those spots on his skin,” saying, “I can't be my own mother... and I can't be my own father and if you're both going to leave me, well, what am I supposed to do?” (205). Billie Jo's comment points out that families are responsible to care for and help each other – part of their responsibility is to stick by each other, even in hard times.

*Kira Kira* provides another example of incredible family commitment. Katie feels and acts very responsibly toward her sister, Lynn, who is dying of cancer. However, she also

feels responsible for her parents' and brother's welfare. She and Lynn commit to "save [their] nickels to help Mom and Dad buy [their] first house" (46), wanting to pitch in to meet a family goal, giving the money to their parents "the night before [they] went to the bank with [their] parents to apply for a loan" (133) to buy their first house. Katie comments that they "all took care of one another" (59) after her baby brother is born. In fact, the whole family does pitch in to help each other. Lynn, despite her fatigue, "managed to help [Katie] a lot" with her homework (64). The family exhibits its care in being responsible with their care for each other.

Katie's growing sense of responsibility toward her brother and sister develops as she sees her sister get sicker. When she notices that Lynn is so tired she won't get out of bed, she "cooked her an extra helping of liver and told her to chew well" (120), wanting to help her sister get better. When her brother gets his leg caught in a trap, and her sister becomes too weak trying to carry him to safety, she runs for help on her own, and knocked on the door of someone's house, begging for help (146). As Lynn gets sicker, Katie comments that their "whole lives revolved around what Lynn wanted. What was good for Lynn, and what more [they] could do for Lynn" (169). Katie lays "in bed...think[ing] of new things [she] could do for Linnie. Maybe [she] could let her try [her] pillow to see if she liked it better. Or [she] could bring her a new cracker she'd never tried" (184). Katie longs to make her sister more comfortable, to make her happier, showing a true commitment, and a sense of responsibility for her beloved sister. In fact, Katie feels responsible toward her family, wanting to do things to please them, help them, and support them, just as we've seen in many other children's books.

Both child and adult chosen children's books present loyalty to one's family in a good way. Responsibility to family members is motivated by love, requiring commitment, sacrifice, patience, and forgiveness. Characters in these books constantly represent this ideal, providing a picture of what responsibility to families should look like.

### Helping Those in Need

Characters in these books show one last characteristic representing responsibility – specifically social responsibility. Child and adult chosen books constantly exalt caring for those who are less fortunate, helping those in need, whether friend or stranger. In fact, most of the characteristics already mentioned were motivated by care for others. For examples respecting people is represented in these books as one way characters show care – through honesty, tolerance, and even respect for authority. The morality of stealing is related to whether or not it is done as an act of caring for another, and perseverance and hard work are often motivated, in these novels, as an act of care for loved ones. Loyalty to one's family is clearly motivated, time and again, by loving care for family members. These books emphasize care for others in very overt ways as well.

Characters in child chosen books display care for others often. In *Skeleton Man*, by Joseph Bruchac, a rabbit offers to “help [Molly] because [she] saved him” (5, 28). The rabbit leads Molly through the woods as she tries to escape her uncle, helping her to safety. Throughout her ordeal, Molly appreciates her teacher, Ms. Shabbas' concern, seeing that the way Ms. Shabbas looks at her is “the way a true friend looks at you when they say they want to help you and really mean it” (37). She opens up to this teacher about her fears, and her teacher gives her her home and cell numbers, telling her to call her anytime (37). Molly feels better having an ally, someone helping her – even someone

just believing her. This kind of care and concern – listening and being concerned for another’s welfare – is one example of this quality in these books.

