9-1-2003

The Motif of Human Flying in Children's Literature

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THE MOTIF OF HUMAN FLYING IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Teacher Education

and the

Faculty of the Graduate School

University of Nebraska

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

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September 2003

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,

University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Master of Science,

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Date Sept. 4, '03

The Motif of Human Flight in Children's Literature

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine works of children's literature that included humans that could fly, and to further examine the reaction of students who were exposed to the specific works. Twenty-six books were studied and the results were compiled using qualitative procedures. The data that were examined in the study of the books included reviews and editorial commentaries from many sources and the researchers own notes, taken during the reading and studying of the books identified by this research. The research conducted with the literature details the patterns and similarities that can be found in the cross section of works studied. These include variations of dream patterns and themes involving cultural identities and social issues. Four students participated in the study, which introduced them to a wide variety of the books used in the first phase of the research. Data were collected from their journal entries, transcriptions of audiotapes that were recorded during discussions and interviews, and written or visual work that was completed as part of the project. The students believed that the books that they were introduced to were written for the purpose of inspiring imagination in the readers, and that they thematically represented ideas about freedom. All of the data from both phases of the study were triangulated to reach conclusions with regard to the literature that is available to educators with a motif of human flying, and in drawing conclusions regarding what students believe about this specific type of literature.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Wilma Kuhlman, who was so instrumental in every step of this research. Her steadfast support, encouragement and faith in me made the research process one of joy and accomplishment, and her insights were always invaluable. I also wish to thank the members of the committee, Dr. Jeanette Seaberry and Dr. Kathleen Danielson, who always gave me positive feedback. Karen Weber, also on the committee, provided her gifted insights into writing and editing. Dr. Sarah Edwards guided me through the earliest stages of the writing and research. I am profoundly grateful to all of them.

I further wish to thank my four children who were enthusiastic and supportive as I took on this work. They are my best cheerleaders. And finally, but most importantly, I find no words eloquent enough to thank my loving husband who has always been unwavering in his support and encouragement in my pursuits and achievements. He made it all possible.

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Introduction

For nearly a week my student, Susan, had been reading *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000). As she closed the book and returned it to me, she sighed, "But they never told us how they could fly. I want to know how they could fly." I, too, had read the book recently and the women's ability to fly in the book seemed so real that I had to remind myself this was a fantasy. As an educator, it seemed to me that I should be able to understand and explain to my students the symbolism and historical significance of the literature that was available to them in my classroom. However, when it came to humans who could fly, I had nothing to use for guidance. There were, I knew, many other stories with humans that could fly. Were there similarities or a common theme that I could identify in these literary works, I wondered.

Educators know that the books children read and have read to them have a profound effect on them. Books enlarge our students' world vision, take them to places they will never see in the real world, fuel their imaginations and stretch their understanding of the world in which they live. Educators must consider various themes and motifs in the literature that is introduced in a classroom or educational setting so that children's view of the world can be enhanced. Classroom teachers spend hundreds of hours reading, evaluating and sharing literature with the children whose education is entrusted to them. Units are developed, authors are studied and motifs are identified in

the best available literature. Research has traditionally looked at the themes and levels of meaning in children's literature to give educators guidelines for completing these tasks.

Many educators are aware of the need to address ethnic and multicultural views in their elementary classrooms. Awareness is generally high concerning ethnic authors and literature addressing racially diverse topics and subjects. Less attention has been paid over the last several decades to research of the motifs in literature. Motifs are often used in symbolic ways to produce familiar themes for the reader, and used by educators to develop lessons that enlighten elementary students about cultures, customs, and mindsets of people of all heritages. Among these themes is the use of quilts in African American literature (Davis, 1998). The "survival story" motif often appears in the telling of the Eskimo traditions (Stott, 1986), combining a common motif and its cultural significance. "Safe place" themes are found in familiar literature (Misheff, 1998) such as *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952). Educators and students alike can benefit from acknowledging and recognizing varied literature with multiple themes and cultural relevance, which can be used to explain life experiences, both in the present, and historically.

A theme that continues to reappear in children's literature, and has been doing so for many years, is that of human flight. Certainly men and women, as well as children, have always been fascinated with flight in any manner. Books, which describe early flight machines and historical attempts to launch man into the air, are numerous, and few children are disinterested in the concept. However, the motif this study pursued is that of human flight, without device or the "magic carpet" fantasy. In these stories people fly simply because they can. Often the reader is told that the flight was made possible

simply because the humans in question believed that they could fly or that flight was made possible because of need.

Conscientious use of literature in the classroom, coupled with the sensitivities required for educating students of diverse heritage and cultural experiences, dictates that themes and motifs be identifiable in the literature selections used in the classroom, whether read aloud or independently. The motif of people who are capable of flight occurs and reoccurs in African American literature, as seen in *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985) and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). It occurs in Hispanic literature in *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) and *Isla* (Dorros, 1995). Flying people are found in literature several decades old, and in books currently being produced and read by students, as seen in *Granny Learns to Fly* (Murphy, 1996), *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000), and *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor* (Taylor, 2002).

The search of research literature regarding children's literature produces very little which helps us to understand what is represented by human flight, the ethnic or cultural significance of these works, and, perhaps more importantly, how children react to these works. There appears to be little to guide educators in determining how children are affected by the notion that, in a book which appears to be based in reality, a human can fly simply because he believes he can, or because he wants to or needs to badly enough. While parents and educators may believe that a child will react similarly to this literature as they do to other fantasy, there is no documentation that children's exposure to literature with humans who become airborne elicits a familiar response. Certainly there is little evidence that indicates the theme is used for the same purposes as other

fantasy literature, or that children are able to understand or appreciate the cultural significance of the motif.

The Problem

Without a systematic, critical look at the literature referred to in this study, development of themes or relating the motif of flight to cultural themes is speculatory. While a vast amount has been written regarding multicultural literature as a genre of its own, and in regard to its use in classrooms, stories which feature human flying does not appear in the research literature that I have surveyed.

A picture book titled *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994) depicts a scene with an African American mother telling her young son the story of "flying Africans" which she recalled from her childhood as part of the folklore handed down from generation to generation. African Americans, as well as many other ethnicities, have lost much of their heritage and cultural folklore as other cultural norms have been assimilated, sometimes forcefully, and the old beliefs and stories are lost. As educators, there is urgency in reclaiming those elements that once were common, and accepted in a culture of folklore or traditions. Over time these elements may become endangered - without understanding or appreciation, if exposure and literary education fails to keep them alive and memorable for each new generation of young readers.

This study critically reviewed literature that contains the human flight motif, examined the cultural ties, and further explored how children react to and are affected by literature that includes humans capable of flight.

Research Questions

The guiding questions for this research were:

1) What reoccurring patterns emerge from a cross section of children's books with a human flying motif?
   a) What patterns and literary devices are employed in these books, which may be important for classroom use?
   b) Specifically, what themes are evidenced regarding the cultural, cultural and ethnic issues of works, which use the human flying motif?
2) What response patterns are exhibited by children as they read and discuss these works?
   a) What do children believe that the stories and the symbolism mean?
   b) What cultural, social and ethnic links become apparent that might impact choices for and by children in educational settings?

The Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify works of children's literature that use the motif of human flight, critically review and explore the themes, and investigate the reactions of children who are exposed to the literature with this specific motif. The results of this exploration will aid classroom teachers, librarians, professional educators, and literary specialists to develop a heightened awareness of books that use the human flight motif. Further, it is hoped that these same professionals will gain an understanding of the themes that "human flight" evokes and, when it appears connected, the cultural diversity offered by the stories. Educators working directly with children will have a

better grasp of these concepts and a source of information for the children's literature that exists with these themes. As children's reactions are explored, themes and uses for the works will become clearer and more useful in the classroom or individual reading situation.

