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The Short Story as a Vehicle of Literary Engagement for Standard  
Eight Afrikaans-Speaking Pupils in the Orange Free State

By

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(née Jones)

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

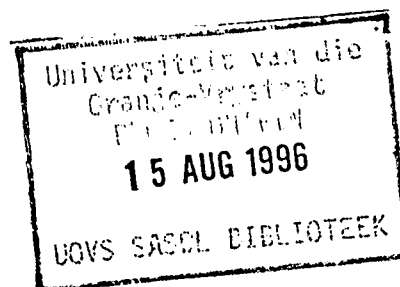
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# 1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

## 1.1 Introduction

This study was stimulated by information gleaned from Afrikaans-speaking, Standard eight pupils over a period of five years. These pupils represented different schools throughout the Orange Free State and the focus of this information was their classroom experience of literature in the school English programme. Informal classroom discussion on literature resulted in a more specific discussion of the the pupils' classroom experience of literature. These discussions seemed to point to a rather negative perception of the classroom experience and I drew up a questionnaire in an attempt to analyze the pupils' negative responses. A pattern began to emerge from the questionnaires which stimulated me to attempt a study where the pupils' reception of the text was to be the main focus of investigation. The questionnaires were soon abandoned as I realized that these particular responses would not be directly relevant to a study investigating pupil response to specific texts. These initial, informal classroom discussions were spread over a period of five years and information gained in this way represented the responses of approximately 500 pupils from all over the province. The emerging pattern of response did seem to justify the series

of findings gained without providing a statistical database. The fact that pupils came from different schools and therefore had experienced different teachers and classroom approaches, made the conclusions drawn from these informal discussions meaningful in that they were demographically representative. In other words, the inputs of pupils used in this study do not reflect the teaching influence of one or two teachers only. The following interesting facts emanated from these discussions:

#### 1.1.1

Pupils felt that they could make a contribution to classroom discussion on a literary work if they were given the opportunity for such individual expression. They all stated that their contributions would be in the area of interpretation, but that they were seldom, if ever, given an opportunity during classroom sessions.

#### 1.1.2

All pupils felt that there were only "right" and "wrong" answers to questions set by their teachers on specific literary works. The "right" answer was the one prescribed by the teacher.

#### 1.1.3

All pupils said that they rote-learned the teacher's "answers" and used these during examinations to achieve good passes.

## 1.1.4

Many pupils felt that a variety of shorter texts covering different themes would be more stimulating than one or two works of fiction read laboriously through the year. According to an article by Hogge, his second-language pupils started reading avidly once they were introduced to shorter texts:

*The classics which are meant to uplift us and provide us with a window onto the universal experience, were all too long for the average teenager to be bothered with - whether the teenager was a radical black or an apathetic white (Hogge 1991:31).*

Hogge's discovery seemed to be echoed in my own discovery that a variety of shorter texts could not only become a vehicle for meaningful literary engagement, but could also give pupils the opportunity of presenting their own interpretations without any teacher intervention, in other words, could promote a reader-centred classroom approach. The shorter text could be read, pupil response recorded and discussed in the allotted class time.

## 1.1.5

Pupils displayed very little understanding of different literary genres and viewed each classroom text as a static, separate entity which in no way related to their reading outside the classroom. This finding is underscored by

similar observations made by B. van Dyk of first language high school readers, of whom he writes:

*In my experience, pupils need to be given clear parameters regarding what they are learning in order to benefit from it. The literature syllabus as currently structured does not provide this. Consider the syllabus from the pupil's point of view. On arriving at school on the first day, the pupil is normally given three books, usually a Shakespeare, a novel of Victorian fiction, and a modern play/novella/collection of short stories. At the same time he receives a booklet of 30-odd poems. He is told to begin reading one of the books for study in the first term.*

*Each book is then handled as a separate entity, as is each poem. The texts become mysterious containers of meaning which can only be opened by the teacher's intervention. One of these texts is completed, it is shelved as a separate body of information which normally has no connection to any other text, or to the action of reading, while the next text is brought forth for consideration. The pupil is given to believe that what he is in fact doing is some kind of arcane procedure which scrutinizes a text for a length of time (for a poem, usually for 40*

*minutes) before it is relegated to a file where it will remain until examinations demand retrieval.....To the pupil, then, the text becomes a static object, its meaning contained within itself and rendered incapacitated once it has been 'dealt with' (1994: 18-20).*

The main thrust of the rest of the article is a plea for a shift to be made away from the idea of literature in the first language syllabus to a more general idea of reading. Van Dyk's article was inspired by the same sort of observations of pupils making meaning as was this study.

## 1.2 Rationale

The above observations, as well as a time constraint of only four hours teaching time per week, seemed to suggest the use of a pupil-centred reading course where a variety of shorter texts could be read in class.

The short story presented not only an opportunity for a thorough study of a specific genre, but an opportunity to attempt a reader centred approach in the second-language classroom. Reception Theory presented the best theoretical basis for a study such as this as it places much emphasis on the role of the reader :

*a text, once it leaves its author's hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work (Rosenblatt 1978:ix).*

This premise based on reception aesthetics describes the approach used in this enquiry into Afrikaans adolescents' making meaning of a text. The term "Reception Theory" will refer to this shift in concern from the author/text to the reader and the text.

### 1.2.1

#### Reception Theory as theoretical basis

Reader-centred theorists see the literary text as a communication process with distinguishable elements, viz. author/sender; text/message and reader/receiver. The meaning of a text can only be derived by taking into account the reader's response to the text:

*The effects of the text, psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of the reader (Tompkins 1981:ix).*

Thus the emphasis for Reception Theory is firmly focused on the role of the reader in the reading process. It allows not only for individual and subjective interpretations of a text, but provides a sound basis for inquiry into how the

reader makes meaning. This study attempts primarily to establish a degree of literary engagement using a variety of short stories coupled with a reader-centred classroom approach. By literary engagement is meant here the ability to recognize thematic features in the text; a grasp of the content of the text and an ability to respond to the text drawing on the reader's own horizon of expectations. (This term is dealt with in the next chapter). Thus, responding to the text would include activities such as analyzing, personalizing and interpreting. Emphasis has been placed on pupil articulation of his/her own reading experience and not on the pupil's understanding of the teacher's interpretation. Articulating about literature covers a wide variety of ways in which pupils indicate their responses to texts. In a classroom context, the pupil is expected to make public a vision of his/her reading experience. In this way the pupil is led to develop procedures and strategies which are aimed at enriching his/her reading experience. The whole process is intended to instil an awareness of the ways in which the text guides and determines the reader's responses; the value of good writing, and the motives that lie behind the author's message. The question now arises: can literary engagement be measured or quantified? If literature learning is to be measured, then a testing program covering the whole of the field of literature should be implemented systematically. This would be a major undertaking, so the focus here is only on the concept of literary engagement. Moreover, it is exceedingly difficult to quantify literary engagement,

so this study attempts only to reflect the extent to which a degree of literary engagement has occurred, and to do this it employs three questions which pinpoint the three main components of literary engagement as outlined above. At best a test is an imperfect measure and these three questions are not regarded as the ideal instruments, but the results do give some insight into the 'what' of the group's reading experience. The whole process of studying the profile of a group and providing a platform for their own responses to selected texts, provides valuable information about the particular group's reading expectations and the way in which these are fulfilled.

A large proportion of pupils indicated (as already mentioned) that they could not make sense of a text without teacher intervention and approval. This study proves that this particular reading expectation is not valid, but is perhaps based on a traditional classroom approach where a New Critical approach and text-centred method have robbed young readers of their belief in their own interpretations.

In a later section, an analysis of the pupils' responses to the questions put to them, draws attention to the degree of literary engagement which can be achieved in the classroom through a pupil-centred approach in which all discussion is initiated from pupils' own responses to the texts.

This study based on Reception Theory may provide insights regarding the following questions:



- How does the adolescent respond to the short story as genre?
- How does the adolescent think or feel about a text after reading it?
- How does a teacher develop a greater understanding of his/her pupils' literary interpretation so as to refine his/her pupils skills of literary analysis?
- Can literary engagement be achieved with a group of second-language speakers by using a number of shorter texts with very little teacher intervention?
- Can a reader-centred approach, where the reader is regarded as a vital link in the communication process between the author, the message and its concretization, be successfully practised in the classroom?

The reader group selected for this enquiry will be fully described in a later section. The responses were collected from a group of one hundred girls and boys from all over the Orange Free State, who visit the Education Centre in Bloemfontein on a regular basis. The essential hypothesis of the study is that literary engagement can be achieved with second-language learners through a reader-centred approach where the teacher is a facilitator in the pupils' process of making meaning and where the classroom focus on their own responses promotes their own insight into the process. An important consideration here is that a pupil-centred approach includes more than simply focusing on

pupil responses to texts: it implies also that the researcher (or teacher) makes a thorough study of the learners' reading background and interests so as to gain insight into the reading expectations of the pupils which will lead to effective classroom guidance during the discussion sessions.

As this study is based on the concepts gleaned from Reception Theory, it is essential that the main features of this theory and their relevance to this study be clearly delineated. This process is attempted in the next chapter.

## 2 RECEPTION THEORY AND ITS RELEVANCE AS A BASIS FOR DISCUSSION WHEN DEALING WITH THE RECEPTION OF LITERATURE BY THE ADOLESCENT READER.

### 2.1 Towards a definition of Reception Theory.

The terms reception (Rezeption); "response" or "effect" (Wirkung) as well as aesthetics of reception (Rezeptionästhetik) have been energetically debated, defined and investigated by literary theorists throughout the world over the past two decades. German scholars, Jauss and Iser of the Constance University are regarded as the major proponents of Reception Theory. Reaction to social, intellectual and literary developments in West Germany during the late 1960s emerged as a collective effort by the Constance group and culminated in what is commonly accepted as Reception Theory. Reception Theory has left no area of literary endeavour untouched and is related to recent American critical endeavour called "reader-response criticism".

Followers of Reception Theory are concerned with the reader's response to the text. Literary theorists became concerned with, not so much an analysis of the text itself, as a shift towards a study of the reader's response to the text. The most significant contribution encompassed in

this new paradigm is that the object of study has shifted from studies of the text itself to a view that the reader forms part of a literary communication process (Van Collier 1983:5).

Reading is seen as a literary communication process which includes three main elements, viz. sender-message-receiver. The sender is the author who encodes a text (the message) which is addressed to a potential receiver (the reader) who must make meaning by decoding the text. Only when this cycle is completed can there be any discussion of meaning or literary interpretation. Briefly, then, Reception Theory concerns itself with the text and the reader as opposed to Formalism which is focused mainly on analysis of the text. It is an umbrella term which also includes empirical research on reader-response (Holub 1984:xii). The term aesthetics of reception or Rezeptionasthetik was used by Hans Robert Jauss, who felt that literature should be treated as a process which critically examines both the production and the reception of the text. Meaning of the literary text is still the focal point of critical enquiry, but reception theorists have shifted the angle of focus from the text to the reader.

In North America similar paradigm shifts were being developed under the umbrella term "reader-response criticism". Their work did not constitute a concerted collective effort, like that of the Constance University

group; these reader-response theorists were working, not only in North America, but all over the world and they have had little contact with one another. Holub makes the important point:

*If reader-response criticism has become a critical force, as some would maintain, it is by virtue of the ingenuity of labeling rather than any commonality of effort (1984:xiii).*

There has been little contact between the adherents of reader-response criticism and reception theorists and their work has been, until now, mutually exclusive.

Reader-response theorists have been influenced by quite different precursors, which, in turn, have led to rather disparate views on the objective basis for study. Van Boheemen-Saaf says in this regard:

*The products of (their) critical activity are no longer of use to the teaching of literature. They have no important discursive content which can be transmitted to a new generation of readers. So the appearance of this new direction in criticism asks for a revaluation of more than the critical product, it asks for a revaluation of the function of literature in the classroom and society, and the role of the teacher (1980:15).*

Reception Theory as developed by the theorists of the Constance University, on the other hand, provides us with instruments of insight into how literature is understood by a specific interpretive community which, in turn, serves as a basis for effective planning for and understanding of a literature program. By interpretive community is meant certain common norms of interpretation which regulate the way in which a specific reader-group thinks and perceives (Lategan 1992:10). My study is concerned with the responses of a very specific reader group with a fairly clearly determined interpretative community, and with assessing and encouraging those responses: a classroom method is used in which the teacher is a facilitator instead of a central interpreter in the reading process. The main theorists of Reception Theory are Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser of the Constance University. These two theorists' work forms the basis for this study. Their ideas of the reader making meaning and the reading process form the foundation for the classroom method and approach taken in this study.

## 2.2 Influences and predecessors

The wide acceptance of Reception Theory is perhaps partly explained when one reviews its extensive origins and influences. Historical, social, political, and

psychological forces and events in the 1960s in Germany led to the development of a new awareness in a post-Nazi Germany where society was coming to grips with its past.

Precursors to Reception Theory are not hard to find and audience response has been highlighted even as far back as Aristotle with his catharsis theory. Several theories and ideas kept recurring in the 1960s and prepared fertile ground for Reception Theory. Holub identifies five main predecessors who have been referred to extensively by reception theorists and have also established a text-reader focus in their work. They are: Russian Formalism, Prague structuralism, the phenomenology of Roman Ingarden, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics and the sociology of literature (1984:14). I will very briefly outline certain key contributions to concepts of Reception Theory by the abovementioned theorists. Understanding of key terms and concepts used by Jauss and Iser is facilitated by a brief look at their origins.

### 2.2.1

#### Russian Formalists

The most unlikely contribution by the Formalists stems from their preoccupation with laying bare the device and how this constitutes an aesthetic object enjoyed by the reader. The Russian Formalists extended the concept of form to include aesthetic perception and included the process of interpretation itself. This approach is closely aligned to the viewpoint of the reception theorists.

## 2.2.2

## Prague Structuralists

The main exponents of Prague Structuralism are Jan Mukarovsky and Felix Vodicka. Until quite recently Westerners have had no access to the work of these theorists, but between 1967 and 1974 much of their work had been translated into German and read extensively in Germany. It was Mukarovsky who first recognizes the relationship between literature and society and that sole concentration on the text would not deal adequately with this relationship. Mukarovsky states that the artwork or artefact (the work itself) has to be reconstructed by the recipient or receiver (Fokkema 1978:25). He continues that the aesthetic object is formed in the consciousness of the perceiver. Mukarovsky also acknowledges the social and cultural background against which the reader interprets the text. This comes close to Jauss's horizon of expectations which is a key concept in Reception Theory and allows for various interpretations or concretizations of the text. Mukarovsky, however, never formulates Reception Theory as a unified field of research, but his student Vodicka recognizes reception-related problems in his outline of the tasks of literary history (Holub 1984:35).

## 2.2.3

## Roman Ingarden

Ingarden's structure of indeterminacy has exerted a most significant influence on the theorists of Reception Theory,



in particular on Wolfgang Iser whose theory of indeterminacy in the reading process forms a cornerstone of his theory.

Ingarden sees the literary work as consisting of four layers. These four layers are the following: the first layer consists of the word sounds and aesthetic effects such as rhythm and rhyme, the second layer comprises the words or sentences as meaning units; and the third and fourth layers consist of the represented objects to be completed by the reader. Ingarden recognizes that there is no way that these objects can be totally determined and the objects represented in a literary work display "spots" or "places" of indeterminacy (Holub 1984:25). The reader of the text has actively to fill in or complete these "spots" or "gaps" to make meaning. Ingarden refers to this process as concretization. This term is extensively discussed by Iser and forms part of his theory on the processing of the text.

#### 2.2.4

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Gadamer concerns himself with philosophy and ontology in his questioning of methodology and its relationship to truth. He discusses the history of hermeneutics in his study and sees art as a paradigm for understanding in general (Gadamer 1975:146). An important facet of Gadamer's theory on hermeneutics has been utilized by reception theorists, i.e. that one's prejudices and

preconceptions are a fundamental part of any hermeneutic situation. These prejudices or misconceptions are not, however, to be regarded as a barrier to understanding. A true study of hermeneutics must take into account its own prejudices and history. Gadamer introduces the word "horizon" to clarify what he means by a hermeneutical situation. Horizon refers to our "situatedness" and prejudices which we bring with us to a situation at any given time.

Although Gadamer's theories are abstract and very philosophical and not applied particularly to the reading process itself, these are the terms appropriated by Jauss for his "horizon of expectations" and Iser's "repertoire of the text". Both concepts are discussed below.

#### 2.2.5

##### Sociology of Literature

Several theorists such as Schucking, Hirsch and Lowenthal started investigating the sociology of literature, but it was only after the Second World War that German scholars were ready for a new approach. Especially during the 1960s, scholars started taking into account the public, the sociology of readers and the book market. Although no direct cause and effect line can be drawn from any one of the above movements, they all contributed in various ways to prepare the way for reception theorists such as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser.

### 2.3 Hans Robert Jauss

Jauss draws on the theories of Mukarovsky and the Russian Formalists and unites elements of both schools of thought in formulating his own theory regarding the relationship between literature and history. Jauss draws from the Prague Structuralists (Mukarovsky and others), who insisted on the historicity of literature, and the Formalists, who introduced aesthetic perception as a theoretical tool for exploring literary works (artefacts). Jauss believes:

*The relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication lies in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works already read. The obvious historical implication of this is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident (Jauss 1982:20).*

Clearly Jauss aims at restoring history to the centre of literary studies and wants to link artefacts of the past with present concerns. He called his theory "Aesthetics of

Reception" (Rezeptionasthetik) when it first appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Jauss posits that the historian of literary reception has a conscious, mediating role to play between the past and the present:

*A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence (1982:21).*

Thus the historian of literary reception is required to rethink constantly the works (artefacts) in a particular canon in the light of how they have influenced or affected and are influenced by current events and conditions. Literary history becomes central to literary studies as it enables us to understand past meanings as part of present practices (Holub 1984:58).

### 2.3.1

#### Horizon of expectations

One of Jauss's greatest contributions to Reception Theory is his concept the horizon of expectations, which is relevant to my study in that it is applied when analyzing adolescent responses in a later section. As will be demonstrated through the pupil responses, this "horizon"

determines the extent of pupil enjoyment and involvement with a literary text. Through this concept Jauss achieves an integration of history and aesthetics. The term is not altogether new to Jauss as we have seen from his precursor Gadamer's contribution. However, nowhere in his book "Toward an Aesthetic of Reception" does Jauss clearly define what he means by this term. Holub points out that Jauss has used the term in many different compound words or phrases:

*Jauss refers to a 'horizon of experience', a 'horizon of experience of life', a 'horizontal change' and a 'material horizon of conditions'. The relationship among these various uses is left just as nebulous as the category "horizon" itself. Jauss seems to bank on the reader's common sense in understanding at least his main term. 'Horizon of expectations' would appear to refer to an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a 'system of references' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text (Holub 1984:59).*

Jauss postulates three main components to constructing this horizon of expectations, viz.:

- the reader's knowledge of a specific genre;
- the reader's reading experience and knowledge of literary-historical surroundings and

- the reader's knowledge of the difference between practical and literary language usage as well as the opposition between fiction and reality (1982:22).

A reader's horizon of expectations does not remain constant as it is a dynamic concept implying continual change and adjustment (Bosman 1987:9). The reader of a text goes into the reading process with a foreknowledge "*which is an element of the experience itself*" (Jauss 1982:23). As a result of his/her horizon of expectations, the reader comes to expect certain elements such as, for example, a beginning, a middle and an end or a happy ending to a love story. These expectations "*can then be maintained intact or altered, reorientated, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text*" (Jauss 1982:23).