A major theme in *Shiloh Season* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor is kindness toward others. Judd Travers terrorizes the neighborhood, driving recklessly, hurting animals, breaking hunting laws, and even shooting at Marty. When Marty hears about what vets do with really mean dogs, he decides to try it with Judd. The vet tells Marty that “when a dog is really mean and hiding out somewhere, you start by leaving food where he can reach it. He may not take it right away, but by and by he’ll get hungry. Once he starts accepting your food, he’ll listen for the sound of your voice to get to know you. And after he learns to trust you, he’ll let you pet him. Just takes time. You have to be patient” (81). Later, when Judd crashes his truck near Marty’s house, Marty and his father help Judd, calling emergency and the doctor, and trying to get him out safely (98-99). Marty leaves bread and chicken for Judd, later attaching notes to cheer him up as he recovers from the accident. Marty brings his dog Shiloh by to visit Judd, letting this dog’s former abuser pet him. Marty sees that his efforts have not been in vain, that Judd is warming up as a result of his attentions.

The rest of the town takes part in caring for Judd, helping him recover from his accident. Marty’s sixth grade class makes “a big card and [sent] it to Judd from [his] sixth grade class” (105). Not only does the class reach out to him, but “the neighbors on one side of Judd took one of his other two dogs to care for and the neighbors on the other took the third. Still another neighbor drives his tractor mower over to Judd’s and mows his grass, and Whelan’s Garage fixes up his truck up for him and parks it in front of his house for when he’s ready to drive again. All the dents are gone” (107). The neighbors,

who've been threatened and endangered by Judd's recklessness, quickly rally to his aid when he's in trouble. *Shiloh Season* exemplifies the redemptive power of kindness – how one's being kind to others can change that person, helping them heal and grow.

Penn Webb, the boy Crash tortures and hates throughout the book *Crash* by Jerry Spinelli, also displays a patient kindness toward others. He singles Crash out as his first friend in a new town, and walks over to Crash's house to "ask [him] if [he] would like to come to dinner at [his] house" (11). Penn explains that this is what people did in North Dakota with their friends, and that he wants to be friends with Crash. Later, Penn and his family "kept asking [Crash] to go other places, too" (28), even though he always said no. They honestly wanted to reach out to him including him in their family fun, wanting to spend time with him. When they hear that Crash's grandfather had a stroke and is quite ill, they come "over one night, all three of them. With food" (110). This family kindly reaches out to others who are going through a tough time, just as Judd's neighbors do in *Shiloh Season*. Again, we see the value of reaching out to others in kindness – finally, after years, Crash becomes friends with Penn.

The kindness of others helps Bo and Prosper as they try to live on their own in a foreign city – Venice. Scipio, the Thief Lord, steals to provide for Bo and Prosper, along with their other homeless friends (34-35). Bo tells a detective that "'Scip brought us coats and blankets'" (152). Scipio risks his own safety for other, less fortunate children, even rescuing kittens "someone wanted to drown... in the canal" (37). The children he cares for also support each other. When Prosper thinks his aunt may be close to finding him, he asks his friend Hornet, "'you don't think... that we should leave, Bo and I?'" (67). Hornet replies that the group would stick together, even if any one of them puts the others

in danger. These children care more about each other than they do for themselves, a quality exalted in this book.

When these children have to flee their hideout, they remember “Ida Spavento... [who] told [them] she would help” (228). Ida lets the children move in with her, and when Bo and Prosper are missing, Ida pulls the children together for an all out search effort (233). She ends up inviting all the children to live with her, having grown to care for them so much she’s “relieved” when they tell her they want to live with her (335). Caring for each other helps all these characters escape from a wicked, uncaring aunt and many other dangers throughout the book.

In *The Boys Start the War* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, Mrs. Hatford tries to give the Malloy family a good Buckman welcome. She bakes a cake, telling her boys “it’s the traditional way to greet a new family in the neighborhood... The Bensons did it for us the first week we moved in, and I’ll never forget how good that cake tasted after unpacking all day” (44). She also sends her four sons over to the Malloys’ house, telling them that “with the four of [them] working, [they’ll] have their windows done in no time, and it’s the least [they] can do for new neighbors” (62). Mrs. Hatford exemplifies care for people, empathizing with them as they move in next door, and offering help in whatever way she can, extending friendship to them.