Definition of Terms

Authentic Literature: Trade books that are sold on their own merit and written for children at large rather than literature developed for and marketed in textbook anthologies or for the purpose of teaching reading.

Children's Literature: Literature that appeals to the interests, needs, and reading preferences of children and captivates children as its major audience (Hancock, 2000, p. 5)

Culture: The ever changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion, and how these are transformed by those who share them (Nieto, 1996, p. 138).

Ethnicity: A group's sense of identification, a common set of values, political and economic interests, behavioral patterns, and other culture elements that differ from those of other groups within a society. An ethnic group has a shared sense of people- hood, culture, identity, and shared languages and dialect (Banks, 1997, p. 13).

Human Flying: The ability of a human in a story to rise above ground level on his or her own power, without the use of machines or devices that have been specifically designed for the purpose of flying.

Response to Literature: Reactions of children to literary selections which can take many forms including (but not limited to) verbal, written and visual expression that is based on the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the literature (Rosenblatt, 1995).

Social Issues: Events or attributes that indicate or promote *socialization* – the process by which the group makes use of norms and sanctions to ensure that the individual acquires the attitudes, values, and behavior patterns it deems appropriate (Banks, 1997, p. 75).

In chapter 1 I have outlined the problem and purpose that are addressed in this research, and I have stated the specific research questions that guided this study. Preliminary research indicated that, while there is a large number of books and stories written for children that contain humans who can fly, there appeared to be no other studies regarding these works. This study examined the works that present the human flying motif and reported the results of a unit conducted with students who were exposed to a selection of the books.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In pondering the research questions set forth for this study, several specific areas of existing research were examined. Given that this study was to be conducted in two phases, each with its own set of research questions, I began the search for research literature with these two purposes in mind. The first research question dictated locating and studying children's works that contained the human flying motif. I therefore searched for previous studies on this topic, or work that was similar or related. Further, I reviewed studies which have explored other motifs and themes used by authors in order to identify the value and pedagogical impact of the motif presentation in current educational settings. These motifs were also related to the current study as they relate to the themes that I anticipated might emerge from the books studied.

The second phase of the research pertained to children's reactions to the selected literature, thus indicating a need for previous research pertaining to children's response to literature, to fantasy in particular, to literature that presents multicultural and ethnically diverse situations and perspectives, and to determine if any studies existed which detailed response to works with the motif of human flying.

Literature Reviews for the Human Flying Motif and Related Motifs

Little to nothing was produced in searches for studies that detailed children's literature that specifically used the human flying motif. Finding no studies in my chosen area of research made developing the literature review challenging, but also significantly

reinforced the need for such a study to be completed. Suggest to someone to name a flying "human" from literature, and the most likely response is *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1911). Thus, finding no other flying human research studies, a search for literature regarding "Peter Pan" produced a number of studies. Peter Pan is immortalized, not only in literature, but also in every imaginable media, as the childlike quality in all of us that many hold on to dearly. Hollindale (1993) studied the critical reception of Peter Pan over time, and although he found vast differences of opinions, the central response he returns to is that children respond to the flying boy positively. In fact, children prefer fairy tales (Percell-Gates, 1989) when given a choice in literature in many situations and, according to Percell-Gates, are able to find the intrinsic values in such literature.

In an effort to locate previous work that looked at "flying" as a symbol, the children's book *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1993) was featured in a discussion of symbolism in children's book in *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature* (Lukens, 1995). In that handbook the following is noted:

> A **symbol** is a person, object, situation, or action that operates on two levels of meaning, the literal and the figurative or suggestive. Certain symbols are universal...in a picture book, too, symbol can help us understand a thematic point. *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting tells of a homeless father and his small son who live at the airport, moving constantly so as not to call attention to themselves. When a bird flies in, the boy watches it dash itself repeatedly against windows, trying to be free. Wounded, then rested, it finally manages to 'fly away home,' just as the boy hopes he and his father will be able to fly away to a home (p. 157-158).

Lukens establishes the "flying" symbol, but not in the context of a flying human.

In researching children's literature over the past century with a particular emphasis on ethnic literature and fantasy, two periodicals are of interest to this research.

The Brownies Book and *Ebony Jr.* were important sources of African American stories in the twentieth century (Vaughn-Roberson, Hill, 1989) but were short-lived publications. Kory (2000) speaks of the "peculiar significance of fairies" in *The Brownies Book* and the response that they elicited from African American children. It is significant to note, according to Kory (2000), that the first and mainstay genre of stories offered were fairy tales and folktales. The body of literature that could be called African American was predominantly of these types. Kory continues to examine the scarcity of original fairy and folktales with identifiable ties to African folklore, but the identifiable motif of what does exist, in examining the two (now defunct) periodicals, is that of the fairy or "flying person."

Motifs studied for this research.

In beginning this research project, I searched for literature and research that studied children's literature with motifs that I believed might be related to the stories I was planning to study. The following list of motifs and themes was developed:

1) Motifs in fairytales, fantasy and folklore.
2) Motifs involving life issues of disability, survival, the elderly and death.
3) Motifs that include ethnicity, morality, and feminism.
4) Motifs of the everyday objects used to convey meaning.

The literature review that follows is divided into these four specific types of motifs. It is relevant to be acquainted with the existing literature in previously studied motifs with the belief that this will provide a framework for looking critically at the books that are studied in this project. Given that there is no research pertaining to the human flying

motif, these thematic studies were the beginnings of my search to understand human flying as a motif in children's literature.

Motifs in fairytales, fantasy and folk.

Many of the studies focused on fairy tales center around specific motifs found in the genre. The motifs of the hero, storytelling, and negative female roles are all identifiable and have been documented in research literature, throughout traditional literature. Slattery (1991) makes a case in her article "Thinking about Folklore" that exposing children to fantasy literature with specific, meaningful motifs is a successful process for teaching about underlying literary patterns and extended meaning. Tabbert and Wardetsky (1995) find a compelling motif in fantasy to be that of dreams, both in dreamlike quality, the conception that fantastic stories were, in fact, just dreams, and further as the fulfillment of a dream.

O'Connor (1989) examined the stereotypical image of women in fairy tales and found the "negative woman motif" to be common, and related it to negative self-concept in young girls. He suggests that care should be taken when choosing literature of this ilk, for underlying meaning and motif that may not be identifiable with a brief examination of the story. Misheff (1989) also critically looks at the female motif (usually unfavorable) in traditional literature, as well as the storytelling motif. She points out that the storytelling motif can be used much as a "journey" theme to take the reader on a "cathartic" trip of sorts.

Motifs involving life issues of disability, survival, the elderly and death.

Symbolism is found in a wide variety of children's literature with an equally extensive field of themes. Research of Stott (1986) and Lehr (1994) focuses on survival motifs that commonly occur in children's literature. Specifically, Stott examines the use of the survival stories in works that are to appeal to, and therefore in a format common to, Anglo-American-European cultures while building a story line regarding a minority people. The survival motif, the researcher believes, is severely strained to bring understanding to children who culturally do not have the frame of reference needed. Lehr studied the responses of fourth-grade children to books with the survival motif and reported a more positive level of understanding and grasp than did Stott.