A literary work is not read in a vacuum and a reader, by various means, is predisposed to a specific reception when the act of reading commences. It is this concept or theory provided by Jauss which provides a most valuable tool for gaining insight into the literary engagement of a group of real readers. My study attempts to gain insight into the predispositions or expectations of a specific group of adolescent readers. Their responses, which are documented in a later section, reveal their expectations, which in turn, provide the literature teacher with valuable insights regarding their level of development as far as literary engagement is concerned. Pupils were asked whether they

enjoyed the short story or not and this question required a motivated answer. The answers to this question indicate whether their expectations were met or not.

Jauss's contribution can have far-reaching implications for the teaching of literature insofar as it focuses on a hitherto unexplored component of the whole reading process, i.e. the pupil him-/herself (Bosman 1987:11). Jauss's emphasis on the history of literature also has serious implications for a study of this nature, in that the history of the text should be accounted for, so that pupils do not experience the selected texts in a vacuum. Pupils should be informed about the period in which the text was written and also its reception at the time of publication. Pupils should also be made aware of other possible receptions of the text. In the case of *The Suitcase* by Eskia Mphahlele, for example, pupils were requested to view the story from more than their own perspective during small group and class discussions. Pupils were also exposed to the reception of the teacher. It should be stressed that this study merely represents one example of a possible application of reception theories.

Jauss does, however, run into trouble with his attempt to objectify his concept of the horizon of expectations. He postulates that the horizon of expectations can be reconstructed and he achieves this by studying evidence or signals from the works themselves and thereby measuring the effect or impact on the reader against a horizon that is

abstracted from those works, and the distance between the horizon and the work is not an adequate criterion for determining literary value (Holub 1984:62). Paul de Man in the introduction to Jauss's "Toward and Aesthetic of Reception" points this out as well:

*Similarly, the horizon of expectation brought to a work of art is never available in objective or even objectifiable form, neither to its author nor to its contemporaries or later recipients (1988: xii).*

In spite of methodological problems, Jauss's concept of the horizon of expectations has been a valuable tool towards understanding the reader's role in the reading process. Understanding the expectations which the reader brings to the text, gives the teacher of literature an insight into the responses his/her pupils are likely to make to that text and serves as an indicator to the kind of guidance his/her pupils need when decoding the signals in the text itself. For instance, in my study, pupils' responses were used to initiate discussion on the texts: a process which encouraged pupils to explore and analyze these responses for validity. These discussions very often led to a re-reading of the text itself so as to scrutinize signals in the text.



The work of Jauss together with that of Wolfgang Iser, another reception theorist of the Constance school, constitutes the main body of work on Reception Theory.

## 2.4 Wolfgang Iser

Both Iser and Jauss were concerned with refocusing literary theory away from the author text as central paradigm to a shifted focus of the text/reader. Jauss was inspired to studies of Reception Theory through his concern about literary history, whereas Iser was concerned primarily with the text and how readers related to it. Iser came to Reception Theory through phenomenology and, as we have seen, the work of Ingarden. His early lecture "Die Appelstruktur der texte" (1970) which was delivered at the University of Constance, established Iser as one of the leading theorists of this school.

In the introduction to his book "The Act of Reading", Iser is at pains to point out that his main concern is the interaction between text and reader. His is a theory of aesthetic response (Wirkungstheorie) and not a theory of the aesthetics of reception which deals *"with existing readers whose reactions testify to certain historically conditioned experiences of literature"* (1976:x). The main point to establish here is that Iser's theory has its foundation in the text itself, but unlike New Criticism,

with a shift in focus to include the reader. Whereas traditional literary theorists of the New Criticism school sought to establish the meaning of a text by scrutinizing the text itself, Iser states:

*Such a meaning must clearly be the product of an interaction between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension. And, equally clearly, the reader cannot detach himself from such an interaction; on the contrary, the activity stimulated in him will link him to the text and induce him to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text. As text and reader thus merge into a single situation, the division between subject and object no longer apply, and it therefore follows that meaning is no longer an object to be defined, but is an effect to experienced (1976 9-10).*

Thus meaning is a product of the interaction between text and reader and the subsequent effect experienced by the reader.

Iser pinpoints three main areas for investigation, viz. the text and its inherent ability to produce meaning; secondly, the processing of the text in reading; and finally, the conditions which determine the text-reader interaction (1976:21). Iser aims at shedding more light on not only

how meaning is produced, but also what effects literature has on the reader. One of Iser's most important concepts in understanding the communication process between the reader and the text is his construct "repertoire of the text"

#### 2.4.1

The text and its processing.

##### 2.4.1.1

Repertoire of the text.

Iser's concept "repertoire of the text" comes close to Jauss's "horizon of expectations" in that both theorists use these constructs to facilitate understanding of the effects produced by a literary text on the reader who is an equal partner in the communication process between author and reader.

In an attempt to understand the functioning of the repertoire of the text, Iser explains what he understands by the relationship, fiction/reality. Iser sees the process text/reader as a communication process, and he identifies literature with fiction, which he does not see as the opposite of reality:

*If fiction and reality are to be linked, it must be in terms not of opposition but of communication, for the one is not the mere*

*opposite of the other - fiction is a means of telling us something about reality (1976:53).*

Iser emphasizes that once we accept that we are dealing with a communication process then the focus must include the hitherto neglected receptor of the message:

*Now if the reader and the literary text are partners in a process of communication, and if what is communicated is to be of any value, our prime concern will no longer be the meaning of that text (the hobbyhorse ridden by the critics of yore) but its effect (1976:54).*

This communication process between text and reader is initiated by the repertoire of the text, which constitutes the shared territory on which text and reader meet. Iser likens this reader/text communication process to the speech act in that conventions valid for speaker and receptor also play a role in the communication process between reader and text:

*The utterance must invoke a convention that is as valid for the recipient as for the speaker. The application of the convention must tie in with the situation - in other words, it must be governed by accepted procedures (1976:61).*

Iser believes that fictional language has the same basic characteristics as those of the illocutionary act (1976:61). The illocutionary act is a concept taken from the Speech Act Theory as developed by J.L.Austin and Searle, referring to those speech acts which inform, order, warn, and undertake. A prerequisite for communication between reader and text is that both share the same convention, which Iser defines as "a normative stability" (1976:61).

*The fictional text makes a selection from a variety of conventions to be found in the real world, and it puts them together as if they were interrelated. This is why we recognize in a novel, for instance, so many of the conventions that regulate our society and culture (Iser 1976:61).*

Unusual combinations of these conventions lead the reader to see what he would not normally see in everyday life. The fictional text reorganizes these conventions in that we find them in different and unexpected combinations:

*As a result, these conventions are taken out of their social contexts, deprived of their regulating function and so become subjects of scrutiny in themselves (Iser 1976:61).*

These conventions constitute the repertoire of the text and must not be totally familiar as the text would not fulfil its function of communicating something new to the reader. This, in essence, sums up Iser's theory of the difference between fiction and reality as well as his concept "repertoire of the text", which investigates the basis for communication between text and reader and the structure or inherent nature of the text. This insight is a valuable tool in the hands of any teacher of literature when attempting to guide young people in the process of making meaning. As evidenced in the analysis of pupils' responses gleaned from my study, it is clear that pupils do not understand the difference between reality and fiction and apply "real-life" as a norm of critical evaluation. It will be demonstrated in a later section that pupils can be led to a better understanding of the text if they understand Iser's distinction between reality and fiction. Their expectations of the text will be affected if they understand that literature has the function of communicating something new.

#### 2.4.2

##### Text-reader interaction

A particularly fascinating concept, established by Iser in his investigation into the reader-text communication process, is a structure he refers to as indeterminacy which governs this communication. Iser acknowledges that the communication process between text and reader is somewhat different from a face-to-face communication

process in that the reader is unable to test whether his/her understanding of a certain text is correct or not. Secondly, there is also no regulative context between text and reader for establishing content; in other words, the text cannot adapt or adjust itself to each reader reading the text (Iser 1976:166). In the face-to-face communication process there is specific intent for this type of communication and therefore the regulative context is inherent in the intent of the communication itself. Partners in a face-to face communication process ask each other questions to control intent, frame of reference or accuracy. The only codes or signals guiding the reader are in the text itself:

*The codes which might regulate this interaction are fragmented in the text and must first be reassembled or, in most cases, restructured before any frame of reference can be established (Iser 1976:166).*

The reader is unable to learn from the text whether his/her views of it are correct or not. This very fact can also serve as an impetus or inducement to communication. This "asymmetry" between text and reader underlies all communication processes (Iser 1976:167). Iser refers to this asymmetry as a "blank" or "indeterminacy" when referring to the reading process. This "blank" is not a given ontological fact, but is formed and modified by the imbalance inherent in dyadic interactions, as well as, the

imbalance between text and reader(Iser 1976:167). The reader can only achieve balance if these gaps or blanks are successfully filled. Iser points out that the text cannot change and is constantly bombarded with the reader's projections and, if these projections do not change or adjust as the reading process continues, then successful interaction between the text and reader cannot occur. The reader should continually be changing his/her views, which process in turn gives way to the common ground of a shared situation. A concept which has far-reaching implications for a study of this nature is Iser's accommodation of what reading does for the reader:

*It is only through readjustment of his own projections that the reader can experience something previously not within his experience, and this is something which ranges from a detached objectification of what he is entangled in, to an experience of himself that would otherwise be precluded by his entanglement in the pragmatic world around him (Iser 1976:167).*

Iser points out that the very nature of the imbalance between text and reader is not defined and precisely this indeterminacy increases the variety of communication possible.

The above insights have direct implications for any second-language reading programme. Pupils reading in their second



language may be precluded from a true literary involvement or a new or analytical view of him/herself in relation to the world around him/her, if this interaction is not successful. It is important that pupils be given the opportunity to grapple with the text on their own before teacher input occurs. The teacher should have a clear picture of his/her pupils' background and reading experience so as to anticipate the possible misconceptions which could prevent a successful reader/text interaction. For this reason pupils involved in this study were required to complete a questionnaire which aimed at providing me with this information. The conclusions drawn from these questionnaires will be dealt with in a later section.

Pupils were also made aware of the variety of communication possible in the text so as to ensure a richer, more stimulating literary engagement. This was achieved by sharing my own reception of the text with pupils, but only after they had read and discussed the text and recorded their responses on paper.

Iser's comment is very relevant here that although communication between text and reader implies a reader input as well, this input is controlled by the text. Thus in a certain sense, Iser's theory is firmly rooted in the text itself. Clearly there can be no question of successful communication between text and, in this case, the second-language adolescent reader, if response occurs on a purely arbitrary, emotional level. Pupils must be

systematically led to decode the signals inherent in the text. Iser refers to the "guiding devices" of the text which initiate communication. Meaning gained from the text cannot be equated with the mutual meeting points in the reader's frame of reference, but manifests itself through questioning existing experiences (Iser 1976:168). Without this quality then, reading could never be the mind-stretching, enriching experience that it is. By presenting adolescents with texts which challenge their frame of reference one ensures a valid literary involvement. At this point one needs to consider briefly what is meant by challenging the frame of reference of the reader within the context of a reader-centred approach to literature teaching. This can best be done by a comparison between a theoretical approach to literature teaching which disregards the pupil input, and a pupil-centred approach where meaning includes the pupil's frame of reference. The New Critics of whom Wellek and Warren were the main exponents claimed that no reader could grasp the pure meaning of a text:

*It might be experienced correctly or incorrectly. In every individual experience only a small part can be considered as adequate to the true poem. Thus, the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its many readers. Every single experience (reading, reciting, and so forth) is only an attempt - more or less*

*successful and complete- to grasp this set of norms or standards (1956 138-139).*

In other words, the literary work sets a standard which no reader, let alone the pupil, can ever achieve. Our task as readers is to prise the meaning from the text like extracting syrup from a deep, sticky container - we can only remove parts. This idea has dominated much of classroom approach to literature teaching in this country, according to the research done by Gardner(1989), Bosman(1987), Van Dyk(1994) and others. Respondents under study for this project evidenced the same text-centred approach in their literature classes(cf. Introduction). Reception Theory, on the other hand, offers a different approach. This is summarized by Rosenblatt:

*The poem is an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of reader and text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from every single angle important to him as a human being (1978:12).*

Rosenblatt gives us a view exactly opposite to that offered by Warren and Wellek: a view which has very different implications for the pupil in the literature classroom. These implications are relevant to my study in that they include the frame of reference of every individual pupil. According to Rosenblatt and Reception Theory, the text gains meaning only when a particular reader meets with it and brings his/her own background or frame of reference to bear on the text. Thus each pupil's reading constitutes the actual meaning of the text at that moment for the particular individual. The pupil contributes to the meaning he/she gleans from the text: this meaning of which the results can be challenged by encounters with peer group meanings or other interpretations such as the teacher's reading. The fact that other meanings exist does not make the pupil's contribution any less valid. When asked to articulate a response to a text, the pupil is drawing on his/her resources which include all previous texts he/she has encountered, crystallizing his/her thoughts and feelings and drawing from memory of life. The text, if seen in the above context, becomes a unique event in the experience of the reader: in this case the adolescent Afrikaans-speaking reader. Reading becomes a transaction between the reader, the text and other readers and no longer a laborious task to prise meaning from a text which may be "right" or "wrong" according to the canonized view of the teacher.

The implementation process of the above theoretical concepts is described in the next section.

### 3 IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

I devised the classroom method described below based on the principles of Reception Theory. The method focuses on the pupil's response and supports a transactional view of literary reading.

Bosman emphasizes that any method based on the principles of Reception Theory and where the intent is a reader-centred focus, must contain the following elements:

- The text must be read and experienced by each individual pupil him/herself.
- There must be some form of individual response by the pupil. This response may take many different forms such as contextual questions, multiple choice questions, semantic scales, evaluative criteria, open questions or short paragraphs can be used alternately. It is important that pupils' responses express aspects such as the emotions elicited by the text, the impressions left by the text, how the text relates to the pupil's frame of reference, associations aroused by the text, the central theme of the text. Pupils should be led gradually to motivate their opinions and should be guided to see what they read within a wider context and recognize how texts relate to one another.

- Pupil responses must be discussed by the class or in smaller group discussions. Under no circumstances may the teacher dominate these discussions.
- These discussions should lead to the integration of individual responses with the class response.
- Pupils should be exposed to other receptions of the same text so that they are able to view the text within a broader literary context.
- Pupils must be given the opportunity to explain or justify different receptions of the same text. This experience stimulates their own horizon of expectations (Bosman 1987:54 - 55).

Smith emphasizes three features of Reception Theory which should be displayed in any classroom which employs a method based on Reception Theory, viz. the capacity to integrate formal with social analysis, to construct a chain of receptions which are intergenerational based on real readers experiences, to reveal the socially formative nature of literature (Smith 1971:75). The above prerequisites were accommodated in the following ways:

- Pupils were provided the opportunity of addressing the issues involved and other possible receptions of the stories were discussed.
- Pupils were given the teacher's reception of the stories to ensure pupil exposure to a concretization other than their own so that they would experience different interpretations of the same text.

- Pupils were asked to identify theme as well as express their feelings about the story. This led to discussion on social praxis and they were able to learn why they responded the way they did. Smith makes the very valid point which is applicable to this study that:

*"In literature courses, the more homogenous the class, the more reception theory can contribute by introducing the contrasting points of view of 'others' (Smith 1971:82).*

A methodology based on Reception Theory enables pupils to "discover" the rhetorical and thematic features of a text for themselves. Readings of responses to a text written at the time of its publication, encourage comparison of differing formal and moral expectations of the readers. This in turn encourages pupils to become more aware of the bases for their own responses to the text. Records of such receptions may not be available, but pupils can be exposed to the teacher's response as well as one another's responses.



### 3.1 The process.

The following pupil-centred approach was taken: an approach where the text is not treated as merely content with the main goal of testing results a "right" answer.

#### 3.1.1

##### Initial preparation

Pupils were introduced to the following concepts by means of thorough lessons with examples and classroom discussion:

- The short story as genre.
- The elements of fiction with emphasis on theme.
- The text as part of a communication process between author and reader (Jauss and Iser).
- The difference between reality and fiction as seen by reception theorists (Iser 1978:70).
- The contribution of the reader in the process of making meaning (Iser 1978:22-28:41-68).

Pupils were also informed of the process involved when a prospective writer wishes to publish: the role of the publishers, the bookshops and reviewers. This ensures that pupils view the text within a wider context of the communication process (Bosman 1978:54).

## 3.1.2

Classroom application of a reader-centred approach

Pupils were handed a copy of the selected text and were requested to read it silently. The teacher then read the story aloud according to the applicable principles and guidelines set out by Trelease, guidelines which are conducive to a receptive audience (Trelease 1985:59-62).

No vocabulary was explained so as to minimise teacher interference with pupils' responses.

Pupils were then handed a short questionnaire with the following questions:

- What is the theme of the story? (This tested insight into recognition of thematic features of the text)
- Choose the most significant moment(s) (This tested good grasp of content)
- Did you enjoy the story? Why/Why not? (This provided an opportunity for personalized interpretation based on horizon of expectations)

Questions were answered anonymously. Answers were collected and read aloud to the whole class.

Pupils were asked to divide into groups consisting of four or five pupils each. A few provocative responses were selected by the teacher who handed them to different groups for further discussion and analysis.

Each group reported to the rest of the class when their discussion was completed. Their findings and conclusions in the small groups stimulated or springboarded the whole class discussion. An indication of which responses were used in this way is given in a later chapter. Afterwards pupils were each given a copy of the teacher's response to the same story. These were taken home by pupils and were discussed in the next lesson.

It is relevant here to outline what is meant by group discussion and to explain why this method is relevant in this context. A discussion includes elements such as a small number of pupils meeting and interacting around a common topic. Their interaction must result in the exchange, introduction and evaluation of information and ideas. These discussions should be goal-directed and should include both emotional and objective verbal interaction (Orlich 1994:224).

The discussion method lends itself to use in the literature classroom because it allows for the expression of a wide range of ideas. Discussion implies an active participation and involvement of pupils with the teacher in the classroom situation. Above-all, the discussion allows pupils to discover and state their personal opinions and not merely repeat what a text or teacher has presented (Orlich 1994:224).

During discussions pupils were encouraged to draw on their leisure time reading experiences to aid their interpretation of classroom texts, thus stimulating pupils not to view classroom texts as separate from any other reading.

Structured discussions lend themselves very well to a classroom approach which is pupil-centred and aims at maximum involvement of pupils. Classroom strategy concerning the approach to language usage in the classroom is dealt with in the next section.

### 3.2 Towards an approach to second-language readers

It should be noted that the focus of this study is not language but the reader making meaning or concretization of the reader (Iser 1978:21). The target group, however, are all second-language learners, a circumstance which does demand a relevant approach to classroom language.

The approach used focuses on the reader and minimises teacher interference. Each group was provided with a bilingual dictionary and told to ask for teacher help at any time. Pupils were given the assurance that their responses would not become the focus of a grammar lesson and no utterance by a pupil was corrected orally by the teacher. If pupils were unable to find an English term to

express themselves, they were given the freedom to use an Afrikaans word instead. This was done so as to promote a free and flowing, spontaneous response without fear of censorship. Afrikaans words were noted by the teacher and the English equivalents were provided and explained at the end of the lesson.