*Because of Winn Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo is based on the idea of caring for each other – one point of the novel is that a community forms when its members care about each other, taking time to get to know each other. Opal’s father, the preacher, “always tell[s] [her] that [they] should help those less fortunate than” (16) themselves, and Opal takes his advice, seeking out friends in her new town. She meets Gloria Dump, who

listens “with all her heart, and it felt good” (68). Winn Dixie, Opal’s dog, also shows care and concern for Miss Franny Block, and “he would sit up tall, protecting her, with his ears standing up straight on his head, like soldiers” (99) whenever she had her shaking fits. Opal worries about “protecting [Winn Dixie] from the thunder” (157), caring about his fear and safety. This community comes together because Winn Dixie and Opal reach out to various members of the community, caring about them, listening, and sharing.

Wolf, in *A Mouse called Wolf* by Dick King Smith, rescues Mrs. Honeybee when she falls and breaks her ankle. When Wolf sees her laying on the ground, groaning in pain, “he ran across the room and climbed up the curtains and onto the windowsill...At the top of his voice Wolf began to sing ‘help!’” (73-74) to a passing police officer, saving Mrs. Honeybee. Again, this children’s book shows that helping those in need is a good quality. Mrs. Honeybee and Wolf become close friends.

Adult chosen children’s books also promote care for others, being a major theme in many of these books. In *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo, Despereaux dedicates himself to a princess, and, when told to renounce her or die, says “I am not sorry. I will not renounce my actions. I love her. I love the princess” (56). Despereaux believes that loving others is “a good thing” (58). His motivation throughout the book is love for, commitment to this human princess. He cares about her welfare, going “to the dungeon to save the princess” (233), despite all his fears, and the very real possibility of death.

In contrast to Despereaux’s care for the princess, we see Chiaroscuro the rat learning how to torture prisoners. According to his mentor, Botticelli, “this is how to torture a prisoner: first, you must convince him that you are a friend. Listen to him.

Encourage him to confess his sins. And when the time is right, talk to him. Tell him you will forgive him. This is a wonderful joke to play on a prisoner, to promise forgiveness... Because... you will promise it – ha- but you will not grant it. You gain his trust. And then you deny him. You refuse to offer the very thing he wants” (89). Basically, Chiaroscuro works to betray, pretending to care for and then revealing he doesn’t, a prisoner. In this book, betrayal is presented as true torture – an evil. Pretending to care about someone when you actually don’t, only to hurt them is cruel.

Miggery Sow, a young peasant girl in this book, desperately wants to become a princess, but no one cares about what she wants. Finally, the princess asks, “What do you want, Miggery Sow?” (254), and she cries out, “I want my ma!” (254). The princess has empathy for this young girl, who’s holding her at knifepoint, thinking “Oh, poor Mig, she wants to be a princess so badly and she thinks that this is the way” (198). Again, kindness even in the light of someone else’s cruelty is exalted here. In fact, the princess’ empathy saves her, and she and Mig are able to become friends.

In the same way, Stanley rescuing Zero, in *Holes* by Louis Sachar, is his salvation from a curse generations old. Stanley “took hold of Zero’s forearms and pulled him upright. Then he stooped down and let Zero fall over his right shoulder” (170), carrying his limp body up the mountain to water. Stanley digs in the mud to get some fresh water, pouring it from his hands into Zero’s mouth. When he finds an onion, he “only ate half. He gave the other half to Zero” (172). Stanley nurses his sick friend back to health, showing care and concern, and a willingness to do anything for his friend to help him.

More examples abound in *A View from Saturday* by E.L. Konigsburg. When Noah sees Allen, a man he’s recently met, he and his grandparents “called 911... [and]

sat with Allen until the ambulance came” (15). Nadia, with her grandparents and her father, save baby turtles after a storm hits Florida, saying, “sometimes one species has to help another get settled” (53). Julian also shows he cares for animals, not wanting his enemy’s dog “Arnold [to] eat the drugged treats” (112) someone had placed there as a trick. He replaces the treats with regular ones, and the dog remains unscathed. Helping out those in need, whether human or animal, is valued highly in this book. Four students get together to help out their teacher, giving her “a lift” (97) by helping her feel welcome in school after her accident. Mrs. Olinski, the teacher, comments that she’s found “a cup of kindness” at the end of the book, just as “Noah, Nadia, and Ethan found kindness in others and learned how to look for it in themselves” (157). The characters in this book find kindness in each other, helping each other through a year of school, and finding a great group of friends.