A disability motif exists in literature in many ways, with disabilities portrayed by both animals and people, real and imagined. Genres include fiction, nonfiction, self-help, fairy tales, and picture books (Pardeck, 1998). Blaska and Lynch (1998) find that attitudes about disabilities are favorably influenced when the disability motif is used successfully. Motifs that present issues about the elderly and about loss through death have been studied by researchers extensively. Hudelson (1994-95) looks at the use of both English and Spanish books in a bilingual program that has an "elderly person" motif. The book *Abuela* (Dorros, 1985), which is also examined in this study, is posed as an example of the elderly motif in a positive light, one which extols the virtue of the elderly as teachers of the young. Siebert and Drolet (1993) and McGuire (1993) examine the images of the elderly found in children's literature that play a role in the response and attitudes of the children exposed to them.

Motifs that include ethnicity, morality, and feminism.

Shafer (1998) looked at the ethnic theme more specifically by focusing on the educational value attached to specific literature written between 1900 and 1950. This study dealt with African Americans and looked at the factors that affected academic achievement. Morality symbolism was examined as a positive influence in classroom education within the research conducted by Campoy (1997). The researchers believed that when a motif represented positive educational achievement or high-level morality, the response of the readers was to examine their own beliefs and to adjust positively.

Feminist roles have often been a subject for researchers and a consideration of educators. Literature that uses the feminist motif has been examined with research by Trousdale (1995), Zilboorg (1990), Stewig (1995) and Hanlon (2000). One of the more interesting studies by Stewig (1995) looks at the recurring motif of "wise/witch woman." These women tend to be strong and powerful and the researcher believes that they set a positive response pattern in female students. Zilborg (1990) conducted a case study using the character in *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink, 1973) to determine that feminism is "alive and well" in this novel. The author of this study believes that women writers are communicating to future generations of girls and women specific qualities that they deemed positive. Hanlon researched the images of women in Appalachian folktales and cited numerous examples of the "strong woman" motif, shedding positive light and role model qualities for future generations.

Trousdale (1995) conducted a case study of one seven-year-old girl, chronicling her responses to three folktales with strong feminist motifs. In each story, the studied child was drawn to the strong female protagonist and named her as her favorite character

in each story. However, the child was able to discern that the stories were fictitious and did not wish to be like, or act like, the protagonists. The researcher further suggests that the stories with this theme offer a positive role model while allowing the child the opportunity to differentiate between fact and fiction.

Motifs of the everyday objects used to convey meaning.

As mentioned in the introduction to this research, the quilt motif is seen commonly in works by African American authors (Davis, 1998). According to Davis (1998) many authors use the quilt motif to "read the world." The use of quilts in the stories of Deborah Hopkinson, Faith Ringgold, Courtni C. Wright, Valeri Flourneoy, Patricia McKissack, and Bettye Stroud demonstrate fragments of identity and segments of history. *Tar Beach,* by Faith Ringgold (1991), is a subject in this study. The protagonist is able to fly above the scene below and identifies what she sees as a quilt. McCall (1994) suggests that the quilt motif is representative of social history, the voices of women, races, cultures and even social class.

Food is the motif theme of research conducted by Keeling and Pollard (1999). Food is seen as a symbol of both frustration and power, associated with social norms and rituals. It is also symbolic of either inclusion or exclusion, and can become a social tool. One of the texts examined in this study was the familiar *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963).

Summary of the literature Review for the First Phase

Is this section I have detailed the search for studies pertaining to the human flying motif, which do not appear to exist. I pursued the literature that exists based on the

concept of "Peter Pan" and a study that detailed the significance of fairies and "flying people" in African American literature. This literature review then looked at motifs that other researchers have focused on which included: fairytales, fantasy and folklore; life issues of disability, survival, the elderly and death; ethnicity, morality, and feminism; and everyday objects used to convey meaning. While there are no studies available that specifically treat human flying as a motif, the motif studies that were reviewed here touch on many of the same issues, concerns and themes that are seen in the works that I have studied. It is hoped that this research will add to the body of knowledge regarding motifs found in children's literature.

Literature Review for Phase Two in Which Children Respond to Literature

The goal for this portion of the literature review is to look at existing research in the area of literary response, looking most closely at specific types of response to literature.

Theory of Children's Response to Literature.

In *Literature as Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt (1938) establishes the transactional reader-response theory, in elevating the reader and the text to equal status with the author (1978, p.1-2). She states further:

> A novel or poem or play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meaning into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. Out of this complex process emerges a more or less organized imaginative experience (1938, 1995 p. 24).

"The pinnacle of reader response results when the reader focuses an awareness on the very personal meaning that he or she is shaping" (Hancock, 2000). Rosenblatt observed that when children are given a chance to respond freely to literature, those responses take many forms and vary widely. She found that children showed a remarkable range of ideas and understandings when presented with diverse forms of literature.

A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature (Lukens, 1995) shares this view of reader response: "Each of us brings to a story a personal past, a present, and plans for the future. These elements shape our responses to the story. It seems absurd then to expect that diverse human beings must agree upon exactly the same ideas as being the most important, and must take from the story exactly the same themes...(p. 97).

Studies that Examined Specific Literary Responses in Children.

In other areas of research that examined response, VanSledright (1998) studied the effect of using multiple literary resources with six fifth-graders in their study of American History. His research indicated that the students preferred authentic literature materials to text materials and that a common concern of using this delivery system, that of causing confusion and gaps in information, was not valid in this study.

In the same spirit, Jones (1994-95) compared the effects of using authentic literature in an elementary social studies class to using a text with a second group. The result demonstrated a more significant gain in knowledge and understanding in the group exposed to the authentic literature than in the control group using standard texts.

It is commonly assumed that children respond positively to reading out loud and the study by Nikola-Lisa (1992) found that, in particular, verbal expressions such as

laughter, facial expression and gestures elicited the strongest response in her study group of second graders. Many (1992) analyzed literary response using the variable of grade level and found no significant difference elicited because of grade level. Another study (Lehman & Scharer 1995-96) looked at response differences between children and pre-service teachers, using the book *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, (1985). This study indicated that the adults' responses were significantly affected by discussion but that students were more likely to maintain their individual responses during discussion.

Messner (1989) examined the response of children to fairy tales. As would be expected, he found that some fairy tales elicited more positive responses and others that were quite negative. Trousdale (1989) studied three eight-year-olds and found that children's responses to fairy tales are often unique and that the stories do not mean the same to the children as they do to adults. In particular, children often found more literal meanings for the motifs present in the stories. These findings are significant to this study, in determining the responses of children with regard to human flight.

Summary of the literature Review for the Second Phase

The second section of the literature review examines studies that pertain to reader-response and the work of Louise Rosenblatt, as well as detailing other works which looked at specific kinds of response. Grounding the reader-response theory in Rosenblatt's work, it is worthwhile to note that much research is available to document the impact of what the student brings to the literature as the key factor in the meaning that will be taken from the material. The second phase of my study, examining the reaction of

four students to works that feature the human flying motif is based upon these research findings and principles.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

Introduction

This research project is divided into two distinct parts, which were conducted separately and reflect the research questions in their scope and design. The study explored the reoccurring patterns that emerge from a cross section of children's books with a human flying motif. It should be noted here that part of my intention in conducting this study was to identify and summarize as many of the works as were possible to identify and obtain.

The second phase of the study involves the reactions and interests of children who were introduced to works containing the motif of human flying. In so doing, the study asked questions and examined themes of cultural, social, and ethnic issues that can be explored in educational settings using the chosen works.