Much research has been done on communicative classroom techniques and several researchers have emphasized successful classroom criteria that maximise language opportunities in the classroom. In particular criteria documented by Greyling were kept in mind; he stresses that classroom sessions must:

- \* simulate real-life communication so that learners will be able to transfer the learning experiences to real-life situations.
- \* involve the bridging of information gaps in pair or group work.
- \* be non-threatening to learners in terms of loss of face.
- \* simulate the unpredictability of real-life communication.

- \* be open-ended so that learners will be able to explore their personal frames of reference in creating meaning collaboratively in interactional contexts.
- \* challenge learners to use their imaginations and provide a creative input in the language classroom (Greyling 1990:1-2).

Throughout the classroom sessions an awareness of the reader-centred focus was promoted as well as a focus on the reading process. This can best be illustrated by example. Pupils were often unsure of whether their responses were "right" and asked for teacher opinion. They had to be constantly re-assured that their responses could not be "wrong" and that their response was a vital link in the communication process between the author and the reader.

It should be noted that pupils are asked to identify the most significant moment(s) in the short story which they have just read. This constitutes part of their response to the story. In research done by Kroes on the teaching of Afrikaans to second-language speakers he states that identifying significant moments in a text is a successful technique for second-language learners. It provides the learner with a quick summary of the essence of a story and is an excellent method of testing whether the learner has

grasped the content of the story (Kroes in Van der Merwe 1991: 6)<sup>1</sup>.

An essential element of the pupil-centred approach was drawing a profile of the reader group under study. The results are documented in the next section.

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1 The research by *Kroes* is referred to by *Van der Merwe* and constitutes an unpublished paper by the HSRC. I was unable to find any trace of the original document.

## 4 THE READER

The reader-group identified for this study have the following characteristics in common:

- They are all Afrikaans-speaking.
- They take English as a second language at Model C schools throughout the Orange Free State.
- They all have the same religious affiliation in that all belong to one of the Afrikaans reformed churches. The resultant norms and value systems have impacted on their value judgements expressed in their responses.
- They are all in Standard eight with an average age of fifteen years.
- All of the pupils are academic achievers and are in the top positions of the academic merit list at their respective schools.

These pupils come from various schools throughout the Orange Free State, a fact which implies certain variables, viz. the pupils have been exposed to different classroom approaches to literature and the availability of reading material, especially books, varies. Some smaller towns have libraries with small book selections, whereas pupils from larger centres have easy access to a greater variety of books and reading material in larger libraries as well as bookshops.

### 4.1 Selection criteria

These pupils were selected for this case study for the following reasons:



- They represent the top achievers in Standard eight in Model C schools in the Orange Free State. According to Dechant there is a strong correlation between intelligence and reading ability (Dechant 1982: 67 - 70). As a result of Dechant's research, the assumption can be made that this pupil group is more inclined to reading for pleasure than any other group. This in turn, would ensure a broader horizon of expectations on which to base a pupil-centred approach to reading.
- They are all the same age, which means that they represent a single developmental phase.
- They are all Afrikaans-speaking and so represent one cultural group. This has implications for their reading expectations in that their cultural expectations may sometimes be found to influence their reading responses (Jauss 1982:xvii).
- They were exposed to different teachers in their literature classes which implies various classroom approaches to literature.

The selected pupils represent a homogeneous group of readers whose expectations form the basis on which the selected literature was received.

The pupils' reading background and disposition were assessed by means of a questionnaire. This enabled the researcher to gauge their reading experience and gain knowledge about their possible reading expectations which would have implications in their responses. In fact the questionnaire goes a long way towards constructing an insight into the horizon of expectations of this specific reader group. One is able to glean from their responses what genres they have read and how much they have read.

Thereby one can gain insight into their reading experience as well as their attitude towards reading as an activity.

## 4.2 Background of reader group

Any reader-centred approach to literature requires a thorough knowledge of the reader group concerned. This is to ensure a knowledge of their horizon of expectations, their preferences and reading background (Bosman 1982:47), as in fact this vital information forms the foundation of any programme which hopes to promote either the learning or encouragement of reading:

*Reading as interpretation of experience has implications for both the reading teacher and the pupils learning to read. One implication is that teachers of reading must become experts in reading children. The teacher of reading must understand children and must be able to identify the personal differences in children which may lead to achievement differences between pupils (Dechant 1982:4).*

Thus from an educational point of view as well as from the point of view of a reader-centred approach, a thorough study must be made of a reader group if a meaningful degree of literary engagement is to be achieved. For the above reasons the following questions were formulated and presented to the pupils in the form of a questionnaire. The questions were:

- Do you enjoy reading books?
- What kind of stories do you enjoy most?
- How many books do you read in a year?
- Is reading an important activity in your life?

Pupils' answers are summarized as follows:

Do you enjoy reading books?		
Number	Response	Additional Comment
60	Yes	Unqualified
11	Yes	When I have time
2	Yes	Very, very, very, very, much
3	Yes	Yes, very, very much
18	No	Unqualified
3	No	Sometimes
3	No	I'd rather do sport.

What kind of stories do you enjoy most?	
Number	Response
85	Adventure, Thrillers, Science Fiction and love stories.
3	All kinds
3	Only biographies
1	Fairy Tales
1	Animal Stories
2	Only romance
1	Any story as long as it is longer than 400 pages.
1	Only school stories
3	Stories with a deeper meaning.

The pupils who indicated that they read only fairy tales, animal stories and romance respectively, all replied negatively to the first question.

How many books do you read in a year?

This section revealed that pupils read an average of nineteen books per year with two books being the minimum number read by a pupil and 120 books being the maximum read by a pupil per year.

More books were read per year by those pupils who answered positively to the last question which is:

Is reading an important activity in your life?		
Number	Response	Comment
60	Yes	Unqualified
1	Yes	It is my favourite pastime
39	No	No time

Eleven pupils who responded positively to the first question indicated that reading was not an important activity in their lives.

#### 4.2.1

##### Possible reading dispositions

The majority of pupils read only love stories, adventure stories, thrillers and science fiction. Thus their reading background may lead them to expect a specific predictable ending a story such as a conclusive or happy ending. This may result in their rejection of a story which does not have this kind of ending.

Pupils read an average of only nineteen books per year and one may assume that there was very little change in the choice of genres read by the group: they were not exposed to a great variety of genres. The books they read seemed to indicate a preference for the action-packed story with a

"safe" foregone conclusion. The above conclusions seem to indicate a reader group with an uncritical approach to what they read and a somewhat naive reader expectation.

### 4.3 Theoretical principles

Reception Theory posits that the horizon of expectations forms the objective framework within which the reader's literary experience can be analyzed (Jauss 1979:130). The results of the above questionnaire assisted in predicting the expectations of the reader group under study. This information as well as the fact that the selected reader group all belong to one cultural group provide valuable insight into the possible literary response of the group:

*Now whatever judgements may have been passed on the work will also reflect various attitudes and norms of that public, so that literature can be said to mirror the cultural code which conditions these judgements (Iser 1978:28).*

Reception theorists argue against the idea that the meaning of a text is some hidden truth in the text which the reader must seek out and rephrase; they suggest that reading is rather a process whereby the reader interacts with the text and achieves interpretation as he/she experiences the text and the process (Iser 1978:13). If this shift from text to reader is to be implemented in a classroom situation, then it is imperative that a study be made of the reader concerned to determine as much as possible about his/her reading disposition. This particular reader group are all fifteen years old and therefore fall into the developmental phase known as adolescence. The particular needs and interests of this group are relevant, particularly when it comes to the selection of the literature to be presented to them.

#### 4.3.1

##### Adolescence

Adolescence is that period in life which lies between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. The term adolescent is derived from the Latin verb "adolescere" meaning "to grow up" or "to mature". This period varies in length from family to family, from one socio-economic group to another and from culture to culture. As the age limit for this period differs from culture to culture, it is better to discuss adolescence in terms of specific developmental characteristics than purely on the grounds of age (Louw 1985:340). Thus, it could be said that adolescence commences during puberty, that time of life when accelerated physical growth occurs, the reproductive system develops and bodily changes known as secondary sexual characteristics occur. Adolescence ends socially when the individual is independent financially and otherwise. According to the law, adolescence ends at 18 when the individual is granted franchise or at 21 when parental consent is no longer necessary. Psychologically adolescence ends when the individual is relatively sure of his/her identity, is emotionally independent of his/her parents, has developed an individual system of values and is capable of mature relationships. A few theories on the most important developmental phases of adolescence will be discussed.

#### 4.3.1.1

##### Physical and sexual development

Physical development during adolescence is very different from any other phase of human development and is characterized by a growth spurt, increased height and weight and the maturation of sexual characteristics. Adolescents do not all develop at the same rate as a result of various factors such as culture, nutrition and environment (Santrock 1981:129).

Adolescence is characterized by a new sexual awareness as a result of hormonal secretions in the body. Other physiological changes such as changes in blood pressure, heart rate, red blood cells, respiratory rate and metabolic rate, all occur in this phase of life.

#### 4.3.1.2

Cognitive development.

The cognitive development of the adolescent refers to the age-related changes that occur in mental activity: such aspects as thought, memory, perception and attention (Santrock 1981:180).

Adolescent cognitive development takes place quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Quantitative development refers to developed abilities or previous learning and is often measured by such instruments as the I.Q. test. Qualitative development refers to formal operational abilities such as the ability to think abstractly (Low 1985:36). This formal operational phase is thought to occur in two stages: one early and the other late in adolescence (Santrock 1981:180). Late formal-operational thought starts at about the age of fifteen, which is the average age of the target group of this study. The relevant point to remember here, then, is that adolescence does not signal the appearance of full-blown formal-operational thought. This period is, however, extremely significant in that it is the period when the individual develops abstract theories about such subjects as religious, scientific and moral issues. The adolescent is discovering his own political and personal system of values. It is extremely important to encourage the adolescent's questioning of social, political and religious systems, as this enables him/her to test these existing values before making them his/her own. This adolescent, cognitive need can be very meaningfully met in the literature classroom.

No discussion on the cognitive ability of the adolescent is complete without reference to creativity. Creativity is a process involving the individual's growing awareness of problems, disharmony and shortcomings in his/her environment. The individual then searches for answers or solutions and formulates hypotheses on possible solutions. These hypotheses are tested, reformulated and retested until results prove satisfactory. The above factors suggest that there is a relationship between cognitive ability and creativity and that hypothetical reasoning contributes towards the development of creative ability during adolescence (Louw 1985:365). Paul Torrance, a recognized expert in the field of creativity, says the following:

*Some degree of creativity occurs whenever people solve problems for which they had no previously learned or practiced solution. Some solutions like this require only tiny creative leaps while others call for genuine breakthroughs in thinking. All of them require that the individuals 'go beyond where they have ever gone before' (1994:7).*

Creative thinking in the sense expressed by Torrance is closely linked to the kind of literary engagement aimed at by this experiment. Pupils are encouraged to go beyond a simple literal understanding of the text and to explore the possibilities in the text and to define their own emotional response to the text. Classroom discussions covered a wide range of issues as documented in a later section: these issues were gleaned from the texts themselves and were raised by the pupils' responses to the texts.

In conclusion then, it can safely be said that formal-operational thought is the highest form of cognitive development to be achieved by man. This form of abstract



thought commences in adolescence, but development does not end with the onset of maturity (Louw 1985:367).

#### 4.3.1.3

##### Moral development

In modern society there are certain rules which govern acceptable behaviour and certain values and norms which are deemed important. The responsibility rests with the individual to accept or reject these norms and values. This poses a dilemma for the adolescent because he/she is confronted with various and often conflicting sets of values which he/she must evaluate, very often, with few guidelines. One of the most important adolescent developmental phases is that of developing a personal system of values. Moral development in the adolescent is characterized by a movement away from the childhood obedience to rules, to a questioning of the rules of society or people of authority (Grinder 1978:284).

There are several theories as to how this moral development takes place in the individual. Two of the main theories are the cognitive-developmental theory and the social-learning theory. Lawrence Kohlberg propagated the cognitive-developmental theory and it rests upon the viewpoint that moral development is a process of evolving thought structures that unfolds in the same sequence for all individuals. This viewpoint of moral development holds that the reaching of moral maturity is closely aligned to the cognitive development of the individual. Proponents of the social-learning theory believe that moral dispositions are learned to facilitate self-control, a process whereby socially sanctioned moral standards are internalized (Grinder 1978:308). Grinder makes the following very important observation which has implications for the classroom, and in particular the literature classroom, where values are often discussed:

*Social-learning theorists and cognitive-developmentalists recognize that adolescents must learn emotional self-control, acquire the capacity to abstract moral principles and transcend self-interest in moral decision making in order to develop stable, relatively autonomous patterns of moral conduct (Grinder 1978:308).*

Throughout the reading process the adolescent encounters characters and events which reflect specific moral values with which he/she may, within the framework of his/her own moral development, partially or completely identify. The process of literary engagement encourages the reader to view the events objectively. In other words, the adolescent can grow and be enriched by exercising his/her freedom of choice. He/She is obligated to decide whether he/she is in sympathy with the values expressed by the events in the text. In this way the adolescent is learning emotional self-control, acquiring the capacity to abstract moral principles and to transcend self interest in moral decision-making in order to develop stable, relatively autonomous patterns of moral conduct. Thus, increased maturity facilitates literary engagement while at the same time literary engagement advances the maturing process.

#### 4.3.1.4

##### Social development

The social development of the adolescent is strongly influenced by his/her cultural environment. The adolescent's ability to develop socially will be determined largely by his/her cognitive and physical development and the following three social factors:

- The complexity or level of modernisation of the society in which he/she is growing up.

- The characteristics of his/her particular sub-culture whether it be ethnic or socio-economic and the attitudes of society towards this sub-culture.
- The family structure and the influence of the parents (Louw 1985:373).

It is relevant here to define what is meant by culture. Broadly defined, it refers to the values, behaviour and products of a particular group of people (Santrock 1981:359). The process by which these values and behaviour are transmitted to adolescents is called socialization or enculturation.

Theorists are in agreement that few developments in the cultural milieu over the last twenty-five years have had a greater impact on adolescents than television has:

*Adolescents often spend more time watching television than they do interacting with their parents; for this reason television merits attention as a socialization agent (Santrock 1981:360).*

Television competes with parents, teachers, the peer group and other media in providing models for emulation and providing information that influences adolescent values, beliefs and expectations.

Peer groups form an important function in adolescent socialization which could be positive in that they provide a safe testing ground for establishing independence and making the transition from reliance on their families to adulthood. Peer groups can also negatively influence the adolescent to further alienate him/her from the authority and the norms of his/her parents (Grinder 1978:354).

Much of the adolescent's free time activity is determined by the peer group and social interactions organized by the

group, listening to music, watching T.V. and sporting activities. This fact has important implications for the literature teacher attempting to encourage reading as a form of behaviour in that texts selected for adolescents should take the above needs into consideration and themes should engage their real life needs and interests.

#### 4.3.1.5

##### Identity formation

It is extremely difficult to define the concept identity because it is a very complex and integrative concept. All characteristics of a person's identity are centred on his/her conscious awareness of who he/she is. Identity refers to the individual's awareness of him/herself as independent, unique personality with a specific place in society (Louw 1985:395).

In this period of life the greatest developments in identity formation take place; these are dependent on various factors such as the socio-political conditions or structure of the culture, interaction with parents and peer group interaction. Erikson has produced definitive work on adolescent identity formation and he describes this period as a period of identity crisis as the adolescent is involved in a re-evaluation of him/herself and his/her role in society (1981:265). Erikson believes that as part of identity development the adolescent must experiment with a variety of roles and personalities. The exposure to vocational and ideological alternatives stimulates the achievement of a stable identity.

The literature classroom provides a stimulating place for the adolescent to test his ideas and to think more deeply about societal roles which, in turn, encourages stable identity development. The classroom situation where structured groupwork is possible, also allows for meaningful peer group interaction. Pupils are afforded the opportunity of engaging in discussion with one another

about the texts and in so doing stimulate one another's thoughts and learn to appreciate each interpretation by agreeing or disagreeing with one another about the issues involved and in this way they motivate each other in the process of literary engagement.

#### 4.4 Needs/interests of the adolescent

The above, very brief, discussion of the main developmental phases of the adolescent indicate only normal, healthy development if the basic needs of the young person are met. Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, believed that human needs form a hierarchy which range from basic physiological needs to the need for self-actualization. The acceptance of this hierarchy worldwide has led to a greater understanding of human development especially as far as educating the adolescent is concerned. It is commonly accepted that if needs at the lower levels are not met then it is not likely that the individual will develop to full maturity at the higher levels of the hierarchy. The child who is hungry and grows up in a violence-ridden environment is not likely to develop much intellectual curiosity. Maslow identified five levels of basic human needs, viz. physiological, safety, a sense of belonging and love, esteem, self-actualization and also cognitive and aesthetic needs. One must keep these needs in mind when creating a classroom environment conducive to healthy enquiry and discussion, which are essential for moral and social development.

As mentioned above the adolescent has access to formal-operational thinking and is constantly concerned with analyzing how his/her environment functions which leads to enquiry into nearly every field of human endeavour:

*In effect, the adolescent replaces the younger child's sense of 'what is' with a new sense of 'what might be' (Applebee 1978:108).*

It is clear that variety would be an important criterium when selecting texts for adolescents so as to provide sufficient material to stimulate discussion on many aspects of their lives. One could safely assume that needs, in this instance, would coincide with reading interests in the adolescent. One can assess adolescent interests by means of a classroom survey as was done for this study only to discover that reading interests are extremely limited to adventure stories, love stories and science fiction. It is important therefore to keep the following in mind when taking adolescent interests into consideration:

*Interests can be created and stimulated. In this sphere it is not far from the truth to say that supply creates demand, that the provocation of what is available creates response. One seeks to equip the child with deeper, more gripping and subtler ways of knowing the world and himself (Arbuthnot 1991:31).*

From our knowledge of the cognitive, moral and social development of the child, we deduce that the adolescent needs to be introduced to texts which provide the opportunity through characters and events in stories for comparing their own perceptions of the world with what they know and deduce about the world around them. As for supplying the needs of adolescent moral development, one should provide opportunity for thinking through the motivations and actions of fictional characters thereby assisting the adolescent to evaluate the norms of his/her own society. Arbuthnot notes in this regard :

*The advantage of literature as an approach to developing moral values is that the dilemmas in well-chosen, real and fanciful literature are realistic. At the same time, they are not as threatening to readers as they would be if they were part of their lives (Arbuthnot 1991:30).*

Literary themes for classroom experience should be based on thorough knowledge of adolescent developmental needs. Havighurst identifies a few of these which he terms "developmental tasks of adolescence". They are:

- *Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes.*
- *Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.*
- *Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults.*
- *Achieving assurance of economic independence.*
- *Preparing for marriage and family life.*
- *Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior.*
- *Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior (Havighurst 1972:45-69).*

Many of the above issues are themes which abound in literature and can be found in the short stories selected for this research: if "achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults" is one of the tasks of adolescence, then a story like *Through the Tunnel* which deals with a boy's struggle for independence is relevant and should be of interest to adolescent readers. The *Rocking-Horse Winner* explores not only family relationships, but thematically addresses the norm and value systems of a society. Issues touching on societal

responsibility and the individual's lot within that society are raised by *Sleepy* and *The Suitcase*.

The selected stories provided ample opportunity for classroom discussion on issues which address the developmental tasks of adolescence as identified by Havighurst.

Adolescent needs and interests, especially insofar as the varying cultural groups in S.A. are concerned, need much more study and attention when preparing literary experiences in the classroom. It is imperative that open discussion be promoted in a classroom atmosphere where the adolescent does not feel threatened or exposed and is free to express his opinions freely without fear of being berated or patronized.