Crane man and Tree Ear, in *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park, care deeply for each other. For example, when Tree Ear comes home so exhausted from work that he cannot feed himself, “Crane man picked up a little rice in his fingers, and insistently, but still without a word, began feeding Tree Ear as if he were a baby” (22). When Tree Ear prepares to leave on his trip to Songdo and hears that his master will take feed and care for Crane man while he’s away, he feels “an enormous wave of relief wash over him...it had been his greatest worry – how Crane man would eat while he was away” (101). He gives Crane man a gift – a clay monkey – that “over the past month or so [he’d] filled his idle time” with molding (105). Crane man and Tree Ear truly care for each other, not only in providing for and helping each other, but also in expressing care through a gift.

Ajima and Min, Tree Ear's master and his wife, also show they care in many ways. Ajima sends Tree Ear off with some sweet *gokkam*, "each luscious piece reminding him of Ajima's care" (109). Ajima provided Tree Ear's lunch (and dinner) every day, filling his bowl every evening with enough food for his and Crane Man's supper (41). Ajima also gives Tree ear her son's old "jacket and pantaloons made of heavy cotton, quilted and padded – the warmest of garments" (56). At the end of the story, Ajima and Min ask Tree Ear "if [he] would live with [them] from now on" (146), knowing he's alone in the world, and needs somewhere to live. Ajima provides another example of care for others, providing for a poor boy, and his only friend's, needs.

Grandma, in *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck, exhibits similar care for others. When collecting money at a Legion Auxiliary lunch/turkey shoot, Grandma refuses to give anyone change, getting "more than a dime off everybody, except from those she knew couldn't pay more" (48). The money goes to a woman whose son was severely disabled in the war, who has no other way of providing for herself or her son (51). After a tornado hits the town, Grandma goes to check on Old Man Nyquist, because "nobody'd go near him but Grandma" (121). She then goes to check on Mrs. Wilcox, and, finding her safe, leaves, "bustling to prove she hadn't given two hoots about Mrs. Wilcox", but Mary Alice "saw through that" (123). Mary Alice admires her grandmother's kindness and care for others. She respects and learns to care for her grandmother as these qualities are revealed.

Bud, in *Bud Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis, finds kindness in many people as he journeys to find his father. When Bud tries to get in for a free meal at the mission, the guard refuses him entrance until "a very tall, square shaped man in old blue overalls

looked down at me and said, ‘Clarence, what took you so long?’” (47), telling the guard that Bud was his son, getting him inside for a meal. Later, a librarian saves Bud a special book, and seeing he hadn’t eaten, “handed [him] a paper bag and gave [him] a... smile” (91). He found a cheese sandwich inside. Later, Louis, who sees Bud as he drives by, gives Bud a lift, and “a spare baloney and mustard sandwich and an apple” (100), along with a bottle of pop. He ends up taking Bud to Grand Rapids, where he meets his grandfather. The characters Bud meets during his journey exemplify care, helping him in his need.

Alyce, in *The Midwife’s Apprentice*, has many opportunities to help those in need. When she sees boys throw a cat in the river, “she dragged it out of the water” (8), and tells it, “‘by cock and pie, cat, I would have you live’” (9), showing her concern for the cat’s life. She does the same for Will, creeping out on a branch over a river and yelling, “‘grab it, Will’”, saving him. Later, she helps Will with a cow that’s having trouble giving birth (50). Alyce even helps a hungry young boy, pulling “parsnip tops meant for the cows and some cheese she had saved for the cat and fed instead the hungry boy” (63). She sends him up the road “to the manor” because “they are hiring boys to help with the threshing” (66), knowing he will be well cared for there. Alyce exhibits care and concern for others, sharing what little she has with the young boy, and offering help to both animals and people in need.