Research questions

1) What reoccurring patterns emerge from a cross section of children's books with a human flying motif?
    a) What patterns and literary devices are employed in these books, which may be important for classroom use?
    b) Specifically, what themes are evidenced regarding the cultural, social and ethnic histories of works, which use the human flying motif?
2) What response patterns are exhibited by children as they read and discuss these works?

a) What do children believe that the stories and the symbolism mean?

b) What cultural, social and ethnic links become apparent that might impact choices for and by children in educational settings?

Methodology for Phase 1

In order to locate and identify the widest possible selection of children's books with the human flying motif, it was first necessary to define the motif. For the purpose of this study human flying is defined as:

The ability of a **human** in the story to rise above ground level on his or her own power, without the use of machines or devices that have been specifically designed for the purpose of flying. Human does not refer to a being that is described in the story to be an "alien" or have any powers or characteristics that would nullify the description of human being. Although clearly, by definition, a human "flying" renders the story fantasy, we have limited our search to stories that incorporate realism in all other aspects of the story line.

This phase of the study was divided into two distinct tasks. The first of these was to locate the literature. To do this, multiple methods were used. The following databases and information sources were searched by computer at the university library and with a standard home computer using the keyword "flying." The search engines were keyed to search for the word "flying" in the title and/or the text.

- ERIC
- Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (a commercial source found on the internet which encompasses multiple reviews as well as annotations)

- Books in Print
- Commercial bookseller sites on the internet, which primarily included Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com.

This method of search was time consuming and somewhat unwieldy, but it was learned early on that it was not feasible to include additional keywords, or to exclude specific language. For example, in one effort I excluded the words airplane, spaceship, and bird. The result was that a number of books did not appear that used these words for comparison or description, such as "he could fly like a bird" or "her flight did not require an airplane." In my effort to be as thorough as possible it was necessary to proceed through all titles and annotations that used the word "flying."

Using commercial bookseller sites prove to be quite efficient for identifying books currently available by using the keyword since the sites are able to search all text available. In some cases, many of the books had a chapter or short excerpt available that aided in the determination regarding whether the work was appropriate for this study. Further, no book that appeared on the multiple kinds of searches that were performed was excluded until enough information was obtained to determine whether or not the flight in the book came within the parameters of the study. In all cases, a sincere effort has been made to obtain books that are out of print. This decision was based on the idea that although a book is no longer being published, it is possible that the story may hold keys to the historical development of the themes which we seek to ascertain; and with the idea in mind that these books may well still be on public and school library shelves.

Data Analysis for Phase 1

Data Analysis for Phase 1

The second task of phase one was to read and analyze the identified books using qualitative research methods. Once the books were selected, I developed data files for them using the following steps:

1) The Books in Print database file for each book was located, if one existed, and all available information and reviews were printed and placed in the book's data file.
2) Each book was researched using the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database. This research website is provided by subscription only and I purchased a membership for the period of time needed to complete this study. Again, all information found for each book, including the MARC record, was located, printed, and placed in the respective file.
3) Each book was searched and located, as they existed, at both www.amazon.com and www.bn.com, which are commercial bookseller sites that also contain book reviews and information provided by the publishers. All reviews and publisher notes were printed and placed on file for each book. Other information available on these sites was not considered relevant to this study and was not duplicated or researched.
4) I read and/or observed all text and pictures contained in the books once through without making notes or conducting any intentional research. The books were read a second time (many have been read a number of times additionally) and I made observational notes as I proceeded. I attempted to use a similar format for each book. In most cases, I made a one or two-sentence observation for each two-page spread of the picture books. These observations included factual information of what occurred

on the pages. I also attempted to report in each of these observations anything I believed that the author was implying or foreshadowing. For the short chapter books and young reader novels, I made observations approximately every chapter, generally limiting these remarks to a few sentences or a few short paragraphs, using the same format for listing factual information and general observations about the author's purpose and intent. For each book I also included a short paragraph after all notes were taken from the text in which I made note of specifics about the devices the author had employed or the themes which I believed to be present. Theses remarks were kept brief.

5) All of the books studied for this project were entered into a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel. Headings for the columns were:

- Title
- Reference code
- Author
- Year published
- Who flies
- Gender of flier
- Genre
- Motive/need
- Pattern or theme
- Ethnicity

6) The use of this format made it possible to sort the information and to determine statistical information, which is reported in this study in the discussion for question number one.

7) Working one book at a time, I reread all of the notes and copies of reviews and relevant information contained in each book file. As I worked through this material, I

hand coded observations from reviewers and my own notes that alluded to themes, purposes, and literary devices of the stories and/or illustrations. As themes and literary devices began to emerge, the notes were color coded and assigned to general theme headings. The final step was to reread all the notes and observations, looking specifically at one area at a time, in an effort to determine which patterns were the most universal and/or might be of the most importance when considering their use in a classroom.

Methodology for Phase 2

The second phase focused on the reaction and emergent themes that occurred when the books are shared with children. Using convenience sampling, the decision was made to conduct this study as an action research project using as participants the four students I taught at the time of the study. This program is conducted in the State of Nebraska as an exempt school and is an affiliate school of the private, accredited institution known as Clonlara School, located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Participants

The above school setting and group of children were selected for a number of reasons. Due to the easy access for me to these children, curriculum and unit studies were designed to include the books being studied. The students could then experience total immersion in the "human flying motif" works and responses were more complete and complex than they might have been. Further, because of the ability to include the selected materials in regular classroom instruction, daily journals were kept and used for interpretation at the end of the study. All the students who participated in the program

are students that I work with because they have significant learning disabilities. However, all of the students are competent readers who needed only minimal support in reading and understanding the books.

This group of students included two males and two females. Two of the children were seventh graders and two were ninth grade students. Three of the children are Caucasian and the fourth is Caucasian-Hispanic. The variety of learning difficulties, life experience and interests is wide. Pseudonyms were used to assure confidentiality. No specific test results or other materials from school records are reported here. The reading comprehension levels were obtained from informal assessments and determined over a period of time.

Paul.

This fourteen-year-old came to my program from a private school he had attended the year before. His history included benign brain tumors that were discovered several years after they had begun growing, according to medical opinion. These had been removed approximately one and a half years before we began the study. Paul had a number of physical difficulties but was able to ambulate without assistance. Although generally functioning at his ninth grade level he was considerably delayed emotionally and had suffered some rejection and isolation in previous peer situations because of his many "differences." His reading comprehension level was at or above grade level, but Paul was not adept at vocal communication. I often supplemented discussions among the group (that were recorded to provide data for this study) by simply repeating what I had understood him to say or allowing him extra time to make his thoughts known, and then I

repeated those comments for the sake of the tape recording. His writing, however, is strong and his journal entries agreed in content with the recorded comments that have been transcribed from the tapes.

Mike.

Adopted as a preschooler, Mike had always seemed delayed to his adoptive parents. Currently twelve at the time of the study, his adoptive parents had been aggressively seeking therapy and medical interventions for him from the time he had joined their family, but he had continued to fall behind his classmates and to suffer serious social maladjustment and peer rejection issues. Mike had been in my program for a year and a half before the study and had come from a public school. Information regarding his birth mom and psychological evaluation suggested the probability of fetal alcohol syndrome. He was working considerably below his current seventh grade placement but was a surprisingly proficient reader when he was interested in the material. Mike was being treated medically for attention deficit disorder. His handwriting is very labored and transcribing his journal entries proved difficult at times. Mike is Caucasian. He was removed from his biological family at the age of ten months.

Chloe.