The above special needs of the group were taken into consideration when selecting the four short stories for this study. As the teacher's response formed an integral component of the study, these are given in the next section.



## 5 FOUR SHORT STORIES: BRIEF TEXT-CENTRED LITERARY EVALUATIONS

The following four short stories were selected for purposes of this study, viz:

*The Suitcase* - Eskia Mphahlele

*Through the Tunnel* - Doris Lessing

*Sleepy* - Anton Chekhov

*The Rocking-Horse Winner* - D.H. Lawrence

### 5.1 Motivation for selection

The four short stories were selected with certain practical classroom constraints in mind. Firstly, the story had to be short enough to be read in the allotted one-hour period with enough time left to elicit pupil response to the story. Then the language had to be accessible to second-language speakers. Finally, the stories had to be able to stand up to literary scrutiny; in other words they had to be of good quality as literature. Special characteristics which might stimulate interesting responses were taken into consideration such as the point of view from which the story was written. The stories selected include a story written at the turn of the century in circumstances totally unknown to pupils, a story set in South Africa, but representing another point of view of existence far removed from pupils' own experience, a story where the real and the surreal are presented as equally credible and one dealing with parent-child relationships.

Several other stories were read to pupils before these four stories were finally selected. If the majority of pupils indicated that they did not enjoy the story, that story was

eliminated. Stories such as Somerset Maugham's "The Verger" and Katherine Mansfield's "The Fly" were read to pupils with negative responses in both cases. I felt it was important that the stories discussed should at least be found interesting by pupils.

The four stories cover many different topics which fulfil the adolescent need for variety and a wide range of issues to stimulate thought-provoking discussion.

Issues such as cruel social systems, parent-child relationships, materialism and growing up, are raised by the stories and provide excellent opportunity for the adolescents to explore their own views on these issues.

## 5.2 Reception Theory and textual analysis

Both Iser and Jauss admit that the inherent textual constraints prohibit a free, arbitrary response to the text. The textual clues guide the reader's interpretation. The reader must recognize the clues in the text which guide him/her in the communication process. Iser says in this regard:

*The verbal aspect guides the reaction and prevents it from being arbitrary; the affective aspect is the fulfilment of that which has been prestructured by the language of the text. Any description of the interaction between the two must therefore incorporate both the structure of effects (the text) and that of response (the reader) (1976:21).*

The text is integral to this communication process and any second-language reading program should aim at equipping

pupils with the skills to recognize the inherent textual clues of any given text. Jauss has this to say:

*The psychic process in the reception of a text is, in the primary horizon of aesthetic experience, by no means only an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions, but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception, which can be comprehended according to its constitutive motivations and triggered signals, and which also can be described by a textual linguistics (1982:23).*

Not only is the reader's response affected by the textual clues, but his/her response is also conditioned by his/her "horizon of expectations" which horizon is continually altered and established as he/she reads. Thus, the text itself has to provide the directives or signals or clues which ultimately make for an adjustment in the reader's horizon of expectations and subsequent influence of the text (message) on the reader.

Holub underlines the importance of the above deduction:

*Neither Iser, nor Jauss, nor any West German reception theorist is willing to dispense with all constraints on the production of meaning from the side of the text, and that the East Germans openly advocate principles of determinacy in their theory is more a difference of degree than of kind (1984:133)*

My own response to the texts leans heavily on my literary experience and training in searching for clues/signals inherent in the text. The following responses formed an integral part of the classroom method in that they pointed pupils to possibilities in the text and exposed them to another reception of the same texts.

### 5.3 Literary evaluation of four short stories

#### 5.3.1

##### *The Suitcase* - Eskia Mphahlele

In this powerful short story, Eskia Mphahlele presents us with a young man, Timi, who is unemployed and desperately wants to take something home to his pregnant wife on Old Year's Eve. It is a moving story of a young man trapped in an inhuman social system where there appears to be no hope. He dreams of that one "sheer naked chance" (Mphahlele 1981:15) The use of the word "naked" takes on a whole new dimension at the end of the story.

Timi sits on a pavement in the blazing heat of an African sun and stares down at a wasp tormenting a worm. The worm struggles violently, but the odds are too great. The worm dies in what seemed to Timi "an unequal fight" from the outset (15). The worm and the wasp form the metaphor for Timi's life where he is trapped in an unequal struggle for survival. Timi sees the suitcase as his only chance and he is willing to put everything on the line to keep it:

*Then the wild, primitive determination rose in him; the blind determination to go through with a task once begun, whether a disaster can be avoided in time or not, whether it is to preserve worthless or valuable articles. No, he was not going to part with the case (20).*

He keeps the suitcase and the story ends in disaster for Timi with a typical O'Henryian twist in the tail. The suitcase reveals a dead baby:

*A naked, white curly-haired image of death (23).*

He had gambled with chance and lost.

The white employers in the story are stereotyped, seemingly heartless characters who further emphasize the vast gaps in understanding between black and white races in a country in the grip of a very unjust social system.

It is Old Year's Eve and the revelry in the streets sharply, ironically contrasts Timi's misery:

*In the bus he found an atmosphere of revelry. The New Year spirit, he thought, an air of reckless abandon. Happy New Year! one shouted at intervals (17).*

Throughout the story, the focus is on the suitcase. The suitcase becomes the centre of Timi's dreams for a better future; the suitcase becomes the centre of tension for the reader and the suitcase eventually determines Timi's destiny. Mphahlele sets Timi's struggle for survival against a deft description of a pavement society representative of any South African city: the drunk on the street, the ever-present threat of the police who offer no protection or safety for black people; the riff-raff on a crowded city bus and his gas-bag friend, Pitso. This seemingly harmless and inconsequential mosaic only serves to emphasize the horror and desperation of a man trapped in a society where he has no way of survival or of fending for the family he loves. Timi feels threatened by everything after he has taken the suitcase and even the street noise becomes a threat to him:

*The hum and buzz so common to Good Street rose to a crescendo, so savage, so coldblooded, so menacing. Suddenly he got a strange and frightening feeling that he had excited all this noise that he was the centre around which these angry noises whirled and circled that he had raised a hue and cry (19).*

Mphahlele's diction is simple, vivid and almost stark in places. Sentences are short and clipped which serve to underscore the brutality of circumstance trapping the victim, Timi:

*Timi did not see he was about to walk into a crowd of people. They were being searched by the police, two white constables. He was jolted into attention by the shining of a badge (19).*

The description is vivid and easily visualized while at the same time maintaining the tension right through to the climax at the end:

*The constable, after taking all the rags out, pointed to an object inside. And is this also your wife's?(22).*

He glared at Timi with aggressive eyes. Timi stretched his neck to see. It was a ghastly sight:

*A dead baby that could not have been born more than twelve hours before . A naked white curly-haired image of death (23).*

Short staccato sentences, lead us step-by-step to the victim's own discovery of the cruel blow fate has dealt him. The constable's eyes are "aggressive". Timi has already been found guilty by those employed to uphold the law and seek the truth. Not even the truth can save him from the inevitable. The use of the word "white" in the description of the dead baby has powerful connotations in a society where colour means survival or persecution. The story does not attempt any explanation of circumstances, but merely recounts Timi's experience. Timi's simple powers of reasoning as he attempts to justify keeping the suitcase, are poignant because of his unsophisticated, blind faith in Providence:

*There must surely be valuable articles in it, Timi mused. It was so heavy. There must be. It couldn't be otherwise. Else why had Providence been so kind to him so far? Surely the spirits of his ancestors had pity on him; with a sick wife and hungry children (20).*

The stark, telegram-style of the diction emphasizes his simple, childlike reasoning.

Timi is surrounded by unsympathetic people and it is a vindictive fellow-passenger on the bus who finally betrays Timi. Timi is trapped in a society where fear and betrayal are experienced daily and encouraged by the powers in control of the system.

Through Timi, Mphahlele exposes us to the harsh realities of an Apartheid South Africa and its wicked implications for a simple, caring, family man.

### 5.3.2

*Through the Tunnel* - Doris Lessing.

The story is set in a seaside resort where mother and son are enjoying their annual holiday. The young boy is eleven years old and knows the beach very well:

*The young English boy stopped at the turning of the path and looked down at a wild and rocky bay and then over to the crowded beach he knew so well from other years (De Villiers 1982:198).*

From the outset the story is characterized by delicate attention to physical details of the setting. A setting which consists of the beach, which is very familiar to him and, on the other side, a "wild and rocky bay". The bay is unknown to him, a new challenge which he yearns to explore. The setting provides the metaphor for the child's self-

exploration which is to follow. The open beach is well-known and he is well protected by his mother. The rocky bay is "wild" and unknown and he will have to go there alone. This bay comes to represent the boy's yearning for independence from his mother. The very first paragraph discloses the conflict in the growing boy and links it with the physical aspect of the resort as well as the description of his mother:

*His mother walked on in front of him, carrying a bright-striped bag in one hand. Her other arm, swinging loose, was very white in the sun. The boy watched that white, naked arm and turned his eyes, which had a frown behind them, toward the bay and back again to his mother (198).*

The detailed description of his mother's white, naked arm emphasizes her vulnerability - she is exposed and white, unused to the sun and unaware of the inner conflict awakening in her son. Contrasting her whiteness are the colours of the bay:

*From where he was, high up among the red-brown rocks, it was a scoop of moving bluish green fringed with white. As he went lower he saw that it spread among small promontories and inlets of rough, sharp rock, and the crisper, lapping surface showed stains of purple and darker blue (199).*

The colours are dark and signify danger. The boy is torn between his intense desire to break away from his mother's protective presence and his guilt about leaving her as he is only too aware of her vulnerability:

*Contrition sent him running after her (198).*



The constant tension between his dependence on his widowed mother and his own yearning for independence is firmly maintained until he finally achieves his independence:

*When he was so far out that he could look back not only on the little bay but past the promontory that was between it and the big beach, he floated on the buoyant surface and looked for his mother. There she was, a speck of yellow under an umbrella that looked like a slice of orange peel. He swam back to shore, relieved at being sure she was there, but all at once very lonely (199).*

The boy has had his first taste of independence and freedom, but also his first experience of loneliness which is a normal consequence of independence and freedom from the constant protective presence of his mother.

Later he discovers the tunnel as he watches the boys who are native to that coast diving and disappearing into the tunnel. As he waits for the boys to reappear from under the water, he experiences terror as they don't reappear. When they finally do appear, they are quick to gather up their clothes and leave him:

*They were leaving to get away from him (201).*

He again experiences loneliness and a new, very adult sensation, viz rejection:

*There was no one to see him, and he cried himself out(201).*

He turns again to his mother who represents his only security:

*It seemed to him that a long time had passed and he swam out to where he could see his mother. Yes, she was still there, a yellow spot under an orange umbrella (201).*

Just seeing her and experiencing everything she means, gives him the courage to dive back into the water only to discover that he cannot dive deep enough as the salt water hurts his eyes. Again, it is to his mother that he goes to solve his problem. He asks her to buy him some swimming goggles. The goggles become the instrument to his freedom and independence. The goggles empower him to achieve his goal:

*He fixed the goggles tight and firm, filled his lungs, and floated, face down, on the water. Now he could see. It was as if he had eyes of a different kind - fish-eyes that showed everything clear and delicate and wavering in the bright water (202).*

In very mature fashion Jerry sets about planning and preparing for his sole passage through the tunnel. The tunnel becomes his first real challenge, a difficult one where he can rely on no help from the outside, least of all his mother. With adult-like resolution, he does not tell her about his plans. He has only his own inner resources to carry him through this impossible passage: he must achieve his own rite of passage to maturity.

The passage to independence is an uncertain one which is well described as the boy vacillates between acts and feelings of dependence and independence. He persistently practised holding his breath underwater, when his mother announces that they must soon leave for home. He knows he has to attempt the swim through the tunnel soon, but fear fills his heart:

*Supposing he died there, trapped? Supposing his head went around, in the hot sun and he almost gave up. He thought he would return to the house and lie down, and next summer, perhaps, when he had another year's growth in him- then he would go through the hole. (205).*

The adult decision to make the attempt, in spite of his fear, is made:

*This was the moment when he would try. If he did not do it now, he never would (205).*

He makes the decision to go in spite of his fear.

The environment which forms the backdrop for the boy's growth from boyhood to manhood is characterized by two spaces, viz. the safe open beach where his mother is and the rocky bay with its barriers and red and purple colouring. The immensity of his efforts to prepare for the swim, change him and the open beach no longer has the same significance for him:

*It was a torment to him to waste a day of his careful self-training, but he stayed with her on that other beach, which now seemed a place for small children, a place where his mother might lie safe in the sun. It was not his beach (204).*

His very next action demonstrates his new-found independence from his mother's protection:

*He did not ask for permission, the following day to go to his beach. He went, before his mother could consider the complicated rights and wrongs of the matter (204).*

The rocky bay has become "his" and he no longer needs his mother's approval to go there.

The diction contributes to and firmly underscores the theme of the boy's passage from childhood to maturity. The big rock from which he attempts his swim through the tunnel is termed the "barrier rock", a barrier or tremendous obstacle to be overcome before his maturity is achieved. This "barrier" is described as huge and as "a black wall of rock" among "fanged and angry boulders" (201). In opposition to this barrier the boy must break away from his dependence on his mother who could be a soothing, comfortable obstacle to his independence:

*He floated on the buoyant surface and looked for his mother. There she was, a speck of yellow under an umbrella that looked like a slice of orange peel (199).*

The contrast between the roughness of the barrier rock and the soothing, smoothness of the "orange peel" which represents his mother's over-comfortable presence, is unmistakable.

The boy experiences a wonderful, exciting new world on his own away from his protective parent. He has tasted the beginnings of independence, but the tunnel, the final passage into adulthood is still to come. Here again the diction supports the theme:

*The great rock the big boys had swum through rose sheer out of the white sand, black, tufted lightly with greenish weed. He could see no gap in it. He swam down to its base (205).*

The boys are "big", leaving no illusion as to the strength and maturity needed for the task ahead and the rock is "black" and rose "sheer out" of the sand. The task ahead

is formidable and will tap all his inner resources. The sentences are short and precise. They are clipped, almost staccato, a technique which is used again in the climax, which is his passage through the tunnel. The longer sentences are broken with frequent commas, which have the same staccato effect:

*He was at the end of what he could do. He looked up at the crack as if it were filled with air and not water, as if he could put his mouth to it to draw in air. A hundred and fifteen, he heard himself say inside his head - but he said that long ago (205).*

The repetitive echo of "as if" in the subjunctive clauses emphasizes the intensity of the boy's personal experience. The accumulation of vivid adjective and verb usage, depicts the intense personal struggle in which the boy is involved:

*His head was swelling, his lungs cracking ...He struggled on in the darkness between lapses into unconsciousness. An immense, swelling pain filled his head, and then the darkness cracked with an explosion of green light (206).*

The words "cracked" and "explosion" vividly suggest the immensity of the boy's struggle.

The story relies heavily on character and setting rather than intricate plot to move it along. Tension is held firmly throughout as we live each moment of the boy's passage into adulthood.

### 5.3.3

*Sleepy* - Anton Chekov

Anton Chekov is an author whose style and techniques of short story writing have been imitated many times since his death.

*Chekhov's short stories, often ruefully comic, revolutionized the medium (Fitzgerald 1989:124).*

Instead of the well-made tale with its beginning, middle and end, Chekov presented ironic sketches full of insight and psychological surprise. Sheila Fitzgerald says of Chekov's influence on contemporary writing:

*Chekhov's prominent stature in world literature is not a consequence of his philosophy or worldview as much as it is based on short fiction and dramas executed with a phenomenal artistry which peramanently altered the literary standards for these genres (1989:125).*

Chekhov concerned himself with ordinary people and their everyday lives and was accused by the critics of his time, of being singularly lacking in a world view:

*They were amazed that Chekhov only recounted various trifles and explained nothing. Can it be that all Russia has become so emptied of content that for a thinking man there is nothing in her which he would like to understand and explain? (Jackson 1967:23).*

It is exactly this ability to present real people as they actually live the trivialities which make up life that constitutes Chekhov's greatest artistic strength. Eichenbaum notes that:

*What seemed a 'fortuitous collection of facts' was in fact the realization of one of the basic principles of Chekhov's artistic work - the endeavour to embrace all of Russian life in its various manifestations, and not to describe selected spheres, as was customary before him.*

*The Chekhovian grasp of Russian life is staggering; in this respect as in many others, he cannot be compared with anyone (Jackson 1967:23).*

In the short story "Sleepy" Chekhov poignantly, but lucidly highlights the dreadful plight of a young girl trapped in a cruelly unjust social system. The story is about a little servant girl, Varka, who is nursemaid at night to a baby who screams incessantly and during the day she is general cook and domestic servant. She never gets any sleep and finally strangles the baby so as to get her much needed sleep.

The action takes place within a twenty-four hour time span. The story starts at night, goes through the next day and ends the following night. Chekhov brilliantly and immediately sets the scene for the action and introduces us to the contrasting images which are repeated throughout and serve as cohesive symbols. The contrasting images of light and darkness as well as stillness and motion are introduced and are painted with filmlike clarity:

*There is a big patch of green on the ceiling from the ikon lamp, and the baby clothes and the trousers throw long shadows on the stove, on the cradle, and on Varka. When the lamp begins to flicker, the green patch and the shadows come to life and are set in motion, as though by wind. There is a smell of cabbage soup and the smells related to the inside of the boot-shop (Garnett 1929:139).*

All our senses have been drawn into this short, but startlingly vivid description of, not only, Varka's place of work, but her whole existence. The single word "Night" which introduces the story as well as the image of darkness which is repeated also introduces the theme of light and darkness which point to life and death.

The whole story is structured around Varka's intense yearning for sleep, and events are separated only by her state of consciousness and her times of activity. The story opens with the first phase, in darkness, as the exhausted Varka attempts to hush the screaming child. Chekhov successfully superimposes the harsh, cruel reality of Varka's trapped life on the unreal world of her dreams and the dreamlike quality of the shadows in the room.

The flicker of a lamp is the only movement which penetrates Varka's intense struggle between waking and sleeping or life and death. The lamp flickers and the sickening perceptions of her degrading existence penetrate her half asleep, half-dead state:

*When the lamp begins to flicker, the green patch and the shadows come to life, and are set in motion as though by the wind. It is stuffy. There is a smell of cabbage soup, and of the inside of a bootshop (139).*

Again the lamp flickers and the reality of the shadows almost attacks Varka and forces her back into an existence which is more than a living death. Chekhov brilliantly weaves reality and dream into a coherent whole and with a film-like flashback, we are transported through Varka's dreams to her past and the cause of her trapped circumstances. Her father dies after a terrible night of suffering: a suffering and death which marks the beginning of Varka's slavery and living death.

The second phase of the story begins with the dawn of a new day and the harsh commands of an uncompromising master:

*Varka, heat the stove, she hears the master's voice through the door. So it is time to get up and set to work (144).*



A day of obeying commands, rushing from task to task and relentless work starts again.