Crispin, from *Crispin: the cross of lead* by Avi, both experiences the benefits of others’ care and cares for others himself. The priest in his hometown works to help Crispin escape the evil Aycliffe, who’s trying to kill him. The priest tells him to “remain hidden in the forest for another day” so he can “find some food to sustain [Crispin] for a

while. And perhaps someone will know the best way to go” (39). A woman feeds Crispin some porridge before he leaves, and offers him some bread for his journey (48). Crispin’s friend Bear is more concerned for his safety than his own, telling him “not to pay any mind to [him]. Just run” if there is any trouble (136). Crispin survives because of people’s help, and finds a friend in Bear, who cares about his safety.

Crispin, in turn, exhibits care for others, as well – especially his newfound friend Bear. When praying for his parents souls, for example, he “added Bear’s name to those for whom [he] begged protection” (207). Out of gratitude for Bear’s friendship, when Bear is imprisoned, Crispin “resolved to help free him – even if it cost [him his] new life to do so” (253). Crispin does free Bear, and the two escape from their captors, fighting them off and leaving the city singing together (296). Again, Crispin’s actions exhibit his care for Bear – being willing to sacrifice his own life for him, praying for his protection.

*Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech provides more examples of care and concern for others. Gramps, when he “noticed a woman leaning over the fender of her car”, and “marched off to her rescue” (27). Gramps and Gram are recipients of kindness later in the book, when Gram is bit by a water snake. A boy they’ve met at the stream offers his help, placing “his mouth against Gram’s bloody leg. He sucked and spit, sucked and spit” (95), and guides Sal and her grandparents to the nearest hospital. This boy’s helpfulness, as well as Gramp’s helpfulness for a woman stranded on the road exhibit care for strangers.

*Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse is full of examples of caring about people, many of which reflect social consciousness. Billie Jo, who is upset about men shooting rabbits, comments that “at least... they went to families that needed the meat” (7). Later, Billie Jo comments that despite the poverty of everyone around her, “Ma donated: three jars of

apple sauce and some cured pork, and a feed-sack nightie she'd sewn for our coming baby" (16) when people came asking for help. Another day a boy comes to their house, and "asked for food. He couldn't pay anything, but Ma set him down and gave him biscuits and milk" (58). When Billie Jo and her father, still grieving the loss of her mother and baby brother, hear that an infant has been found on the steps of the church, they "pulled out a box with the rest of the clothes Ma had made for [their] new baby and ... drop[ped] them by the church" (185). Billie Jo and her family care about those around them, offering help to anyone they know who needs it, despite their own pain and poverty.

Members of their small town community act very similarly, being a wonderful example of even the poor extending help to others in need, caring more for others than themselves. Billie Jo and her father go to a community ball, where the townspeople raise "thirty three dollars for infantile paralysis" (115). When the government sends food to the school for the hungry children, "the bakery sent loaves of bread and Scotty Moore, George Nall, and Willie Harkins brought in milk straight from their farms. Real lunch and then stomachs full and feeling fine for classes in the afternoon" (117). Later, when a family shows up in a beat up at school in a beat up old truck, Billie Jo's teacher told them "they could stay as long as they wanted" (120). Every day, the students "bring fixings for soup and ... share it at lunch with our guests, the family of migrants who have moved out from the dust and Depression and moved into our classroom" (121). Some of the students even "bring in toys and clothes for the children" (121). When a local still is closed by the sheriff, he decided the half ton of sugar he confiscated "should find its way into the mouths of [the] kids" at the school, so their teacher bakes for them (126). Later, when the

town is caught in a dust storm during a funeral, “a woman opened her home to [them] not just [Billie Jo and her father], but the entire funeral procession” (164). This small Texan community exhibits care and compassion for one another, extending kindness and help not just to other townsfolk, but also to any who come through their town needing assistance.

Again, in investigating this moral issue, we see that both adult and child chosen books exhibit similar characteristics. Adult and child chosen books encourage selfless care for others, both friends and strangers. They also imply the need for a social consciousness, extending care and concern to a wider community.