This thirteen-year-old girl had started my program at the seventh grade level at about three months before the study started. She had come out of a public school situation, which her parents had become increasingly concerned about. Although she was receiving special services in her school, she was not coping well with the rigors of a middle school program. Over the past year she had suffered increasingly recurrent and

severe migraines and stomachaches that were interfering with school attendance. Further, her mother observed that she was "no longer a happy child" and seemed depressed or agitated most of the time. Upon entering this program, most of the physical symptoms subsided completely. Chloe's father is Mexican and some Spanish was spoken in the household, although her mother only spoke English. Chloe was reading at about a fifth grade level but was a cooperative and willing reader, and exceptionally able to vocalize her thoughts and opinions about her reading.

Vivian.

Vivian was adopted at the age of seven and spent much of her early years in foster care. She has the same biological mother as Mike, but does not share his adoptive family. At the age of fifteen, her reading comprehension level was at her ninth grade level placement or above, but overall she was somewhat below grade level, particularly in math and science. It is also suspected that Vivian is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, although she appears to not be affected as seriously as Mike. Her last year in public school was the third grade and she has been privately educated since then. During her public school years her mother states that there were serious social problems and that she had great difficulty making friends. She had been removed from the biological family for the last time when she was approximately four and a half years old. It is believed that her experience there involved abuse and severe neglect. Her adoptive mother reported incidents of nightmares, conversations, and graphic pictures (that Vivian had drawn) that indicated she remembered horrific events. She was currently being treated medically for depression at the time of the study.

Confidentiality and Informed Consent

Prior to the beginning of the research, the parents of the four students were asked to sign a form that granted permission for their child's participation in the study (see Appendix A). Pseudonyms were used throughout this study and confidentiality was respected throughout the project and the writing of study. I explained the research to the students by telling them that we would be studying a particular kind of literature and that I was studying the books themselves and their (the students') thoughts about them. I explained that their language arts assignments and journaling for the duration of the study would be relevant to the books we were studying. I did not tell them in advance that there was a specific motif in the books or the identity of the motif. They each signed an agreement to participate (see Appendix B).

Procedures

The second phase of the study involved observing and recording the reactions and interest of the students who were introduced to works about human flying. In so doing, I conducted conversations and purposeful activities that I hoped would lead to insight about cultural, social and ethnic issues. It was further presumed that these insights would produce paths that could be explored in educational settings using the works that are chosen. Early investigation of the works that had thus far been identified indicated that strong themes existed in primarily ethnic stories dealing with the human spirit and of human coping with oppression, deprivation, and a need to have control over one's own individual life. This phase of the study lasted seven weeks. The plan that was used for carrying out the research is detailed here by week.

Week 1.

The students were shown three books, which were all picture books without words and incorporated the human flying motif. Each student was given adequate time to peruse the books and choose one of them for an activity. After each student had chosen a book and studied it at will, she/he was asked to complete one of the following activities:

1) Write a story for the book and pictures. You may tell what is happening and/or you may write dialogue to help the reader understand the story.
2) "Read" the book to me or to a classmate, making up the story and/or dialogue as you go.
3) Produce an illustration of a picture that might have occurred after the book that you just studied. Write a short description of your picture, and why you think the picture is the "next step" in the story.

Students were asked to complete this project by Thursday of the first week. I recorded conversations with the students as we explored this assignment. Stories, pictures, and tapes of "readings" were collected as data for this week's activity.
On Friday students were asked to write a journal entry regarding the three wordless books that they viewed. The content of these short essays was open for the student to choose, with the exception that they were instructed to include a statement regarding why they chose the work they did for the first activity.

Week 2.

I read picture books and showed the pictures to the students on the first four days of the week. These books had been selected based on the human flying motif presence, diversity of ethnicity and diversity of story type. These books were presented as follows:

Monday *Flying Dimitri* (Drawson, 1997)

Tuesday *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994)

Wednesday *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg, 1999)

Thursday *I Can Hear the Sun* (Polacco, 1996)

Each day the students were asked to complete one of the following in response to the book read:

1) Complete a journal entry with any thoughts you have concerning the book read.
2) Draw a picture with a short written description in response to the book read.
3) Tell one other student or me what your reactions were to the story heard today.

Students were encouraged to use at least two of the options in the course of the four days. Journals, pictures with writing, and tape recordings of reactions were collected as data for this week.

On Friday the students were asked to write a short essay finding at least two things that were different in all the books read and two things that were the same. The students had access to all four books as they were working on this assignment. The essays were collected as data.

Week 3.

The picture books *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) were presented to the students as the works that we were to investigate for this week. I did not read them to the students and I did not give them any background about the books in the beginning. I simply showed them to the students, telling them about the work they were to complete for the week. The assignment was as follows:

Read both of the books for the week. Choose one of the books for a response. You may use any method you wish to respond that has been mentioned in the earlier two weeks of activities. It is acceptable to mention the second book in your chosen response if that is appropriate.

Data were collected as it had been before, including tape recordings of all conversations and presentations with the students that related to this study. After the projects were complete, we read the two books out loud and discussed them. I particularly pointed out the background information given at the end of *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) and the glossary for pronunciation of the Spanish terms in *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991). Recordings of these conversations were produced and later transcribed.

Week 4.

Students silently read *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor* (Taylor, 2002) on the first four days of the week. Each day each student read approximately thirty-five pages of the book. As the book is short and has manageable text, I expected the task to be completed without difficulty, and it was. Following the completion of the reading, the group was encouraged to discuss what they had read. Although I was the facilitator of

these discussions, I was seldom a participant. These open-ended questions were used to promote this discussion as needed:

1) What did you notice about today's reading?

2) What do you think might happen in tomorrow's reading?

3) Were you surprised at what happened today? Why or why not?

On Friday students were asked to make journal entries in response to the book read for the week. Tape recordings of the purposeful conversations and the journal entries were collected as data.

Week 5 and 6.

I began reading *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000) to the students, dividing it evenly over the course of the two weeks. Conversations were conducted as in week 4. Data were collected via tape recordings of the conversations. In some instances, because the book was written for an older audience and was longer, I asked more purposeful and specific questions to ensure understanding. At the completion of the reading, the students were asked to choose a response method to complete for this selection. All options that have been mentioned before were acceptable.

Week 7.

On Monday I read the short story "The People Could Fly" from *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985) to the students. The class discussed the story and those discussions were recorded. The class was asked as a group to decide on a culminating project for the unit. Cooperative learning strategies were encouraged as they decided on the project and made plans to carry it out. Although I presented the following projects to the students as

possibilities, I made it clear that they did not need to use mine and were welcome to find an alternative. My suggested list included:

1) Writing and acting out a "scene" which describes some aspect of the unit of study.
2) Planning and executing a mural or sequential picture roll which relates to the works studied.
3) Cooperatively writing a story, which incorporates at least one of the themes or patterns they have explored for the past several weeks.

The students earnestly discussed this project and decided to make a collage that would represent the books they had read and the themes. The discussion and its results are explored in the results section. The collage was finished at the end of the seventh week.

In summary, the data that were collected consisted of:

1) Transcripts of the discussion and conversations that occurred between the students and me, and those discussions that occurred among the students themselves.
2) Copies of all essays, journal entries and stories that the students produced for this unit. All writings of the students were entered as Word documents and the original student work was given back to them.
3) Artwork produced for the unit was retained, as well as the collage for the final product. When the study was completed, the individual artwork was returned to the student. In some instances, I entered notes concerning these visual pieces for the sake of documentation.