Chekhov's mastery of imagery is evident in the description of Varka's cleaning the goloshes:

*She sits down on the floor, cleans the goloshes, and thinks how nice it would be to put her head into a big deep golosh, and have a nap in it. And all at once the golosh grows, swells, fills up the whole room. Varka drops the brush, but at once shakes her head, opens her eyes wide, and tries to look at things so that they may not grow big and move before her eyes (145).*

The golosh seems to grow into a huge container, reminding us of a coffin. Varka, with child-like yearning, longs for a nap in the golosh. Throughout the story we view the agony of existence from the point of view of the young girl. Her child-like inability to analyze her situation, but merely cope with whatever comes her way, is lucidly depicted:

*The day passes. Seeing the windows getting dark, Varka presses her temples that feel as though they were made of wood, and smiles, though she does not know why (146).*

The third phase of the story is a return to the same situation as the the first phase of the story where Varka is again rocking the screaming baby through another long, deathly, wearying night. The same images are repeated to accentuate the continuation of her monotonous existence:

*The cricket churrs in the stove; the green patch on the ceiling and the shadows from the trousers and the baby-clothes force themselves on Varka's*

*half-opened eyes again, wink at her and cloud her mind (146).*

Varka is aware of a force keeping her from living. This force is her sleepless existence. Her conscious, working, wakeful life is keeping her from life itself and she pinpoints death as her only access to life:

*At last tormented, she strains all her powers and her vision, looks up at the blinking green patch and listening intently to the screaming finds the enemy that prevents her from living. That enemy is the baby (147).*

The story is brought to a quick conclusion. The baby becomes an object, a removable object. She strangles the baby and sleeps. Chekhov never once loses the intense mood of the story right through to the last word. The murder of the baby is almost an aside in the form of a subordinate clause. The emphasis is on Varka and her release, momentarily, from intense suffering:

*When she has strangled him, she quickly lies down on the floor, laughs with delight that she can sleep, and in a minute is sleeping as sound as the dead (147).*

The whole story is framed in a nutshell between the two significant words "Night" and "dead". The diction is simple with vivid descriptions which make it ideal for use with second-language speakers. The visual appeal of the descriptions leans on the same techniques as those used in film. We have a close-up picture of every detail of her existence graphically drawn in the opening and closing scenes. We also experience a flashback to the past as Varka remembers her father's death and we see a dissolve in the opening scene as the shadows cast by the trousers and the baby-clothes are superimposed on a high road of liquid

mud. Varka's reality dissolves as her dream takes over from the reality of the room and the shadows.

A contemporary of Chekhov's, Maxim Gorky, said of Chekhov:

*No-one understood as clearly and finely as Anton Chekhov the tragedy of life's trivialities. No-one before him showed men with such merciless truth the terrible shameful picture of their life in the dim chaos of bourgeois everyday existence (Fitzgerald 1989:127).*

This story is an illustration of this statement. He depicted the detailed drudgery in the life of a thirteen-year old child whose life was unbearable.

#### 5.3.4

*The Rocking-Horse Winner* - D.H.Lawrence

In *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, D.H.Lawrence presents us with a picture of a young boy, Paul, living in a wealthy upper-class home with his family. The mother is of aristocratic descent and yearns to keep up the style she was accustomed to in her youth. She wants to keep the huge house and the high financial standards that go with it, at all costs. Her desire for money becomes an obsession to the point of excluding all else, even her children:

*There was a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck.....Everybody else said of her: 'She is such a good mother. She adores her children.' Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each others' eyes (Bain 1982:213).*

The children are filled with anxiety as they sense their mother's destructive obsession which seems to haunt their home. Their home, which should be a place of security and

love for children, " is haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money. There must be more money*" (213)

The mother's obsession becomes a destructive, supernatural force: a force which becomes an almost tangible presence in the house, or so Lawrence convincingly makes us believe. Lawrence uses the technique of repetition. A whisper which emphasizes the horror of a supernaturally evil presence in the house and seems to take on a life of its own, and ensnares the small boy, Paul.

This supernatural force drives Paul to seek "luck" which his mother equates with money. He attempts to reassure her that he is lucky and that God told him so. The mother, naturally, does not take this seriously:

*This angered him somewhat, and made him want to compel her attention (215).*

The boy, like the mother, becomes obsessed, but obsessed on a different level. He develops an unnatural obsession which drives him to ride a wooden horse ceaselessly to pick the name of a winning horse in the next racing event. His obsession is focused on finding the ever-elusive luck which will satisfy his mother's ever-demanding need for money:

*He went off by himself vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to 'luck'. Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted it, he wanted it, he wanted it (215).*

Here again, the repetition drives home the intensity of the boy's feeling and obsession. Lawrence clearly outlines that the child's conflict is inside himself. Ironically, it is to the nursery where Paul goes to resolve his

struggle. His childhood toy, the rocking-horse, becomes a vital instrument for solving his inner conflict:

*When the two girls were playing dolls in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him (215).*

The little girls are doing what children are supposed to do in a nursery, viz. playing with their dolls. Paul, by stark contrast, is involved in a strange activity which demonstrates the intense inner conflict in which his existence has become embroiled.

Lawrence makes the supernatural appear logical and credible and we are led to believe that Paul can ride his rocking-horse furiously and come up with a name of a winning horse for the next race meet:

*He knew the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again, and start his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there (215).*

The young boy is not only caught up in an inner conflict, but he is also intensely aware of an overwhelming presence in their house. This presence becomes the driving force behind all his actions:

*Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been 'whispering' worse than ever lately, and, even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious*

*to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds (219).*

Paul is emotionally in trouble and is focused on his mother and her needs. He is overwrought, his mother does notice, but is only vaguely concerned :

*'Wouldn't you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you'd better,' she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him (221).*

The child begs her not to send him away before the Derby and the mother successfully projects her own attachment to the house onto Paul, and misinterprets his unwillingness to go away. She assumes that he loves the house too much to leave and she lets him stay. Lawrence carefully emphasizes the word 'house' and nowhere does he refer to "the house" as a home. The mother worries about the child, but seems unable to free herself for long enough to intercede meaningfully.

She loves, even worships, the house as it has become a symbol of a gloriously affluent past which she is tenuously clinging to with everything she can muster. She allows herself to be convinced that the boy shares her love for the house and again the "house" rules her judgement:

*Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it (221).*

The boy's pitiful and repeated attempts to reassure his mother not to worry are poignant and heart-rending. Paul seems to make the evil obsession of his mother his own and this 'devil' in him drives him to use his gift from God for material gain instead of spritual growth. It is this depravity which eventually causes his death. A depravity

which the boy got from his mother: someone who is supposedly responsible for his spiritual growth and development. Lawrence brilliantly highlights the destructive nature of human greed. The close and complex relationship between mother and son unfolds: the son attempts to protect his mother and she feigns concern, but is unable really to help him. The boy is too young and impressionable to recognize his mother's obsession for what it is; he only senses her anxiety and worry which make him feel insecure. He watches her every move closely:

*You know people send Mother writs, don't yōu, Uncle? (219)*

and :

*'And is Father not lucky?' 'Very unlucky, I should say,' she said bitterly. The boy watched her with unsure eyes. 'Why?' he asked. 'I don't know. Nobody knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky.'*

*'And aren't you lucky either, mother?'*

*'I used to think I was , before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed.' 'Why?'*

*'Well--never mind! perhaps I'm not really,' she said.*

*The child looked at her to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him (214).*

Paul's intelligence and natural perceptiveness lead him to become intensely involved with his mother's problem. Instead of allowing these good qualities to work for him, Paul and the ineffectual educators around him, are unable to prevent him from harnessing his intelligence and aptitude in a positive way. Ironically, Paul's unselfishness becomes destructive as a result of his mother's obsession. The intensity with which the child pursues his goal, viz. luck, is both frightening and unnatural in one so young. He turns himself into a

sacrifice to save his mother and not even in a spiritual sense; he attempts to save her materially, which makes his ultimate and well-motivated death even more tragic. The good in the boy becomes the instrument of his destruction and relentlessly destroys him as it is allowed to gain momentum in his life:

*He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him. 'Let it alone, son! Don't you bother about it!' urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn't really hear what his uncle was saying. 'I've got to know for the Derby! I've got to know for the Derby! I've got to know for the Derby' the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness. (220)*

The story ends tragically, as expected, with Paul dying. Paul, Christ-like, sacrifices his life to save the life of his mother whom he loves. He dies in vain, however, as his mother has gained only material goods through his death. No spiritual growth or salvation from her obsession is gained. Oscar makes this clear:

*My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner (222).*

Not only is the boy's death well-motivated, but Lawrence does not spare us the consequences of his theme, viz. the depravity and consequences of human greed.

The diction in this story is so powerful that it warrants separate treatment.



#### 5.3.4.1 Diction

Lawrence's vocabulary and syntax in the *Rocking-Horse Winner* is simple, which makes it ideal for use with second-language speakers. Although the language is simple, the story nevertheless communicates complex ideas and themes which makes it suitable for thought-provoking discussion with adolescents.

It is especially Lawrence's skilled use of the adjective and adjectival forms in this story which compels the reader's attention. An example of this gradual build-up of tension is clearly demonstrated in his vivid descriptions of the boy's eyes:

- *The boy watched her with UNSURE eyes (214).*
- *Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a STRANGE glare in them (215).*
- *But Paul only gave a BLUE glare from his BIG, rather CLOSE-SET eyes (215).*
- *Well, I got there!" he announced fiercely, his BLUE eyes still FLARING (215).*
- *The boy gazed at his uncle from those BIG, HOT, BLUE eyes, set rather close together (215).*
- *The child had never been to a race meeting before, and his eyes were BLUE FIRE (217).*
- *The boy watched him with BIG, BLUE eyes, that had an UNCANNY COLD fire in them (219).*
- *He became WILD-EYED and strange, as if something were going to explode in him (220).*

Here Lawrence uses a hyphen effectively accentuating the destructive force taking over Paul's soul.

- *I've got to know for the Derby! I've got to know for the Derby!" the child reiterated, his BIG BLUE eyes BLAZING with a SORT OF MADNESS (220)*

- *His eyes BLAZED at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse (222).*
- *His eyes were like BLUE STONES (223).*

The boy's eyes are at first merely "unsure", but gradually words like strange, flaring, hot, uncanny and cold fire, project the horrible and dangerous conflict raging in the boy's consciousness which culminates on his death-bed, where his eyes were like "blue stones". The finality of the comparison with an inanimate object representing the dust of death, is more than compelling. The COLD and BLUE are used interchangeably, but both reflect the iciness in the boy's soul. The words fire, blazing and flaring which usually describe heat, are combined with words describing extreme cold - a contrast which aptly emphasizes the extreme inner tension the boy is experiencing.

The words describing the cold, stoniness in the boy's eyes are echoed in the descriptions of the mother, viz.

*Only she herself knew that at the centre of her heart was a HARD LITTLE place that could not feel love*

and

*As his mother read it, her face HARDENED and became more expressionless. Then a COLD determined look came on her mouth (220)*

Lawrence's use of unexpected descriptions is well illustrated in this last example where a "cold look" comes onto the mother's mouth and not as one would expect into her eyes. The word "stone" is not used in the descriptions of the mother, but the echo is unmistakably there.

Lawrence strings adjectives together, but breaks the string before it becomes monotonous with short, precise sentences:

*There was a STRANGE, HEAVY, and yet not LOUD noise. Her heart stood still. It was a SOUNDLESS noise, yet RUSHING and POWERFUL. Something HUGE, in VIOLENT, HUSHED motion (222).*

The above quotation is also an example of Lawrence's firm control over his images which is in evidence throughout the text. The descriptions convey precisely, terrifyingly the mood he wishes to evoke without becoming over-used or repetitive.

## 6 ADOLESCENT RESPONSES TO THE FOUR SHORT STORIES

Stories were read in the following order to the pupils. There is no particular reason for the order chosen.

*The Suitcase* - Eskia Mphahlele

*Through the Tunnel* - Doris Lessing

*Sleepy* - Anton Chekhov

*The Rocking-Horse Winner* by D.H. Lawrence

The pupil responses to the three questions (cf. page 43) were quantified in an attempt to evaluate whether literary engagement had been established without any input or interference in the reading process and, above - all, without any prompting by the teacher. Pupils' responses were brief and probably do not express a full range of each pupil's emotional and intellectual response which may be regarded as a limiting factor in the study. Quantification of pupil response may also run the risk of oversimplification of response to literature.

The responses to each story will be given, followed by a summing up of their responses and my analysis of the responses. The responses recorded here represent, as fully as possible, the variety of response gained from this group. All the responses were read to the class afterwards and certain provocative answers were given to the groups who discussed the response and then presented their findings to the rest of the class. The responses used in group discussions will be indicated in brackets after the relevant response. Not every single answer will be given as many responded in exactly the same way, even using exactly the same words.

## 6.1 The Suitcase - ESKIA MPHAAHAALELE

### 6.1.1

#### Theme

Only nineteen pupils identified a theme of general or universal relevance relating to individual entrapment in a cruel society. Their answers are represented by the following:

- *"The weaker people are always overshadowed by the strong people in an unfair society."*
- *"The well armed people always sting the defenceless to death."*
- *"The black people are always the least in a situation. They aren't given a chance to improve themselves."*  
(This response was given to the groups to decide what the reader meant by "improve themselves.")
- *"A man with no future in life trying to get another chance in life."*
- *"Anybody, how innocent he may be, could be caught or driven to difficult situations."*
- *"Timi was like the worm- defenceless - desperate to break free."*
- *"An unequal struggle."*
- *"Defenceless people never win."*
- *"Life is unfair."*
- *"Some people are trapped in surcumstances like the worm by the wasp."*
- *"The poor people in society that are suffering to make a living."*
- *"Unfair life: the strong against the weak."*
- *"Timi was as defenceless as the worm and the law was as powerful as the wasp."*
- *"Life is just as the meeting between the worm and the wasp. There are people who are innocent and there are those who make these people their prey."*

- *"The helpless are usually depressed."* (This response was given to the groups to ascertain what exactly was meant by the reader.)
- *"The black man is oppressed like the worm in the story."*

Eighty-one pupils gave a very literal, content-based interpretation of the theme. These responses can be divided into four main categories, viz. interpretations relating to the taking of chances. (There were 32 of these.) Interpretations referring to crime or more specifically, stealing, as evil. (These numbered 22.) Seven pupils felt that the theme had something to do with human greed and finally, there were 20 interpretations referring to Timi's desperation. Their answers are represented by the following:

- *"Timi thought if you have nothing, you have nothing to lose so he took a chance and lost."*
- *"He was desperate and willing to take a chance."*
- *"There are going to be times in one's life where you're going to have to take a chance and face the consequences."*
- *"Life consists of chances and we choose to take them."*
- *"If you take a chance you must bear the consequences like Timi."*
- *"Life is risky. He took a risk and lost."*
- *"You must use your chances wisely."*
- *"To take a chance in life."*
- *"Taking a chance to get lucky could also turn bad."*
- *"The suitcase and the chance of being lucky."*
- *"When you feel helpless or desperate, you take chances. Those chances can be luck or unlucky."*
- *"When you are in a bad situation, and you take a chance you haven't got the tools to get you out of the situation. And you ended up in jail."*
- *"Never take a chance that will not be to the benefit of yourself or other people."*

- *"Life is unfair and taking chances you can gamble with everything you have."*
- *"Timi was out of work and he was like the worm, defenceless because he had no work and no money. The suitcase was for him a chance to get something like money, clothes and articles to lose some pressure on him. It did not work out like most things in today's world but you got to take the chance."* (This response was given to the groups to consider whether the reader had pinpointed theme or not.)
- *"Honesty is the best policy."*
- *"Don't take something that doesn't belong to you."*
- *"Don't take other people's things."*
- *"Crime doesn't pay."*
- *"Crime doesn't pay-there is no way to justify it."*
- *"You shouldn't take things that don't belong to you."*
- *"You can't do something wrong just because you have a feeling that you won't be caught."*
- *"Don't lie."*
- *"Crime never pays."* (Groups were given this response to determine whether the intellectual impression left by the story actually dealt with crime or not.)
- *"Don't be greedy."*
- *"Greed."*
- *"Timi's desperation."*
- *"When you are under pressure you usually do the unexpected."*
- *"Deperation drives you to do anything."*
- *"The desperateness of a helpless man."*

#### 6.1.2

##### Significant moment

Sixty-four pupils decided that the most significant moment in the story occurs when the dead baby is discovered in the closing lines of the story. They respond as follows:

- *"Timi doesn't know what is in the suitcase and the significant moment is when they see the dead baby."*

- "When they found the dead baby."
- "When the constable showed Timi the dead baby."
- "When the baby was found in the suitcase."
- "They found the baby in the suitcase."
- "When they found the dead baby in Timi's suitcase. He lost as always. He never won."
- "When Timi saw what was really in the suitcase that he take. A white baby."
- "When Timi stretched his neck to see the dead baby in the suitcase."

Thirty-six pupils identified various other moments in the story such as the moment Timi decides to take the suitcase or the metaphor of the wasp and the worm. These groups are represented as follows:

- "When Timi saw the wasp killing the worm."
- "The most significant moment in the story was when Timi decided to go through with his plan."
- "When the two women came in with the case. One was looking 'sick'."
- "The moment he decided to claim the suitcase as his."
- "When the wasp attacks the worm."
- "I think that the most significant moment was when the wasp caught the worm describing the whole essence of the story. The defenceless always seem to suffer."
- "When the girls left the case behind and he claimed it."
- "When the police stopped him."
- "When he claimed the suitcase to be his. He crossed the rubicon."
- "When he took the suitcase and got off the bus."

### 6.1.3

#### Reader enjoyment

The responses to the final question of whether the reader enjoyed the story or not, produced some rather fascinating



responses. Fifty-seven pupils did enjoy the story for various reasons:

- "Yes, it gave us a different view of how a black man experiences things in life."
- "Yes, I enjoyed it because we saw it out of the point of view of the oppressed."
- "It was the best story I ever read in this class. The end was unpredictable. It was binding. In short: It was great. Cool!"
- "It was a good story with pitch black humor." (This response was given to the groups to discuss.)
- "Yes, something very different - lots of tension."
- "Yes, the end was a surprise."
- "Yes, it shows true life with all its cruelty and things we won't ignore."
- "I enjoyed the story because South Africans can relate to this type of thing. It conveys a message and teaches us a lesson."
- "I did enjoy the story. I was curious even though the end is shocking."
- "Yes, I enjoyed the story because it learns you a lesson and it awakes emotion."
- "Yes, the story kept me on the edge till the end."
- "Yes, it gives you something in a new perspective." (This response was given to the groups to determine what the reader meant by "new perspective.")
- "Yes, the story is realistic and reality bites! (sometimes)"
- "Yes, I can identify with Timi - I would have done the same."
- "Yes, A well-known surrounding but told from a different perspective to broaden my frame of reference."
- "Yes, I enjoyed it, it kept me interested right through and had the most shocking ending.." (This was given to groups to discuss story endings and whether the ending to this story was well motivated or not.)

- "I enjoyed the story very much. I particularly liked the way it had been written and how everything was written to fall together."
- "Yes, it was shocking."
- "It is a good story, although dead babies may not appeal to everyone."
- "Yes, it was very touching."
- "Yes, I was wondering all the time what is in the suitcase."
- "Yes, it is not an ordinary story."
- "Yes, it depicts lot of human qualities. it also shows to the racists that there are blacks that are trustworthy and who has a sense of justice."
- "I enjoyed the story. it was well written and out of the ordinary. It shocks you into reality and is written in such a manner that it is absolutely credible. The writer's technique is brilliant as can be seen when he describes the wasp killing the worm and showing the reader ever so gently, what went on in South Africa. The whites were the wasp and the black people were the worm." (This pupil seemed to indicate an understanding of the codes or signals in the text.)

Forty-three pupils did not enjoy the story and clearly indicated that their expectations had not been fulfilled:

- "No, he must not have stolen the suitcase and I neither like the idea of the dead baby."
- "It was sick and I felt I could puke." (This response was given to the groups with the request to consider whether one can reject a work of fiction purely on the grounds of the content or whether one should use other measures of evaluation.)
- "I disliked the story because I didn't like the end. how could a person kill a new-born baby and leave it on the bus? It makes me feel sick."