### **Summary/Conclusion:**

Morality pervades our society, influencing people’s actions, voting preferences, and the way people treat each other. The moral content in book preferences may be an indicator of the moral values members of society espouse. Kohlberg, Piaget, and Narvaez’ studies suggested that children and adults think differently about morality, that children are possibly a moral subgroup in society. Other studies suggest that children and think about morality in ways similar to adults, being able to both analyze and relate to moral content in books as do adults. From the picture these 22 books represented, it seems that other studies, such as Townsend and DiGuilio, Clare and Gallimore, and Rives, Smith and Staples, who believe that children and adults relate to moral content in literature in similar ways, may be true. However, this study seems to indicate that children do not necessarily need formal moral instruction, already naturally choosing literature that reflects a similar moral consciousness to adult readers. In fact, the

overarching result in this study indicates that children and adults seem to be attracted to similar moral ideals.

In looking at the moral content in children's literature, I discovered the similar ways children and adults relate to the morality promoted in these books. Understanding how children, as one subgroup of society, interpret and relate to moral content in literature has broader implications for society, especially for those serving children in schools, homes, and libraries. This study provides a picture of one way adults and children think about literature, about morality, and about each other.

### **Implications of Research:**

This study has implications for anyone working with children. First, findings impact the selection policies for librarians in both public and school libraries, indicating that involving children's choices in the selection of books is quite safe morally, since books they choose seem to reflect a moral consciousness similar to adults'. Librarians may also adjust their selection policies to better reflect children's recommendations and choices, based on a better understanding of the ways children see the world.

In some ways, this study assessed the effectiveness of adults to choose books reflecting the moral characteristics children relate to. Adults don't seem to need to adjust their own thinking about moral content in children's books. Teachers and school administrators, for example, may think differently about their use of children's literature to teach morals, possibly incorporating media literacy skills in their curriculum because there seems to be little need to reinforce moral standards adults approve of. Children's book choices already reflect the morality adults seem to naturally promote in their book choices for children. In general, this study provided a picture of the kind of morality that

resonates with children and adults, helping adults better understand and interact with children.

Another area this study may impact is the debate on censorship. Children's books are especially vulnerable to censorship, as adults working with children are concerned about the effects moral content may have on child readers. Understanding the lack of differences in moral values children are attracted to in literature may help educators, parents, and librarians trust children's choices more. Because children's and adults' book choices reveal similar moral content, it may indicate that children are capable, on their own, of choosing literature that reflects broader Western social moral norms and relieve some adult concerns regarding children's ability to choose appropriate literature for themselves.

Beyond the impact this research may have on those working with children, this study may influence academic research in philosophy and religion. The moral values presented in books chosen by children can be an indicator of current children's moral values, or even a reflection of changes in society as a whole. The moral values found in these books may present philosophy and religious studies with a picture of what morality looks like in American society at large and of how little children's morality differs from adult morality in this culture. For the library/information science profession at large, this study can influence the way information professionals think about not just access to information, but its moral impact on information users, as well as understanding the effect personal moral values can have on the choices users make for access.

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### **Annotated Bibliography of Children's Books:**

#### Newbery Books: (Adult Chosen)

Avi. *Crispin: the cross of lead*. New York: Hyperion Paperbacks for Children, 2002.

Crispin searches for his true identity while fleeing the steward of his manor, who is trying to kill him. On his way, he becomes apprenticed to a friendly minstrel named Bear and becoming entangled in a peasant rebellion.

Creech, Sharon. *Walk Two Moons*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1994.

Sal travels with her grandparents to Lewiston, Idaho to pay her last respects to her mother. Along the way, Sal relates the story of her friend Phoebe, who's also dealing with the loss of her mother.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud Not Buddy*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1999.

Bud leaves Flint, Michigan in search of his father, whom he believes is Herman E. Calloway, a famous musician.

Cushman, Karen. *The Midwife's Apprentice*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1995.

Alyce, a homeless young girl, works for a midwife, trying to find her place in the small community.

DiCamillo, Kate. *The Tale of Despereaux*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2003.