Data Analysis for Phase 2

Data analysis for this phase of the study was conducted by hand coding (Creswell, 2002). It was important to the understanding of the results that I looked at each document individually and coded for emerging themes. Further, a significant facet of this research was to examine the materials that comprised the data in chronological order to be open to the possibility or extent that attitudes and impressions may have changed as the unit progressed. Common shifts were examined as part of the analysis and have been reported in the results section of this study.

Summary

This study consisted of two distinct sections. The first looked at all literature that I was able to locate which uses a human flying motif, using the definition stated previously. That literature was summarized and analyzed for themes and patterns. Data files were developed and studied for each book using the six-step plan that was outlined previously in this chapter.

The second component of this study explored children's reactions and responses to the literature. Participants were four students who I currently worked with and taught in a full school program of an alternative nature. This selection of study participants made it possible to custom design a detailed and lengthy unit using the literature that was the focus of this research.

The approval of the IRB and the parents of the children participating was acquired. Data were collected and analyzed in the form of interviews using Seidman's (1991) guidelines, field notes, and documents the students produce, thus providing a

triangulation data input to analyze and answer the research questions. The second phase data were hand coded and analyzed to allow the flexibility to look for emerging and shifting themes and attitudes.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This study was divided into two distinct sections, as discussed in Chapter 1, with two different research questions. The first question searches for answers in the literature that was identified for this research. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used to locate the books that were included in this study. Many books were examined and not included because they either did not meet the criteria and definition of human flying or because their intended audience was not children.

Human flying was defined for this study as "the ability of a human in the story to rise above ground level on his or her own power, without the use of machines or devices which have been specifically designed for the purpose of flying." I found that it was also necessary to add the condition that the character doing the flying should appear to be human in all other respects. For example, in *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1911) the protagonist is not human-like in a variety of ways, above and beyond his ability to fly. The lines on this definition clearly blurred more than once, but every effort was made to obtain books that fit the criteria and had the common thread of a human who was a relatively realistic character, except that s/he could defy gravity.

The methods for developing and researching these works were discussed in Chapter 3. Having developed the themes and patterns as was described, I then sought to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

Results for Question 1

What reoccurring patterns emerge from a cross section of children's books with a human flying motif?

Twenty-five stories were studied for this research. One book was based on a short story in the anthology, *A Treasury of Irish Stories,* (Riordan, 1995) giving me one more book than story. All of the stories feature humans who fly, relatively unassisted, except for one. *Flying Lessons* (Semel, 1995) has a protagonist who desperately wishes to fly but plummets from a tree on her one serious attempt and breaks her leg. This book was included because of the significant symbolism of human flying that is inextricably woven into the story line.

Statistics

Statistics regarding the books were recorded using a spreadsheet as discussed in Chapter 3 and reveal the following: In the twenty-five stories studied, the human "flier" was male in fifteen of the books. Females who "flew" were featured in eight stories, and only two works portrayed both males and females flying. Ethnically, the books and stories were quite varied. Two books, both written and illustrated by Arthur Dorros, were Hispanic in language, content and character. African American folklore was the basis for *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985) and *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994). A third picture book, *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) was based on the black community that the author grew up in, making it somewhat autobiographical. England was the home for another two books, and *Mrs. Meyer, the Bird* (Erlbruch, 1995) is German. *Flying Lessons* (Semel, 1995) is a Jewish story set in Israel in the 1950's.

The books studied range in publication date from 1967 to 2002. In the interest of diligently studying the motif of human flight in children's literature, and in acknowledgement of the fact that no other similar study appears to exist, every effort was made to search for, obtain and include older works with the appropriate theme in this research, which included obtaining out-of-print books in some cases. However, the true significance of a study about a symbolic and widely appearing motif is not to just further the historical knowledge, but to show relevance for current and future readers. It was, therefore, highly appropriate to find that seventeen of the books were published within the last decade. *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor* (Taylor, 2002) was actually published after the research for this study had begun, and was included in both the literature research and the portion of the study conducted with students.

Genre

Sixteen of the works studied are classified as picture books. Two of these, however, *Randolph's Dream* (Mellecker, 1991) and *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994), while comprised of full page pictures that add dramatically to the story, are far more textually laden than the other picture books, and could, if not for the quantity of artwork, stand as a short chapter book.

Three of the titles in the picture book category are actually wordless books. *The Flying Grandmother* (Kojima, 1981) and *Flying Jake* (Smith, 1988) use pencil-line drawings and sequences of frames. *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996) is presented with photography that is digitally altered and tells the story impressively well.

In the two anthologies that are included, only one story from each was studied. In both cases, there was only one story that fit the research specifications and used the human flying motif. As mentioned earlier, there is a duplication of an Irish story, which was first published in *A Treasury of Irish Stories* (Riordan, 1995) and later expanded to a short chapter book, *Granny Learns to Fly* (Hickey, 1996). The second anthology, *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985), takes its title from the story that was part of this research. Again, the other stories in the anthology did not fit the parameters of the research.

Three short chapter books and five novels intended for young audiences complete the body of works which are annotated in Appendix C and will be referred to in the discussion of theme. The books used in the student research were taken from all genres and are listed and briefly referred to in Chapter 3. These are discussed extensively as part of the results for the research questions.

Results for Question 1a

What patterns and literary devices are employed in these books, which may be important for classroom use?

Two patterns of significance were noted and studied. The first is that, in many cases, the author (and/or illustrator) used dreams to facilitate the credibility of the flight: both dreams that occurred during sleep and daydreams. However, what made the stories interesting and diverse was the variety of ways this technique was employed, and the twists that individual stories implemented to give the reader reason to pause and contemplate. Secondly, it became obvious that many authors and illustrators of picture

books used humans who could fly as a literary device that made it possible to tell a story to a young audience with a bird's eye perspective while also enlisting imagination and fantasy intended to be fun for the reader. In some cases, the author simply seemed to want to tell a story and used a flying human to do so. In others, the flying served as a significant part of the plot and helped tie story elements together.

Dream Patterns

Fly By Night (Jarrell, 1976) and *Billy the Bird* (King-Smith, 2001) both begin with the author telling us that David and Billy (the stories' fliers, respectively) can fly. The pattern here is that both boys "wake up" to fly at night, but in the morning cannot remember that they can fly, or what they did. Both books are of the short-chapter genre.

A picture book, *Waking Upside Down,* (Heckman, 1996) also brings another character, Morton, who begins and ends his flight during sleep. Heckman never suggests that Morton is dreaming and we are never told if Morton remembers his adventure. The implication that Morton's flight is a dream comes on the last page of the story, when he is found waking up in bed, smiling, after the previous page had him curled up and sleeping on the ceiling. This subtle suggestion seems to pull the elements of the story together and make it believable as a dream, without destroying the magic by declaring the whole story to be imaginary. A *School Library Journal* review declares, "This is a story every dreamer will enjoy" (Marino, 1996).

David, from *Fly By Night* (Jarrell, 1976), questions, "Why do I always forget? I always forget. If I remembered in the daytime I could fly in the daytime. All I have to do is remember." But he does not ever remember. The illustrations by Maurice Sendak

are dreamlike and softly muted, and the entire story suggests that the flying episodes are dreams, but such claims are never explicitly stated. This technique gives the story an ethereal quality and might lend itself, then, to imaginative jaunts for readers who could also invent stories about their activities during the night when they could "remember" that they were able to fly. *Publisher's Weekly* referred to the text as "lyrical, interspersed with rhymes" (1986) which also adds to the dreamlike quality of the story. The unequivocal statement of the author that "At night David can fly" (p. 4) adds to the heightened imaginative power of the story.