- "I did not like it because I thought the ending was horrid. If it had a more lighter ending it would be very enjoyable story for me."
- "No, although it has a lesson for everyone, it was not something nice. It was rather unfair." (This was given to the groups to discuss whether or not stories/fiction should be "nice" or not.)
- "No, the story is realistic. But all we hear these days is apartheid, apartheid, apartheid."
- "No, it is racist story." (This response was given to the groups to decide the validity of the reader's statement.)
- "No, it was horrible. Not my kind of story."
- "No, the dead baby was disgusting."
- "No, the story did not hold my attention."
- "no, you know what is going to happen before it do."
- "No, because Timi do wrong things. he doesn't set a very good example." (This response was given to the groups to decide whether characters in stories should be morally strong or not.)
- "I didn't enjoy the story but it is facts that we have to face that some people are less fortunate than ourselves."
- "No, I didn't like the story because Timi blamed his failur on the Whiteman." (This was given to the groups to discuss the validity of this response.)
- "No, I would have liked it if the story would have went on with a courtcase, but now it is actually a stupid story without anything lasting." (This response was given to the groups to decide what the reader meant.)
- "No, I don't think life for blacks is as bad as the writer described it." (This was given to the groups to discuss the accuracy of this observation.)
- "No, depressing!"
- "No, Timi the main character's meaning and doings was wrong from the beginning."

## 6.2 Through the Tunnel - Doris Lessing

### 6.2.1

#### Theme

Thirty-one pupils felt that the theme of the story was growing-up or achieving independence from the mother in the story. The following answers are representative of this group:

- "At one stage or other in your life you have to undergo changes to grow up, no matter how much it hurts."
- "He wanted to proof to himself that he doesn't need his mother anymore and that he has grown up."
- "She overwhelmed him and he tried to prove that he could get along without her."
- "He wanted to be independent."
- "Volwassewording."
- "parents struggle to let go of children, but have to in the end."
- "Growing up."
- "He wanted to break away from his mother and proof he is grown up."
- "He wanted to prove his independence. He is big like the other boys."
- "Hy is opsoek na selfstandigheid."
- "He wanted independence."
- "In everyone's life, there is something we have to proof to ourselves. For a while it is so importend to achieve this that nothing else matters. And when we achieve our goals (all by ourselves) it soon becomes not importend anymore. It is a stage in 'growing-up'."
- "The striving of a young child to grow up. The tunnel was a goal he had to reach by himself in order to grow up."

Twenty-seven pupils felt that the theme was related to acceptance by others or more specifically by the group of local boys in the story. The following represent their answers:

- *"Acceptance. Just to be liked by other people."*
- *"The theme of the story is the fact that everyone needs to feel accepted by others as well as themselves and in gaining this it helps you to grow up." (This response was given to the groups to determine whether the reader was justified or not.)*
- *"The struggle to be accepted by others and to be like them."*
- *"To be accepted."*
- *"To be accepted by others. To do what you want no matter what."*
- *"He wanted to prove himself that he was worthy of being part of the group."*
- *"He wanted to prove that he was just as good as the bigger boys so that he could be accepted."*

Forty-two pupils decided that the theme related to one's achievement of goals in life and human determination:

- *"To want to achieve your goal no matter what the obstacle."*
- *"When you set yourself a goal you must try to succeed. The boy wanted to prove himself." (This example was given to the groups to determine whether the story is about goal-setting.)*
- *"A typical success story where the boy has done it through hard training on his own."*
- *"Determination."*
- *"He was determined to reach his goal and therefore he would stop at nothing."*
- *"Determination - when you want to do something -you'll do it. I also think the story has to do with a racial thing." (This response fascinated me and caused me to*

re-read the story. The answer was given to the groups who re-read the story.)

### 6.2.2

#### Significant moment

The responses to question two were as follows:

Ninety-six pupils felt that the most significant moment was when the boy achieved his swim through the tunnel. The following are some of the responses:

- *"When he made it through the tunnel."*
- *"The most significant moment is when Jerry makes it through the tunnel, for his life changes from that moment he begins to grow up."*
- *"The moment he breaks through the tunnel into the light."*
- *"When he saw the crack of light at the end of the tunnel."*
- *"After Jerry went through the tunnel."*
- *"When he realized that he had reached the end of the tunnel."*
- *"When he exits the tunnel."*
- *"When he swam through the tunnel."*
- *"Where he sees the crack of light at the end of the tunnel."*
- *"It was the moment he saw the light exploding and when he reached the surface."*
- *"When he breaks through the tunnel."*
- *"When he was in the tunnel, his breathing almost stopped, he saw the crack of light."*
- *"When the boy reached the surface and had succeeded in his goal. After he went through the tunnel."*
- *"The moment he broke the water surface."*
- *"When he swam through the tunnel."*

The four remaining pupils identified the following most significant moments:

- "When he was on the rock and his nose bleeds and he decided to swim through the tunnel."
- "When he lay on the rock and realize that he did it."
- "When Jerry blurts out to his mom at lunch, 'I can stay underwater for two minutes, at least'."
- "It is when she touches his shoulder after he swum through the tunnel and when he blurts out to her 2 to 3 minutes."

The above four answers were given to the groups to discuss. Pupils had to motivate their concensus from the story. This resulted in a re-reading, in the groups, of certain extracts from the story.

### 6.2.3

#### Reader enjoyment

The final question on the questionnaire received a unanimous "yes" from all pupils. This was the only story which was enjoyed by all 100 pupils. Various reasons were given for their enjoyment. The following represent their responses:

- "I liked it because it is very real and describes it as a young boy sees it."
- "I really enjoyed the story because it is all about what life is all about, almost a sense of stubbornness to achieve something which I can identify with."
- "Yes, because it was gripping."
- "Yes, the theme was successfully brought out." (This pupil identified theme as growing up.)
- "Yes, we all are Jerry's sometimes. The story kept us in suspense for a long time."
- "Yes, because it can be related to life - Because one always wants to do everything other people do. And in the end one realizes it is not all that important."
- "Yes, I liked the story because it is very well written and is a very gripping, fast-moving story."

- "Yes, it has suspense, especially the part in the tunnel."
- "Yes, you could see how it looked underwater by the description and it didn't turn out the way I thought."
- "Yes, the boy succeeded. I thought the boy would die and was glad that he lived."
- "Yes, the suspense that if he was going to survive the swim through the tunnel or kept me interested and wanting to read on."
- "Yes, it had a positive ending - I don't like bad endings."
- "Yes, I can see myself in the boy."
- "Yes, he finally achieved his goal."
- "Yes, it is written good, you can actually 'feel' that you are under water."

### 6.3 Sleepy - Anton Chekhov

#### 6.3.1

##### Theme

Fifty-six pupils were able to identify theme in universal terms as related to a cruel social system or unequal opportunity for members trapped in rigid circumstances as a result of an unjust social order. Although poorly expressed, these pupils were able to recognize the universal element which constitutes the intellectual impression. The responses are represented by the following:

- "Sometimes you have no choice in your way of living and you get caught in situations that you don't act in the usual manner."
- "She is a victim of happenings in her life."
- "The girl's oppression forces her into a state where she cannot think clearly."
- "Sometimes life is unfair and hard."



- "She was in circumstances beyond her control which forced her to kill."
- "The character is trapped in the cruel customs of her time and circumstances beyond her control."
- "As a result of her cruel circumstances she is cruel too."
- "She is strangled by her circumstances."
- "Society is sick."
- "Slavery and cruelty which occurred in 1880."
- "The theme of the story is that life is very hard in a cruel society for some people."
- "Suppression."
- "Circumstances which drive and oppress you."
- "Everyone must be free and you cannot force something on anyone."
- "Oppressed working classes."
- "The slavery of people during the nineteenth century. if you were not rich, you weren't granted anything. You had no life of your own."
- "Life is not easy if you are not free." (This response was given to groups to ponder on what the reader meant by 'not free')
- "The masters of this world do not care about the 'Varkas' of this life."
- "Slavery and just how far some people would go for their own comfort."
- "Die onredelike behandeling van die werkersklas wat min gehad het deur die hoër adel klas wat geld gehad het."
- "Humans are cruel and inconsiderate."
- "Cruelty to the poor."
- "The struggle of the poor to survive."
- "The treatment of the working class by the upper class and their struggle to live."
- "All people have needs even all the poor people."
- "How society was divided and the struggle between societys."
- "All people should be treated equally."

- "Dit gaan oor mense wat geen regte het in die lewe nie en wat vir ander mense als moet doen en dan self nie regtig 'n lewe het nie."
- "The big generation gap between the rich and the poor in Russia in 1888." (This response was given to groups to ascertain what was meant by the reader.)
- "Poor people trapped in a world where they don't want to be."
- "The theme of the story is one's struggle with one's circumstances."

The rest of the pupils took a very literal approach to the intellectual impression and identified an inner personal struggle as the theme. These responses are represented as follows:

- "She could not break away from her tiredness and killed."
- "If something holds you down, you must get rid of it."
- "If a person is overworked, he will kill."
- "Something stood in her way to freedom and at the end she overcame this specific thing."
- "She wants to get out of her routine. She wants to be someone who is free to do anything she wants to."
- "When you're sleepy SLEEP. Get rid of things that bothers you." (This response was given to the groups to discuss the reader's interpretation.)
- "Varka wanted to get rid of the things that hold her down and look after her own needs."
- "You won't rest untill you get rid of that which binds you and prevents you from living."
- "Sometimes it is necessary but difficult to break with things that are tying you down."
- "We all are limited like Varka."
- "The theme would probably involve human nature - ability to kill etc."
- "You can only stand so much."
- "People can do funny things if they are desperate."

- "Get rid of a obstical that keep her from living."
- "Her hell and how she copes with it."
- "You cannot drive a human past the limits of endurance and expect everything to go well."
- "Discrimination You can't press a person beyond his limits."
- "A person (Varka) will do anything for sleep."
- "Sleep."
- "If you are tired you will do anything."
- "People can stand so much before they crack."
- "Some people use other people and don't care."
- "She was driven to the point where she would do anything to get what she wanted most."
- "If you have an obsession about something in life you will almost do anything to have what you want."
- "A girl who will do anything for sleep."
- "The rushed life that makes us mad."

### 6.3.2

#### Significant moment

Pupils singled out two main significant moments. Most pupils identified only one of the two, but a few did identify both.

Sixty-four pupils thought that the most significant moment was when Varka strangled the baby at the end of the story. Their answers are represented by the following:

- "Where she stills the baby forever."
- "Where she kills the baby."
- "Where the baby is killed by Varka. it symbolises that all her problems will disssolve if she kills the baby."
- "The end where she gets to sleep."
- "When the baby is killed by Varka and she finally gets the sleep she needs."
- "Where Varka kills the baby."
- "Her killing the baby because she is overtired."

- *"When she killed the baby and finally fell asleep."*
- *"When Varka kills the baby and lies down to sleep at once."*
- *"When she kills the baby for rest."*
- *"When Varka murders the baby."*
- *"When she laughs with delight after she killed the baby and then fall asleep as the dead."*
- *"After she killed the baby with delight she fells asleep, the thing she wanted so much."*
- *"When she killed the baby because it is her enemy."*
- *"Definitely when Varka strangled the baby."*
- *"There where she strangled the baby because she was desperate to sleep."*
- *"When she kills the baby and doesn't care about the results."*
- *"Die hele verhaal bou aan die hoogtepunt waar sy die baba doodmaak en dan is alles verby."*
- *"When the baby is killed and all is silent."*

The rest of the pupils (36) felt that the most significant moment in the story is when Varka identifies the baby as her enemy. Their answers are represented by the following:

- *"When she recognises her foe, the baby."*
- *"Where Varka sees the baby as her foe."*
- *"There where she finds the foe who will not let her live."*
- *"When she realizes that the foe who won't let her sleep is the baby."*
- *"The moment she realized that the foe who would not let her live is the baby."*
- *"The most significant moment in the story is where Varka realizes that if she kills the baby she will be rid of all her problems."*
- *"When she laughs and decides that the baby is her enemy."*
- *"It is the place when she realise that the enemy is the force that binds her."*

- *"When Varka decided that the baby was the cause of all her sorrow and sleeplessness."*
- *"When she started hallucinating and thought that the baby was her foe and had to be killed."*
- *"The discovery of the problem-her enemy."*

### 6.3.3

#### Reader enjoyment

The final question which aimed at ascertaining whether pupils enjoyed their reading thereby indicating whether or not the story fulfilled their expectations, was answered as follows. Sixty-nine pupils enjoyed the story, but for many different and fascinating reasons. Many of these answers provided good material for group discussion:

- *"I liked the story because it teaches the high and mighty people a lesson to give more and expect less."*  
(This was given to the groups to discuss the idea of literature "teaching a lesson.")
- *"Yes because that is how it was in that time. It is awful but true."*
- *"Yes, it is different to the ordinary story. The descriptions were good."* (This pupils acknowledged the fact that the story extended her/his horizon of expectations.)
- *"Yes, i like the story because it displays truth about what is really happening."*
- *"Yes, it creates an atmosphere of the living conditions in 1888."*
- *"Yes, you also sometimes feel as sleepy but you have to go on."* (This pupil was not able to identify theme.)
- *"Yes, it interests me to know how people lived in those days and how they were treated"*
- *"It is still a good story. The build up to the end of the story is very good."*

- "Yes, I enjoyed it because I can actually feel how Varka felt...it is very realistic."
- "In a certain way, yes. Like Schindler's List its disgusting but the truth in it makes it nice to read. I wouldn't read it everyday of my life but every now and again it would be nice."
- "I enjoyed the story because it is something different, not just the usual plot. It takes you to another world and another lifetime." (This was given to the groups to discuss what the reader meant by "not just the usual plot.")
- "I enjoyed it because it relates to a book I read recently on the Russian Tsars."
- "Yes, you can compare it with the situation in South Africa and elsewhere in the world."
- "Yes, because it is a real life story."
- "Yes, because the story does not end as you expect." (This response was given to the groups to discuss whether the murder was well motivated or not and groups were also asked to create another ending for the story.)
- "Yes, I thought it very true by depicting the lifestyle of the Russians and it was a masterpiece of fiction."
- "Yes I like stories like this with a sadistic quality." (Another provocative response which was given to the groups.)
- "Yes, it was well written and I felt sorry for Varka."
- "Yes, it is realistic and shows you the realities of a life that you are not familiar with."
- "Yes, although it was a long way back and not in familiar circumstances it tells us about the nature of the human heart."
- "Very dramatic - I like it."
- "Yes, I felt sleepy and irritated by all the work she had to do."
- "I liked the story because it has a good plot."
- "The scenery and thoughts are very well described, but the story itself is not very binding. I liked the

ending where she kills the baby it changed my whole view of the story. Overall, I liked it"

- "Yes, the story was not predictable, different to the usual stories." (This reader clearly reveals his/her horizon of expectations based on the reading of predictable texts.)
- "I liked it that she found her own answer to the problem"
- "The story was enjoyable but kept us in the dark for the whole time. Some events didn't make sense and made the story complicated." (This response was given to the groups to decide why the reader found the story "complicated.")
- "I enjoyed the story because it tells you about the sorrow and pain of other people"
- "This is a good story although it is hard to imagine that a person could become so oppressed that she kills a baby." (This response was given to the groups and resulted in a discussion on the ability of literature to extend one's experience.)

Twenty-nine pupils did not enjoy the story, mainly because they found the story depressing indicating that their expectations of a text did not include this kind of reality. These are their answers:

- "Did not like it - it is boring to read about other people's hardships - I can do nothing about it"
- "No, the story was mixed up and complicated"
- "No, it was boring"
- "Repetitive and boring"
- "I didn't enjoy the story. I don't know why. Maybe because it is too near the reality of these days." (This answer was given to the groups for discussion.)
- "It was good, but not my kind of story. It was a strange story." (This pupil displays a more differentiated evaluation in that he/she is able to

separate the emotional response from the literary merit of the text.)

- *"No, slightly boring - drifting from reality to dream"*
- *"I won't read such stories on my own. Too cruel"*
- *"No, it had a weird end, but it kept us in suspense through the story"*
- *"No, it is a simple story. It is too dramatic and overdone."* (This response was given to groups to discuss the validity of the reader's comment.)
- *"No, too much repetition and it is all the same"*
- *"No, it made me feel sleepy"*
- *"No, I don't like the cruel ending"*
- *"I didn't like the story very much because it lets me feel droopy and it really isn't exciting to read"*
- *"I did not like the story because if I read a story at this stage in my life, I don't expect such an ending"*

Only two pupils seemed to have no idea how to respond to the story. They wrote:

- *"I don't feel strongly either way"*
- *"I don't know. I sort of liked it"*

## 6.4 The Rocking-Horse Winner

### 6.1.1

#### Theme

Sixty-four pupils indicated that the love of money as the root of evil was the theme. The following represent the responses of this group:

- *"The author tried to, tell us that money shouldn't be the most important thing in your life"*
- *"Money musn't rule your life"*
- *"That you must not be selfish and think of your own money needs"*



- "There must be more money." - This was a direct quotation from the story.
- "Money is not everything in the world and cannot bring happiness"
- "Money can't buy everything he had alot of money but in the end Paul died and all that money could not change anythin."
- "Money should not be the most important thing in your life"
- "Money is the root of all evil." - 23 pupils gave this answer.
- "The theme of the story is mainly that you should be happy with what you have. Money shouldn't mean everything to you."
- "Wealth isn't everything in life. Love and happiness and a joyful heart is much more important."
- "Don't seek happiness money for you'll never have enough."
- "The boy thought money was happiness, but it brought death."
- "Money twists values and makes you do things you normally wouldn't do."
- "The mother wanted to keep up a lifestyle that she could not afford and killed her son."
- "The story is about people that always wants more than what they have and how everything around them can feel the intensity of their need."
- "People always want more money and think that money is the key to happiness, but in fact this is not true."

The above are a random sample of answers pinpointing the theme as being related to the love of money and human greed as a destructive force in human nature. The rest of the pupils, 36, saw the theme as luck-related which may indicate a direct, content-based more concrete interpretation. Their answers are represented by the following examples

- "Luck is not the amount of money you have."
- "That life doesn't always have a happy ending or good and bad can come from a certain situation.." (This answer was given to the groups to decide what the reader meant by situation and whether a story should or should not represent life)
- "Luck."
- "The obsession of the boy to try to prove to his mother that he was lucky was disastrous."
- "The boy was always trying to prove to himself that he was lucky."
- "The theme in the story is the fact of luck and unluck and that he wanted to be lucky to help his mother. The relationship between the two of them."
- "You cannot buy luck."
- "Luck cannot be measured in money."
- "It is about finding luck."
- "When you believe in something, you can accomplished it like the boy believed in luck."
- "Luck cannot be bought."
- "The rocking-horse became a winner over Paul."
- "You are not always lucky."
- "Someone that grew up unlucky would seek luck forever even if it would mean his death."
- "The boy seeking for love, using the wrong methods."
- "It's about a child who wants to please his mother."
- "Is luck money?"

Although the above answers indicate a very literal, concrete approach to the story and evidence that pupils do not yet have the skill of identifying the subtleties of theme.

The next question tests whether pupils were able to become engaged with the plot to such an extent that they were able to identify or recognize a significant moment in the chain of events in the story.