Despereaux, a very small mouse, falls in love with a princess, rescuing her from a rat named Chiaroscuro (Roscurio) and his unwitting ally, Miggery Sow when they try to lock her in the dungeon forever.

Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

When Billie Jo's mother is killed after a terrible accident, she and her father try to heal, keeping hope alive during dust bowl Texas during the Depression.

Kadohata, Cynthia. *Kira Kira*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2004.  
Katie and her family cope with her sister Lynn's cancer in the 1950's American south.

Konigsburg, E. L. *The View from Saturday*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1996.  
The Souls, for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, become close friends and compete in the Academic Bowl, encouraging their teacher Mrs. Olinski, and reminiscing about their life changing summers.

Park, Linda Sue. *A Single Shard*. New York: Dell Yearling, 2001.  
Tree Ear becomes apprenticed to the amazing potter Min, hoping to become a potter himself, despite being a homeless orphan. When he takes on the responsibility of transporting his master's work to Songdo, hoping his master will gain a commission from the emperor, he leaves behind his friend Crane man, facing obstacles on his own for the first time.

Peck, Richard. *A Year Down Yonder*. New York: Puffin Books, 2000.  
Mary Alice is forced to spend a year with her grandmother, in a small southern town during the Depression. She slowly learns to appreciate her eccentric grandmother, helping her through a long winter.

Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. New York: Yearling, 1998.  
Stanley Yelnats, who's been sent to Camp Green Lake to dig holes as payment for a crime he's not committed, uncovers his past and discovers new friends.

Young Reader's Choice Award and North Carolina Children's Choice Books (child chosen)

Bruchac, Joseph. *Skeleton Man*. New York: Harper Trophy, 2001.  
Molly knows her "uncle" is up to no good, feeling sure he's kidnapped her parents. Following a rabbit guide in her dreams, she saves her parents and escapes her captor.

Clements, Andrew. *Frindle*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1996.  
Nick decides to create a new word to replace the word "pen". When the entire school takes on his crusade, Nick comes up against his English teacher and the principal, even making the national news.

Coville, Bruce. *My Teacher Fried My Brains*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1991.  
Duncan suspects another alien has taken a teaching position at his school, and searches for clues as to which of the new teachers is the infiltrator.

DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Winn Dixie*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2000.

Having rescued a dog at a local Winn Dixie, Opal meets and befriends the people of her new town.

Funke, Cornelia. *The Thief Lord*. New York: Scholastic, 2001.

Prosper and Bo flee their cruel aunt, befriending other homeless children in Venice, who are cared for by Scipio, the Thief Lord. They accept a job to steal a wooden wing from Ida Spavento, while avoiding Victor the detective and discovering the secret of the wing.

Hornik, Laurie Miller. *The Secrets of Ms. Snickle's Class*. New York: Clarion Books, 2001.

In a classroom with the rule, "No telling secrets", one student searches for her peers' secrets, exposing them with disastrous results.

Sachar, Louis. *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1995.

When Miss Jewls leaves to have a baby, her students go through a series of interesting substitutes.

Smith, Dick King. *A Mouse Called Wolf*. New York: Dell Yearling, 1997.

Mrs. Honeybee befriends a musical mouse named Wolf, who becomes her student and eventually composes his own music.

Spinelli, Jerry. *Crash*. New York: Yearling, 1996.

Crash learns to appreciate his Quaker neighbor Penn, coping with his grandfather's stroke.

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *The Boys Start the War*. New York: Dell Yearling, 1993.

The Hatford boys are upset when they see that their new neighbors are three girls, so they start a prank war, hoping to drive the family away.

Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Shiloh Season*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1996.

Marty and his family feel threatened by Judd, a dangerous drunk. When Judd is hurt in a truck accident, the family reaches out to him.

Never underestimate the power of children's literature. It's a great work of art when you write to children, because most authors will have in mind that adults will read it as well We underestimate children's books along with underestimating children themselves. Both can do so much more than we give them credit for." â€”Heidi Bork Bodin, Facebook.