Billy is also said to be able to wake up and fly. He, however, never comments on wishing that he would remember or possess his flying skills during the daytime. *Billy the Bird* (King-Smith, 2001) is related to the reader by Billy's older sister, Mary. Mary discovers, by accident, that Billy can fly during the night when she enters his room one evening and finds him hovering near the ceiling. Mary is so enthralled with this turn of events that she becomes the enabler of Billy's flying, encouraging him to venture out of the house into the night and even seeing that he is dressed appropriately. Billy never remembers any of his antics the following day and is quite amused with his sister for suggesting that such silly events had occurred. Again, the pattern here of a family member who could fly, but then not remember it, could inspire young readers in many imaginary tales of their own.

Regarding *Billy the Bird* (King-Smith, 2001), Carolyn Phelan of *Booklist* (2001) states that "The tone is so matter of fact, though, and Mary's concerns are so practical that children reading the book will see the child as a reliable narrator recording

extraordinary circumstances." This realism causes this book to have a completely different feel, and should evoke quite different emotions in children than in *Fly By Night* (Jarrell, 1976), in spite of the similar patterns used by the two authors. However, *Kirkus Reviews* (2001) takes issue with the presentation in this book for using a narrator, who is not doing the "flying," because Mary, the narrator, cannot report Billy's feelings or thoughts. On the other hand, David's thoughts and reactions are chronicled meticulously.

Daydreaming accounts for the "flying" that occurs in *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991), *Isla* (Dorros, 1995), *Flying Dimitri* (Drawson, 1997) and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). *Abuela* and *Isla* are books by the same author utilizing the same characters, Abuela and Rosalba, who have two different "adventures" in the picture books. The daydream pattern is the least obvious (of the daydream books) in these two stories where Rosalba goes on imaginary journeys with her grandmother, fueled primarily by stories that the grandmother (Abuela) has told her. The first of the two books begins with Rosalba "daydreaming" herself into flight and then inviting her grandmother into the story too. The second, assuming acceptance of the premise from the first, simply states, "When Abuela, my grandma, tells me stories, we can fly anywhere. Today she's telling me about la isla, the island where she grew up. We are flying there together" (Dorros, 1991).

These two books tell realistic stories which are informative as well. There is little effort to ground the "flying" to a daydream or as being imaginary. The reader is simply taken on the delightful "trips" and safely returned home. One of the author's techniques for making this work is by enlisting the use of the suggestive phrases "we would" or "we could" in the earlier pages of the picture books. As the story is nearing the conclusion,

the language changes to "I look" and "we are walking" (Dorros, 1991 & 1995) to suggest a reality that is becoming a more solid presence than the imaginary status with which the plot began.

Tar Beach (Ringgold, 1991) and *Flying Dimitri* (Drawson, 1997) are also examples of the daydream design but are distinctive in several ways from the Dorros books. Both daydreams occur just before bedtime, and both are far more specific in giving the reader details of the story before the flight and after, thus making a more emphatic point of returning the reader to "reality." These two books differ in their degree of fantasy. *Tar Beach* looks at real life circumstances and the narrator tells her childhood story of poverty and discrimination. Ringgold's language is more emphatic, suggesting more realism and credibility.

Dimitri's daydream occurs as he is brushing his teeth. He tells us, "I zoom up to the ceiling through the top of my head" (Drawson, 1997). The artwork attests to this seemingly impossible feat. When Dimitri "returns," the reader (viewer) finds him in precisely the same place, brushing his teeth. The story, written and illustrated by Drawson, leaves Dimitri's reality and world far behind, weaving its own magical tale, in stark comparison to the reality based Ringgold (1991) book. Both of these daydream styles, starting and ending quite similarly with regard to leaving from and returning to "reality," are effective in taking a young reader on an imaginary ride using a human who can fly, and delivering them safely back to the end of the story.

One of the most intriguing patterns exists in *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994) and *Randolph's Dream* (Mellecker, 1991). The authors, in both works,

tell the reader that the main character, young boys in both cases, is able to fly in a dream that he has. In contrast to *Billy the Bird* (King-Smith, 2001) and *Fly By Night* (Jarrell, 1975) both protagonists are able to remember their dreams vividly. Randolph has multiple dreams in which he can fly. Imani has only one dream, the focus of the story. However, in both cases there is evidence at the end of the story that the flying was not actually a dream, and did, in fact, occur.

Randolph, who dreams that he flies to Northern Africa and saves his father, has sand on his shoes the following morning, a bandana his father had given him, and an orange from the oasis he visited in his pocket. The reader finishes the story confident that Randolph did, indeed, fly. At least one reviewer also agreed, "young listeners will be convinced of Randolph's brave dream come true" (Sutton, 1991).

Imani, whose dream occurs after being told a story by his mother about Africans who could fly, sees an old woman who tells him to fly (in order to escape a dangerous situation). When he awakens he is introduced to relatives he has never met, and his newly met great-grandmother is the woman who had appeared in his dream. She also confirms that she already knows who he is. Imani's flight, like Randolph's, was the solution to a conflict and a flight from danger. In both Imani's and Randolph's dreams, the authors give the reader extensive detail and clear images to bring credibility to their stories. As compared to the daydream pattern in the four books studied for the daydream pattern, these books bring a far more "credible" feel to their "flight" stories.

A third book, *Flying Over Brooklyn,* (Uhlberg, 1999) uses a slightly different version of this "proof it was not a dream" pattern. The book starts with the narrator, also

a young boy, telling the reader that his deepest desire was to be able to fly, and then one day it happened. The entire book is his description of what his neighborhood, Brooklyn, looked like after a record snowfall. The descriptions are detailed and all from an airborne point of view. The next to last page of the picture book shows the boy's mother kissing him to wake him, and to tell him about the snow. Given the text, the reader would assume that the "flight" was simply a dream. However, the end papers of the book show footprints which disappear partway across the two page spreads as the narrator "takes flight." *Children's Literature* states, "Everyone plays a role in bringing this story alive for any child who has ever dreamed of flying – and who hasn't? Before the story even begins, Gerald Fitzgerald has painted two pages of boot prints in the snow, heading right up and off the page" (Leggett, 1999).

Flight as a Literary Device

Primarily by definition, the use of flight as a device secondary to the plot, is limited to picture books because it is a visual device. The author is able to take a bird's eye view of a scene or set of circumstances, and without great explanation or description, tell a broad scale story. Examples of this exist in *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991), *Isla* (Dorros, 1995), *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg, 1999), *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991), *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996), and *Waking Upside Down* (Heckman, 1996). It is of interest to note that four of these books (*Abuela, Flying Over Brooklyn, Tar Beac*h, and *The Ring*) are set in New York City and each "flight" is used to show the sights and scenes of that city, specific to the intent and objectives of the authors. *Isla* begins and ends in New York City, with the flight taking the reader to the Caribbean to explore the Hispanic roots of

the community that was introduced in *Abuela*. The only book that does not feature New York City as a backdrop is *Waking Upside Down* (Heckman, 1996), which never leaves the confines of the protagonist's own home.

Dorros' books are classically "teaching" books but the inclusion of the main character's flight and the delightfully unique perspective serves to make them engaging. The intent of the author is to present Hispanic culture and community life in a format that is entertaining. The books are somewhat bilingual in the respect that they give many terms in both English and Spanish, tying the concepts together conversationally. For example, Rosalba tells the reader, "Then she'd see me flying. Rosalba the bird. 'Rosalba el pajaro,' she'd say" (Dorros, 1991). According to *School Library Journal* in reference to *Abuela*, "What makes the book so interesting is Dorros's integration of Spanish words and phrases via Abuela's dialogue within the English text" (McClelland, 1991). Both of the Dorros books include a glossary for meaning and pronunciation of the Spanish terms, also adding to the educational value of the books.