## 6.4.2

## Significant moment

Twenty pupils identified the boy's death at the end of the story as the most significant moment. The following represent samples of their answers:

- "When he died."
- "When he said he was lucky and died."
- "When Basset came up and told Paul that Malabar had won and that he had 80 thousand pounds. Then he died."
- "The moment when the boy died."
- "The end, when he knew which horse was going to win the Derby and then died."
- "When the boy died after he knew which horse had won the Derby."
- "When he laid on his bed busy dying and shouting Malabar."
- "His words: 'I am lucky' to his mother before his death."
- "His actual death and his uncle's words afterward. (This answer was discussed by the groups to find out exactly what the significance of the uncle's words were. Pupils had to go back to the text for this.)"
- "It is when Basset came in the room and told Paul that Malabar had won."
- "The house's whispering and the end when the boy dies"
- "When the boy died, he died with pride, he left his family enough money to stop the whispering in their house." (This answer was also given to the groups to discuss. They had to evaluate this reader's response and decide whether the author intended pride as an important emotion in the story. The teacher noticed that this same pupil was unable to pinpoint the theme of the story according to his/her answer to the previous question.)

Fifty-one pupils felt that the boy's last ride was the most significant moment. The moment when his mother entered the room and he fell from the rocking-horse. A few of the answers read as follows:

- *"The last time he rode on the rocking-horse."*
- *"The last time he was riding his rocking-horse, wildly and screaming. At that moment his mother appeared in the doorway and was very shocked to see her son.."*  
(This response was given to the groups to examine the textual clues which led the reader to draw this conclusion about the mother's feelings.)
- *"The last time on his rocking-horse when he fell."*
- *"He was lucky but his luck turned when he fell off the horse and he was unlucky."*
- *"The last time he rode the rocking-horse and shouted the Derby's winner."*
- *"While he was riding his horse, shouting Malabar."*
- *"When his mother came into the room and saw him on his mad ride."*
- *"When his mother came into the room and found Paul on his rocking-horse and after that he fell unconscious. It was ironic. I thought he would grow older and bet on horses for a life and then he died when he was still young.."* (This answer was also discussed in the groups and reasons were given why the author chose death for the boy and why the reader's expectations were perhaps not viable within the context of the story.)

Nine pupils felt that the most significant moment was when Paul gave his mother the five thousand pounds as well as the description of the voices going mad. The pupils identified the moment of giving and the effect - the voices - as one moment. These answers are represented as follows:

- *"When his mother got the money and the voices went mad. I thought the money would put a stop to their*

*problems, but it worsened everything.."* (This answer was also put to the groups with the question why the reader had this particular expectation and lively discussion on human greed ensued.)

The last twenty pupils felt that each time a horse won represented a significant moment.

- *"When his horses won the races."*
- *"When the two horses Daffodil and Malabar won."*
- *"The races when horses won."*

Sixteen pupils also identified the moment of his telling his mother that he was lucky as another significant moment.

- *"When he asked his mother if he ever told her that he is lucky and she answered: 'No you never did.' In the end the mother knew it is important to love your children.." (Here again, reader expectation was revealed. This was also given to groups to decide whether there were sufficient textual clues to come to this conclusion.)*
- *"When he told his mother that he had luck and she didn't believe him."*
- *"When he told his mother that he was lucky."*
- *"Even he asked his mother what is luck."*

Forty-one pupils identified more than one significant moment which were two of the above mentioned.

#### 6.4.3

##### Reader enjoyment

Their responses to this question indicate whether their horizons of expectations were met or not. Pupils indicated spontaneously what elements in the story did not meet their expectations. Their reasons varied from value judgements to simply expressing that they are unable to pinpoint why they did or did not enjoy the story.

Thirty-five pupils indicated that they did not enjoy the story. The following answers are representative of this group:

- "No, it is very depressing and a strange kind of story."
- "I did not enjoy the story because it is not very realistic. Like whispering in the house finding luck by riding a play horse etc."
- "No, the end did not match the rest of the story."  
(This answer was given to the groups to assess whether or not the reader's conclusion was justified.)
- "No, it was too awkward. It does not always make sense."
- "No, depressing."
- "No, it is not true enough. Nobody can win such a lot of times."
- "At the beginning I liked it, but it made me depressed at the end."
- "No, but although it had a perfect plot it was too depressing and just wasn't my kind of story."
- "I didn't quite like the story because I felt sorry for the little boy. It is a very sad story."
- "No, it is a terrible story and I don't think it like real life. It is too negative for me."
- "I did not like the story. It was weird and not nice, but in a way it was good that the boy died and was freed from this world. Now he will have love."
- "No, I don't like betting on a horse, especially a little boy, but it does have a lesson"
- "No, it is actually a very silly story. It does teach one something though."
- "No, it was too dramatic for me. The theme is good and it is true in real life."
- "No, because it is a very unreal story although the author has a great writing ability."

- "No, I did not enjoy it because it reminds me of what happens in the real world." (This pupil expresses his/her expectation for escapist reading.)
- "No, but the end is in a way predictable."
- "Not much I don't like gambling."
- "I didn't like it. I don't like stories where the children have to suffer with uncaring parents." (This pupil feels threatened by the story because in it her/his own adolescent need for security and love are not met.)

The rest of the group (65) all liked the story. Their answers are represented by the following:

- "Yes, it is a good, fast-moving story that brings the mother back to earth.."
- "Yes, because the theme of the story is based on the life of today."
- "Yes, the story had a deeper meaning than the obvious."
- "Yes, because there is a lot of tension throughout the story. You never know what is going to happen next."
- "I liked it very much because it is so different from what I am used to."
- "Yes, it is a nice story, but it is a difficult story to understand.." (This answer was given to the groups to decide why the reader could have found the story difficult.)
- "Yes, I liked the theme and the tension."
- "Yes, I enjoyed this odd story about how a boy can ride a wooden horse to know who wins."
- "Yes, except for the ending because Paul should not have died."
- "Yes, it is very well written. The story meant something to me."
- "Yes, because the mother started feeling guilty when her son became ill and died because of her selfishness.."

- *"yes, this boy was determined to help his mother and more determined to get that whisper out of their house." (Eleven pupils did what this pupil did, viz. attempted to justify their liking the story by retelling it. This may indicate an ingrained habit as a result of traditional classroom methods, to quote from the text at all times.)*
- *"I enjoyed the story. One can associate it with life. That people's lives can be ruined by greed and money and that children can suffer because all they want is a family, happiness and love." (Another example of adolescent needs being projected into making meaning.)*
- *"yes. This story reminded me once again that money isn't everything. If you have money but not love or don't have any belief in God, then you don't have anything." (Another example of a pupil making meaning in terms of his/her own religious beliefs. The story seems to justify the religious beliefs and therefore meets with the reader's approval. This answer was given to the groups to decide whether the reader was justified in motivating his/her enjoyment based solely on a religious response.)*
- *"Yes, it was very different from all the other boring stories. This story has something very special and you never know what is going to happen next. It keeps you on your toes the whole time and it has a 'deeper' meaning."*
- *"Yes, it brings an important message across." (This answer was also given to the groups and led to class discussion on whether fiction should or should not "teach us a lesson.")*
- *"Yes, many of us can identify with the characters."*
- *"Yes, it was a bit weird but I liked it."*
- *"Yes, I liked it. I have never read a story like this one, but I like it because there is something in the story that does attract me."*



## 6.5 Summary of Findings

### 6.5.1

*The Suitcase* - Eskia Mphahlele

#### 6.5.1.1

Theme

Nineteen pupils saw theme as the universal entrapment of an individual in a cruel society. Eighty-one gave a very literal interpretation of theme. This section resulted in discussion on :

Societal structuring.

- Identification of theme in literature.
- Whether it was essential for a reader to recognize theme or not.

#### 6.5.1.2

Significant moment

Sixty-four pupils felt that the closing lines represented the most significant moment in the story. The rest of the group presented a variety of other moments in the story. No group discussions in this section.

#### 6.5.1.3

Enjoyment

Fifty-seven pupils enjoyed the story for a variety of reasons. This section resulted in very lively discussion on the following:

- Whether or not there is humour in the story.
- People living the same country, yet knowing nothing about one another.
- Story endings.
- Rejection of a story on the basis of personal prejudice.
- Should fiction be "nice" or not?
- Was the story specifically about apartheid or was there a more universal theme.

- Racism and a definition of the term.
- Whether a protected group in a society ever really understand the suffering of the oppressed.

### 6.5.2

*Through the Tunnel* - Doris Lessing

#### 6.5.2.1

##### Theme

Thirty-one pupils identified theme here as growing-up. The rest identified an element of adulthood and a very real adolescent need, respectively, as the theme. Forty-two said that setting and achieving goals was the theme and twenty-seven felt that acceptance by the group, represented the theme. This section resulted in the groups discussing the following topics:

- Maturity and characteristics of adulthood.
- Adolescent needs.
- Reader projecting own frame of reference into making meaning.

#### 6.5.2.2

##### Significant moment

Ninety-six pupils identified the most significant moment as the moment of achieving the swim through the tunnel. The four remaining pupils each identified a different moment. This section resulted in groups re-reading sections from the story and discussing relevant cause and effect relationships within the text.

#### 6.5.2.3

##### Enjoyment

This was the only story which received a unanimous, positive reaction from the pupils. This section resulted in group discussion on the elements of fiction.

## 6.5.3

*Sleepy* - Anton Chekhov

Fifty-six pupils were able to pinpoint the intellectual impression in terms of universal human suffering in an unjust society. Forty-four pupils took a literal approach and saw a personal inner struggle as the theme. Topics raised by their responses were as follows:

## 6.5.3.1

## Theme

- The second-language speaker's inability to express or articulate precisely.
- Suffering in society.
- How does a reader learn to make meaning.

## 6.5.3.2

## Significant moment

Two moments were identified as significant by all pupils. They were the strangling of the baby and the moment when Varka identifies the baby as her problem. The only group discussion on this section resulted in a class discussion on whether a "right" or "wrong" interpretation existed in literature.

## 6.5.3.3

## Enjoyment

Sixty-nine pupils enjoyed the story. This section resulted in the following being discussed in the groups session:

- Whether literature should teach a moral lesson or not.
- Pupils were given the opportunity to create a different ending for the story.
- The motivation for the murder.
- One response even led to a discussion on why it was easier for them to make a time-shift in film than when reading.
- The benefits of literature.

## 6.5.4

*The Rocking-Horse Winner* - D.H.Lawrence

## 6.5.4.1

## Theme

Sixty-four pupils were able to identify the theme and express it in universal terms. Only thirty-six pupils took a concrete, literal approach to theme. This question resulted in group discussions on theme and whether the author chose a theme first and then wrote the story or whether the story came first.

## 6.5.4.2

## Significant moment

Five different significant moments were identified by pupils and groups discussed the following:

- The specific significance of the closing dialogue.
- The validity and main reasons for the boy's death.
- Lawrence's portrayal of emotion in the mother.
- Why the story had to end in death and the author's motivation of the death.
- The influence of parental priorities and obsessions on children.
- Is it possible to miss the author's intention because of a strong personal need being projected into the text?

## 6.5.4.3

## Enjoyment of the story

Sixty-five pupils enjoyed the story and these responses resulted in the following being discussed by the groups:

- The influence of a foreign cultural setting on the reader's comprehension. (elimination of uncertainties)

- Should literature be evaluated in terms of the reader's personal value system or are other criteria applicable?
- Should fiction teach us a lesson or not?

Thirty-five pupils did not enjoy the story mainly because of the sad ending. These answers springboarded the following discussion:

- Should fiction reflect reality or not?
- Should stories have happy endings?
- The relationship between fiction and real life.

A discussion of the responses and an analysis of these responses will be dealt with in the next chapter.

## 7 ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF GROUP DISCUSSION AND PUPIL RESPONSES

### 7.1 Introduction

The approach taken throughout this study was pupil-centred in that the pupils' responses to the questions were in no way influenced by the teacher's interpretations. This resulted not only in spontaneous, unbiased responses by pupils, but ensured maximum involvement of pupils. At the same time the three questions asked did serve a dual function, in that they guided pupils' questioning of the text even as they provided us with insight into the pupils interpretation of that text.

Class and small group discussions formed an integral part of pupil response and interpretation of the texts. Discussion provides the ideal platform for addressing adolescent cognitive needs: pupils are able to question social, political and religious systems and so test values against their own beliefs. The varying viewpoints expressed by pupils in the group discussions enabled pupils to grasp that a literary work is a dynamic entity which offers a variety of communication to different readers. This understanding was encouraged and emphasized throughout classroom sessions.

Many pupils sought teacher approval for their written responses as well as conclusions drawn in small-group discussions. Questions such as: "I don't know if this is 'right '" or "Will you check my answer?", were frequently asked during the initial stages of the course. A marked decrease in this type of questioning and increased confidence in their own opinions was clearly noticeable by the end of the course.

It should be noted that many small-groups were made up of pupils from a city environment as well as pupils from small country towns in the Orange Free State. During discussions they were formulating hypotheses based on their own unique life experiences which broadened and extended the perceptions of all group members. The use of discussion facilitated a major Reception Theory concept, viz. that reading is rather a process whereby the reader interacts with the text and achieves interpretation as he/she experiences the text (Iser 1978:13). Discussion allows pupils to express their developing ideas immediately, but also allows for uncertainty and approximation. It allows for detours and diversions and analogies with their own life experience. Although group discussions were not recorded, it was noticed that many discussions abounded with sentences commencing with: "It's like....; You know what I mean...; I remember...; I don't agree...; or Why do you say that?" Through this process pupils acquired insight regarding the interpretation process itself. For

second-language speakers discussion is invaluable: it is not as censorious as writing and prevents premature closure in the creative thinking process in that the ideas of others must be accommodated. It also stimulates the unpredictability of real-life communication and is open-ended. This method allows pupils to discover the whole process of reading engagement and how to make meaning of a text. Pupils were able to interact with the text and compare their own interaction with that of their peers (Iser 1978:13). The following analysis of pupils' responses will deal not only with pupils' written responses, but where relevant, refer to the outcome of the the small-group discussions as well.

## 7.2 Analysis and evaluation

### 7.2.1

#### Pupil expectation

It is in this area mainly that Reception Theory has much to contribute when applied to classroom practice. A knowledge of the predispositions and reading experience of the readers does contribute considerably to an understanding of their interpretation of a text. The profile of this reader group indicated that 85% of the pupils read thrillers, adventure stories and love stories (vide Chapter 4 ). Umberto Eco refers to this type of text as a 'closed' text:



*They apparently aim at pulling the reader along a predetermined path, carefully displaying their effects so as to arouse pity or fear, excitement or depression at the due place and at the right moment. Every step of the story elicits just the expectation that its further course will satisfy (Eco 1979:8).*

The books read by pupils come mainly from this type of literature, in which the outcome unfolds in a predictable fashion. The expectations created by these predictable texts were transferred to the texts presented in the classroom. Answers like the following clearly display this tendency:

- *"I didn't like the story very much because it lets me feel droopy and it really isn't exciting to read"*
- *"I did not like the story because if I read a story at this stage in my life, I don't expect such an ending"*
- *"I won't read such stories in my own. Too cruel"*
- *T"Yes, the story was not predictable different to the usual stories"* This last comment clearly indicates that what the reader usually reads is predictable.

Other examples expressing the same idea were:

- *"I enjoyed the story because it is something different, not just the usual plot. It takes you to another world and another lifetime"*
- *"Yes, it is different to the ordinary story. The descriptions were good"*
- *"Yes, A well-known surrounding but told from a different perspective to broaden my frame of reference."*

The above pupils experienced the story as 'different', but nevertheless enjoyed it because their reading experience had been extended.

- *"The story was enjoyable but kept us in the dark for the whole time. Some events didn't make sense and made the story complicated"*

This response was given to the groups to discuss why the reader experienced the story as complicated. Most groups, after much discussion and re-reading of the text decided that the shift back and forth in time and the multiplicity of meaning in the story made it different from the stories they normally read. The outcome of this group discussion displayed a lack of exposure to texts which do not follow a predictable path with a happy ending. Examples portraying this tendency abound in the responses and some pupils openly expressed their preference for escapist literature:

- *"I did not like it-it is boring to read about other people's hardships - I can do nothing about it"*

Some pupils recognized that the story had literary merit, but still responded on an emotional level:

- *"It was good, but not my kind of story. It was a strange story"*
- *"This is a good story although it is hard to imagine that a person could become so oppressed that she kills a baby"*

Many pupils openly projected their own needs into the stories:

- *"Yes, because the mother started feeling guilty when her son became ill and died because of her selfishness"*
- *"I enjoyed the story. One can associate it with life. That people's lives can be ruined by greed and money and that children can suffer because all they want is a family, happiness and love"*

The adolescent's need for love, security and acceptance is demonstrated by such responses which indicate that the readers are not yet fully developed as far as abstract or formal operational thought is concerned as they were unable to distance themselves from the events and what they represent in the story.

According to Jauss reader expectations are also influenced by the reader's knowledge of a specific genre. Some of the responses appeared to indicate that pupils had little understanding of the characteristics of the short story as genre and that this influenced their responses. Pupils seemed unfamiliar with the surprise ending, concentrated plot and brevity which characterize the short story:

- *"Yes, the end was a surprise"*
- *"I enjoyed the story very much. I particularly liked the way it had been written and how everything was written to fall together"*( This reader experienced the concentrated nature of the shorter text)
- *"No, I would have liked it if the story would have went on with a courtcase, but now it is actually a stupid story without anything lasting"*

Some pupils were unable to accommodate the O'Henryian twist in the tail of three of the stories which also seems to indicate a lack of understanding of the genre:

- *"No, the end did not match the rest of the story"*
- *"Yes, except for the ending because Paul should not have died"*
- *"Yes, because the story does not end as you expect"*
- *"No, it had a weird end, but it kept us in suspense through the story"*

- *"No, I don't like the cruel ending"* This last comment could also be indicative of the reader's expectation for a happy ending due to their reading experience of predictable texts.

During one of the small-group discussions on *The Suitcase*, pupils were requested to discuss the following response:

- *"No, I would have liked it if the story would have went on with a courtcase, but now it is actually a stupid story without anything lasting."*

This response led to another discussion of the idea of a happy ending and resulted in the teacher requesting pupils to create their own ending to the story. This they did enthusiastically. The 'new' ending was discussed by the rest of the groups. Thus the group discussions facilitated not only the developing of creativity in that pupils were able to formulate hypotheses which were new to them, but imaginative 'new' contributions to the message of the text could also be made. Certainly pupils were able to go beyond where they have never gone before (Torrance 1994:7). Pupil expectations were influenced by their understanding or lack of understanding of the difference between reality and fiction:

- *"I did not enjoy the story because it is not very realistic. Like whispering in the house, finding luck by riding a play horse etc."*

- "No, it is a terrible story and I don't think its real life. It is too negative for me"
- "No, because it is a very unreal story although the author has a great writing ability"
- "Yes, the story is realistic and really bites!"
- "No, the story is realistic. But all we hear these days is:apartheid,apartheid, apartheid"
- "No, it is not true enough. Nobody can win such a lot of times"

The above responses indicate that real life as the reader knows it was applied as a critical norm and not an insight based on the understanding that the author combines conventions in unusual ways to create a 'new' reality: a fictional reality(Iser 1976:61). These combinations of conventions should not be totally familiar as the reader would not be expanded or enriched by his/her reading experience.

The following pupil response was given to the small-groups with the request that pupils should decide whether this was a valid norm to use when evaluating a text:

- "No, I did not enjoy it because it reminds me of what happens in the real world"

This particular group discussion resulted in a lengthy exchange on the difference between fiction and reality and if fiction should/should not tell us something about

reality. One or two pupils clung doggedly to their opinions that they did not want to read about cruelty even though it existed in real life. Others felt that the reading experience could help them cope better with cruelty in real life. Pupils were totally involved in their discussion and frequent references were made to the text which resulted in re-readings of the text. Regular exposure to texts which do not have the predictable happy ending as well as discussion on fictional reality, systematically broadens their reading expectations.

The above observations were made possible by the concept of the horizon of expectations as defined by Jauss. The horizon of expectations of the specific group of pupils in the project was gained as part of the process of establishing the reader profile (described in Chapter 4). It should therefore be clear how important this knowledge is, as it enables the teacher to understand pupils' inabilities to interpret or enjoy a text. Classroom practice can become conducive to systematically addressing these inabilities and encouraging growth of reading experience. Instructional experiences can be structured where pupils read and learn to read selections which expand their worlds, building on their present understandings and attitudes.

Teachers could compare classroom texts with some of the texts which pupils have read outside the classroom: they could highlight connections among different titles and

assist pupils to make explicit connections with previous reading experiences so that their knowledge of genre and understanding of fictional reality is extended.

A classroom reading programme which aims at focusing on pupil articulation of literary experience will allow pupils to gain confidence in their own interpretations and reading could become a lived-through experience instead of a teacher interpretation where they are reduced to passive onlookers. Many reader-centred methods could be used successfully. For instance, methods such as the silent dialogue where pupils are divided into pairs and write about the elements of fiction to one another in dialogue form. The tableau vivant enables pupils to pinpoint the most significant moment by means of a freeze frame enactment of the scene from the story with the rest of the class posing relevant questions. A sliding scale where pupils distinguish and mark their own responses assists the unskilled to find terms in which to articulate their reading responses. Open response followed by group discussion could successfully be used, as in fact, could any classroom approach which centres on the responses of pupils and systematic broadening of their horizon of expectations.

In a definitive study on the high school pupil as reader, Martjie Bosman maintains that the overteaching of one literary work instead of exposing pupils to a variety of works is not conducive to an exciting classroom reading



experience. Pupils become bored and frustrated with the study of only one or two works per year. Bosman points out that less intensive study of a greater number of texts does not imply superficial teaching, but several works can be successfully used to illustrate the elements of fiction (1987:38). A knowledge of the reading predispositions of the reader group and an insight into their expectations should influence the selection of texts if a variety of different texts are selected for a program. A variety of texts could make the introduction of different genres possible. Pupils involved in this study also clearly indicated this preference for a variety of texts (vide Chapter 1).

As indicated in the introductory chapter, pupils indicated that they wish to be given the opportunity to contribute in the process of interpretation. If their interpretation skills are to be developed in the literature classroom, then pupils must be given the opportunity to freely express their responses. These responses must be discussed and pupils must be informed of the components of the horizon of expectations so that they are able to gain an insight into their own interpretations. If they are aware that they are interpreting a text on the basis of their own reading background, for example, this could lead to an understanding of the process of interpretation and a consideration of their own responses.

## 7.2.2

## Recognition of thematic features

A study of the responses revealed a progressive growth in the recognition of theme after each story. Nineteen pupils were able to identify the intellectual impression as encoded by the author in the first story, *The Suitcase*. Thirty-one pupils were able to identify theme in the second story, *Through the Tunnel*. Fifty-six pupils were able to identify theme in the third story and sixty-four pupils pinpointed the intellectual universal in the fourth story.

Not only was there a clear increase in understanding of the theme, but it should also be stressed that many more pupils were able to identify at least some of the thematic features inherent in the text: pupils were able to recognize some of the characteristics of maturity in *Through the Tunnel* which seems to indicate, in part, an understanding of the author's intention. The same was evidenced in the last story, *The Rocking-Horse Winner*: more pupils were able to identify a feature of theme, viz. 'luck'

After their own responses had been recorded, many of these were given to the small groups for discussion with the view to exposing pupils to other interpretations or misinterpretations of theme. Some of the responses which were discussed in the small group situations were:

- "The black people are always the least in a situation"

- *"They aren't given a chance to improve themselves"*
- *"The helpless are usually depressed"*
- *"The theme of the story is the fact everyone needs to feel accepted by others as well as themselves and in gaining this it helps you to grow up"*

The above examples were discussed in small groups with the teacher moving from group to group acting as facilitator by posing questions where discussion was digressing or flagging. Questions like the following were asked:

- *"Are black men really the least in every society in the world?"*
- *"Are there Timis in other countries too?"*
- *"Why or how are people not given a chance in a society?"*
- *"What attributes make a person a grown-up?"*
- *"Was the story about acceptance only?"*

After thorough exchange of ideas, pupils were exposed to the teacher's interpretation of the story. This demonstrated to pupils that a variety of communication was possible by the text: this point was also demonstrated by reading out pupils' individual responses to the whole class. After the teacher's interpretation had been read, pupils were again given the opportunity for discussion. Passages from the texts were re-read to discover whether the teacher's interpretation was valid or not. During the small group discussions, pupils were frequently re-reading

sections from the text. This encouraged a careful scrutiny of the signals or codes inherent in the text and suggested to the pupils that response to good literature is not merely a random emotional one, but involves a cognitive engagement. In response to theme in *The Rocking-Horse Winner*, one pupil responded:

- "The story is about people that always wants more than what they have and how everything around them can feel the intensity of their need."

This response was given to the small groups for discussion. Pupils were asked to determine what led the reader to deduce 'intensity of need' from the story. This led to a good discussion on the author's diction and literary language in general. Thus, a pupil response to the question on theme, led to insight and understanding of literary language which is an integral component of the horizon of expectations (Jauss 1982:22).

Even the selection of responses to be discussed by the groups is based on the teacher's insight into the pupils reading experience and reading predispositions. Responses are selected with the purpose of broadening discussion on problem areas where interpretation was obstructed.

As indicated in the summary of responses (Chapter 6) several aspects of theme were discussed by pupils in the small groups. These aspects included whether an author

thought about theme first or story first; how to recognize theme and whether all fiction should have a theme or not.

The fact that pupils were increasingly able to identify theme seems to indicate that their growing understanding was facilitated by the above goal-directed, systematic process.

### 7.2.3

#### Pupil understanding of content

Responses to the question testing an understanding of content proved extremely positive in that every pupil really did on each occasion identify a key moment in the plots which indicated a good understanding of the content of the story. This could be attributed to traditional classroom practice where much time is spent on details of content and much testing is content centred. (This was pinpointed by pupils and documented in the introduction to this study). It was interesting to note that many pupils insisted on qualifying their answers even though they were not required to do so:

- *"Where the baby is killed by Varka. It symbolizes that all her problems will dissolve if she kills the baby."*
- *"When they found the dead baby in Timi's suitcase. He lost as always. He never won"*

This tendency may also be indicative of ingrained training that the text must somehow be demystified or explained at all costs.

#### 7.2.4

##### Pupil frame of reference

Much insight is gained into pupil interpretation of the texts if the teacher has some understanding of the pupils background such as cultural grouping and religious values. These factors often result in pupils being unable to decode the signals in the text and they produce 'blinkered' or stock responses dictated by their own value system. Some responses were characterized by direct, concrete and subjective interpretations pertaining to pupils own frame of reference such as the South African situation;

- *"No, it is a racist story"*
- *"I also think the story has to do with a racial thing  
"(Through the Tunnel)"*
- *"The black people are always the least in a situation.  
They arn't given a chance to improve themselves"*
- *"No, I didn't like the story because Timi blamed his  
failure on the Whiteman"*

These answers and others like them demonstrated a stock response or 'blinkered' view drawn from the South African situation which can be seen as an obstacle to interpretation and results in premature closure when

interpreting. The universal element in the stories was lost on these pupils and prohibited real thought about the author's intention. As identified by Jauss, the a text is not read in a vacuum and a reader is predisposed to a specific reception when the act of reading commences (Jauss 1982:23). It is important for the teacher to ensure that the reader expectations are re-orientated according to the genre or type of text so that dynamic broadening of this horizon is achieved.

As early as 1930 I.A. Richards concisely pinpoints the misconceptions which result from stock responses:

*These have their opportunity whenever a poem seems to, or does, involve views and emotions already fully prepared in the reader's mind so that what happens appears to be more of the reader's doing than the poet's. The button is pressed and then the author's work is done, for immediately the record starts playing in quasi-(or total) independence of the poem which is supposed to be its origin or instrument (1930 16-17).*

This text-reader interaction is further refined in more recent studies by Iser. His theory on blanks or gaps to be filled in by the reader as the reading process progresses explains this particular text-reader interaction:

*Balance can only be attained if the gaps are filled and so the constitutive blank is continually bombarded with projections. The interaction fails if the mutual projections of the social partners do not change, or if the reader's projections superimpose themselves unimpeded upon the text. Failure, then, means filling the blank exclusively with one's own projections (Iser 1976:167).*

The above examples seem to display this phenomenon where pupils' projections filled the gaps. Iser states further that the reader must re-adjust his own projections. The text itself must control this interaction.

Thus, young readers with a limited reading experience in their second language who are not adept at decoding literary language, need guidance in acquiring this skill of successfully decoding the author's signals. A reader-centred classroom approach to literature offers an excellent environment for encouraging this learning process. Here pupils can express their responses and test them against the responses of their peers and the teacher in the group discussion sessions. Re-readings of the text are encouraged by the classroom method and this way pupils acquire the skills needed to decode the signals in a text.

Other 'blinkered' interpretations or unsuccessful reader-text interpretations demonstrated in the responses are



value judgements based on a strong Christian background and also pupils concern with finding some didactic implication in the story. Examples abound in the responses:

- *"Not much. I don't like gambling"*
- *"Yes. This story reminded me once again that money isn't everything. If you have money but not love or don't have any belief in God, then you don't have anything"*
- *"No, I don't like betting on a horse especially a little boy, but it does have a lesson"*
- *"Yes, it brings an important message across"*
- *"I enjoyed the story because South Africans can relate to this type of thing. It conveys a message and teaches us a lesson"*
- *"No, although it has a lesson for everyone it was not something nice"*

The above responses mirror Iser's theory that reader judgements reflect the norms and attitudes of their cultural codes. The teacher who understands the cultural background of his/her pupils, can facilitate other viewpoints and interpretations of the text. One of the above responses was selected for group discussion, viz.

*"Not much. I don't like gambling."* Pupils were led by the teacher to identify why the reader responded in this way. Pupils came to realize that many of their judgements are based on their religious beliefs, which in turn, provided insight into their own interpretation of texts.

The above analysis of pupil-centred involvement in a literary experience demonstrates that every pupil was involved in individual response to the texts; they talked and exchanged ideas on their literary experiences in the small-group situation as well as the whole-group discussions and also had an opportunity to respond individually to the texts.

All classroom language was directed at refining and discovering pupils' literary experience with the selected texts; frequent re-readings of the texts were encouraged not only by the teacher, but often urged by peers as well. Different pupil opinions, abilities and interests were treated as valuable and it was consistently stressed that a variety of experience was possible when reading a literary text. In the above study, pupils began to see that different readers make sense of texts in different ways and that the readers bring different approaches to their reading. Pupils are inclined to see these differences in terms of good or bad if they are not encouraged to do otherwise. I experienced this phenomenon several times during classroom sessions. A pupil would be reticent to give his/her own interpretation as he/she felt it was "not good". They were inclined to judge their own statements in terms of "right" or "wrong" and thereby acknowledging that the truth about the text was somewhere outside of themselves. The whole programme was pupil and interpretation centred, which encouraged the uniqueness of each interpretation and stressed the contribution of each

reader. Finally, pupils came to see that meaning was not magically achieved, but entailed a process of pondering, questioning one another and re-reading the text.

The above classroom approach could prove invaluable in a country undergoing radical social change such as ours. Pupils are given the opportunity to examine and discover their uniqueness and the interesting differences that exist among different cultural groups within a protective, tolerant classroom atmosphere.

## 8 CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the degree of literary engagement achieved through a variety of short stories and has emphasized the values of a pupil-centred approach to literature in the classroom.

Pupils demonstrated a better understanding of the text-reader interaction through their classroom behaviour: pupils became increasingly confident in their own opinions and became aware of different interpretations of the same text in their group discussions and individual responses. This occurred slowly as they discovered that there really was no teacher intervention or censorship. This approach encouraged pupils to re-read the text or parts of the text to aid their interpretation. The text became the only source of information in their interpretation process.

Pupils felt free to risk expressing their real feelings and ideas, but realized that their responses had to be justified from the text. Thus, their responses were evaluated in the light of the text itself by their own efforts at finding the truth. The whole process led to pupils gaining insight into the the interpretation process itself as they no longer saw their responses in terms of 'right' or 'wrong' and more important, no longer relied on the teacher to interpret the text.

The reader profile proved an invaluable tool in assisting my insight into pupil responses. I understood their responses in the light of their reading experience and cultural background. The profile even enabled me to predict certain responses and thus to systematically guide their interpretation during the discussion sessions.

The fact that the classroom focus was not limited to the four short stories only, but encouraged references to other texts which had been experienced by the pupils, led to the introduction of several novels such as Bryce Courtenay's "Power of One" and John Steinbeck's "East of Eden"

Knowledge of Reception Theory and its implications for classroom practice makes one feel that emphasis should shift to personally engaging pupils instead of prising meaning from the text or merely studying the teacher's interpretation. A study by John Gardner on the reading interests and reading habits of English (First Language) Secondary School pupils in South Africa confirms that classroom practice in this country does not encourage reading as a pleasurable past-time:

*High schools should aim less at teaching specific works of literature than at appreciation of the act of book-reading, even though that might produce no short-term, easily quantifiable results such as examination performance.*

*Educationists need to direct their efforts towards pupils' attitudes and values in respect of books more than towards simply attempting yet another set of book prescriptions (Gardner 1995:35).*

Another study on effective literature teaching by G. Barkhuizen revealed the following which substantiates what I have discovered through this study:

*In conclusion, it is clear that the teaching and studying of literature should be seen as a collaborative effort. Pupils do not want to be told about literature. They want to experience it and contribute to it. Under the guidance of the teacher, pupils want to become more involved in their literature classes. If they are allowed to do so, perhaps then the real aims of literature teaching will be fulfilled (Barkhuizen 1994:40).*

Most of the subjects of his study had studied English as first language, but a third of the respondents had studied English as a second-language. His findings clearly indicate that this made no difference to their opinions on what they regarded as effective literature teaching. His findings stress pupil engagement and in the words of one of his respondents:

*We were never taught literature, we were told literature (Barkhuizen 1994:39).*

My study has particular relevance and potential in the Orange Free State classroom in that the mark allocation for the English Second-language Syllabus (Std 8,9 and 10) in the Orange Free State has been reviewed. Only one text will henceforth be evaluated in the final matriculation examination. This implies that the remaining prescribed texts can be evaluated by the classroom teacher and the teacher is now free of the debilitating examination constraint and will be able to apply pupil-centred methods in the classroom. These methods should focus on reading as an activity and not the study of one or two isolated texts. Connections should be made between the classroom texts and the pupils' leisure reading.

This research has resulted in an in-service training course for English Second-language teachers who clearly expressed their need for insights regarding less text-centred approaches in the literature classroom. An instructional video demonstrating the pupil-centred methods described in this study was made for second-language teachers and successfully used to illustrate pupil-centred methods in the literature classroom.

Analysis of pupil responses has led to a better understanding of the interpretation process of the second-language learner. A further study could investigate pupil

responses during the group discussion sessions by recording these on audio tape for analysis. Such an investigation could further refine one's understanding of pupil' interpretation process.

The focus here was on the Afrikaans speaker and does not therefore reflect the multicultural nature of the average second-language classroom in the Orange Free State.

Additional research focusing on other second-language learners could result in a valuable comparison of results and could assist teachers in the multicultural reality of present classroom situations.

Studies of this nature could serve to encourage a shift away from traditional text-centred approaches and places pupils' growing ability to develop and ponder their own and others' understandings of literature at the centre of classroom instruction. The overwhelming response received from second-language teachers in the Orange Free State expressing their need for training courses in this area further emphasizes the relevance of research projects such as this, which point to new and much needed directions for instructional change in the second-language literature classroom.



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## ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by discussions with Standard eight pupils who speak English as a second language. A survey revealed that pupils felt that they were seldom given an opportunity for making their own classroom contributions to literature. Pupils experienced that their responses were reduced to rote-learning of the teacher's response and reproducing this during examination. The survey demonstrated that pupils would rather be exposed to a variety of shorter texts than a laborious, lengthy discussion of one or two texts. An attempt was made, through a pupil-centred approach, to achieve meaningful literary engagement with second-language learners using shorter texts.

Reception Theory formed the theoretical basis for this research and in particular, the theories of the Constance School of Jauss and Iser. The relevance of the horizon of expectations, repertoire of the text, and the text-reader communication process formed the basis for evaluation and analysis of pupil responses to four selected short stories.

A thorough reader profile contributed to a better teacher prediction of and insight into pupil responses to the texts. This insight enabled systematic and informed teacher guidance of group work and classroom discussions.

Analysis of responses pointed to a great degree of literary engagement in that pupils were increasingly able to identify theme in each story and demonstrated a clear understanding of the content of each story without any teacher intervention. Reader expectations were not always fulfilled, but through group discussion of selected pupil responses, the teacher was able to guide pupils to a better understanding not only of the process of interpretation, but also of the various components of the horizon of expectations. Pupils were encouraged to view reading as a process of communication with themselves as a vital link in that process.



## EKSERP

Hierdie studie is gemotiveer deur klaskamergesprekke met standaard agt tweedetaalsprekers van Engels. Uit 'n steekproef het geblyk dat sodanige leerlinge selde of ooit 'n geleentheid gegun word om hul eie beleving van die teks weer te gee. Leerlinge ervaar hulle beleving van die voorgeskrewe teks, gereduseer tot onderwyser se interpretasie van en respons daarop. Hierdie teksinterpretasie word dikwels as die enigste korrekte weergawe tydens evaluering ervaar. Uit die steekproef blyk dat leerlinge veel eerder blootgestel wil word aan 'n verskeidenheid tekste as indiepte bespreking van een of twee voorgeskrewe werke. Hierdie studie poog om te bewys dat betekenisvolle literêre betrokkenheid bevorder kan word deur 'n leerlinggesentreerde- onderrigbenadering met die gebruik van 'n verskeidenheid korter tekste.

Die Resepsieteorie word as begronding vir hierdie navorsing gebruik, in die besonder die teorieë van die Konstanz Schule van Jauss en Iser. Die relevansie van die verwagtingshorison, die repertoire van die teks en die leser-teks kommunikasieproses, vorm die basie vir evaluasie en analise van leerlingresponse op vier uitgesoekte kortverhale.

'n Deeglike leserprofiel het bygedra tot 'n besondere insig van die leerlingresponse. Hierdie insig het sistematiese en ingeligte leiding t.o.v. groepwerk en klaskamerbesprekings moontlik gemaak. Analise van die leerlingresponse het geblyk dat 'n groot mate van literêre betrokkenheid wel bereik is. Leerlinge het duidelik getoon dat hulle toenemend die tema duideliker kon identifiseer en goeie begrip gehad het t.o.v. die inhoud van elke verhaal sonder onderwyser inmenging. Leserverwagtings was nie altyd vervul nie, maar doelgerigte bespreking van leerlingresponse het die leerlinge gelei om nie alleen die interpretasieproses te verstaan nie, maar om die komponente van hul verwagtingshorison te begryp. Leerlinge is aangemoedig om lees as 'n kommunikasieproses met hulself te beleef.