The premise for *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) is that Rosalba and her grandmother (Abuela), who have gone to a nearby park, imagine that they can fly in order to go on an adventure through their neighborhood. In so doing, the author is able to tell the reader about the urban community, Hispanic culture, and even its heritage. There is a scene at the dock where fruit is being unloaded from "the land where Abuela grew up." At the airport the two fliers view "where the plane that first brought her (Abuela) landed."

The artwork of *Abuela* is collage and mosaic in appearance and primarily by virtue of the "overview" afforded by the flight motif, conveys effectively the diversity of

the community and the people. The reader is treated to a new perspective of the Statue of Liberty when the flying duo passes close to her head and crown. Dorros also makes a point of grounding the two stories by "visits" to individual locations. In *Abuela* Rosalba and her grandmother visit a tiny grocery store owned by an aunt and uncle, and "fly by" Rosalba's father's office.

In *Isla* (Dorros, 1995) the reader is taken on an even more imaginative journey, compliments of the ability of Rosalba and Abuela to "fly." Dorros's intent here is clearly to acquaint the reader in a more far reaching manner to Hispanic culture and heritage. Abuela takes her granddaughter to the island (la isla) where she grew up and raised her own family. Rosalba has an aunt, uncle and cousins who are still living on the island in the same home that Abuela raised her family. The young reader is introduced to the Caribbean, the rain forest, and to family run markets that are an intrinsic part of the culture and Abuela's heritage. Again, the mosaic nature of the artwork is able to convey vast amounts of information by virtue of the perspective. *Kirkus Reviews* calls the books "culturally packed flights" (1995) and specifically says of *Isla* that it "is a splendid physical geography of the island, covering the fields, tiny towns and the rain forest, as well as an exploration of the social landscape."

Faith Ringgold, author and illustrator of *Tar Beach* (1991), is an artist of some renown. She uses the motif of flight to tell an autobiographical tale from her childhood through Cassie, the narrator of *Tar Beach.* The book is based on a story quilt, which was created by Ringgold and completed in 1988. That quilt currently is in a collection at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City as part of a five-quilt collection

entitled "Woman on a Bridge." The book is designed with the bottom edges of each page picturing the patchwork border of the quilt. The scenes in the book are based on the scene pictured in the quilt. Cassie is able to fly above it all, giving Ringgold the freedom to tell her story from a lofty perspective. The featured geography of the story is also New York City, but unlike the Dorros books, *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) gives a view of a much smaller area, making it possible to present details and cultural specifics to the reader.

"Tar Beach" refers to rooftops where families went on warm evenings to socialize and appreciate the view. Cassie's (Ringgold's) neighborhood is in the shadow of the George Washington Bridge, which her father helped build. *Tar Beach* is depictive of an African-American neighborhood and intentionally gives the reader a "cultural tour." My personal tour of this geographic area revealed that these neighborhood apartment buildings are primarily five or six story buildings and that the roofs of many of them can actually be seen from the bridge. *Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices* suggests that Ringgold's approach and presentation are "an astute societal commentary and a new variation on a traditional African-American liberation motif" (Courtot, 1995).

Myron Uhlberg in *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg, 1999) uses a young boy, also autobiographically, to tell the story of the blizzard, which occurred December 26, 1947, in Brooklyn. The book begins with the flight of the unnamed child who has always dreamed of flying, and then, during a record snowstorm, he suddenly can. As discussed in the dream patterns, this book follows the template of revealing the flight to be a dream. The "flight" is the entire plot as the author and illustrator tell the story of the snowstorm

visually far more than textually. Familiar sights are described as they would look covered, or nearly so, in snow, including the Brooklyn Bridge and Coney Island. The device is well used here to tell a childhood story. As stated by *Children's Literature,* "Flying Over Brooklyn offers a bit of history and a big burst of imagination" (Leggett, 1999). This text is a prime example of using the flight of the narrator to tie together the events the author wishes to relate and the "text links a series of sense impressions" (Publisher's Weekly, 1999).

One of the wordless picture books, *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996), is designed solely of digitally altered photographs. The story evolves as a young boy, who appears bored and lonely in a colorless (black and white photography) world aimlessly playing. He discovers a large bright yellow (it is the only color in the black and white picture) ring and through it, literally, the world takes on color and promise. The boy quickly becomes airborne, sheds his winter garb and shoes, and takes the reader on a fanciful tour of New York City from the child's new viewpoint.

Most notable are the photographs of the child flying by the observation deck of the Empire State Building and a close-up view of the face at the Statue of Liberty. The child returns to earth, and to the black and white photography, except for the ring, which remains bright yellow. As he walks away from the ring and his adventure, a second child finds the ring and the ring again begins to color the world for this second child. Here the photojournalist uses two devices to tell the clever story, color and human flight. *Booklist* tells us that "Digitally enhanced photography makes the magic possible, but Maizlish's

conception and execution make this book work beyond the special effects" (Phelan, 1996).

Waking Upside Down (Heckman, 1996) is the only one of the books discussed here that does not take the "flier" outside, but instead explores the wonder of the inside of a home when seen from the ceiling. Again, the flight motif gives the author and illustrator the means to develop a unique perspective, this time turning ordinary household objects upside down. The book's publisher extols that "Young readers will delight in the odd perspectives of Morton's upside down world and will find something to wonder at on every spread" (Atheneum, 1996). The device is carried out here so well that Verner (1996) claims "ordinary can quickly become extraordinary - all it takes is a new way of looking at things...Kids will enjoy the wackiness of the story even as they're ambushed with a stealth lesson in point of view." The reader actually is able to gain perspective and further point of view in understanding by turning the book over and reviewing the story again going back to front.

Conclusions for Question 1a

In conducting this portion of the research I began with the question "What patterns and literary devices are employed in these books, which may be important for classroom use?" The results of the in-depth study of books with human flight as a primary motif, with regard to this question, have been shown to be two-fold.

1) Authors and illustrators who use the human flight motif often do so in the context of a dream. The variations of this theme are what make each work unique and are of

specific interest to educators in introducing these stories to young people. The variations of this theme that I found include:

a) The character of the story can fly only in dreams. He or she does not remember this the next day.

b) The story's protagonist flies during a daydream, often with great detail and little reminder to the reader that the flight is imaginary. The author may or may not ground the story with "reality" before and after the "flight."

c) The flying in the given work is said or implied to be during a dream, but there is evidence in either text or illustrations, or both, that the flight may have actually been real, thus leaving the outcome to the child's (reader's) imagination.

2) In the genre of picture books, authors and illustrators often use the flight motif as a literary and visual device to inform or teach using a broader scope of subject matter while still involving the reader's imagination and interest.

a) The Dorros books *Abuela* (1991) and *Isla* (1995) use the imaginary flights of a child and her grandmother to teach Hispanic culture, heritage, and language.

b) *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) uses artwork previously produced by the author/illustrator in a museum quality work and adds a "flying" child for the perspective and opportunity it provides for informing the young reader about African American life and culture in the 1930's.

c) *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg, 1999) is another example of an author with a "large" story to tell (a snowstorm in Brooklyn in 1947) using a child who could fly to give perspective and keep the young reader engaged.

d) *Waking Upside Down* (Heckman, 1996) and *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996) are excellent examples of unique artistry made possible by creating gravity defying main characters.

While the pattern of dream enabled flights will encourage students to respond in a literary way with writings of their own, the device used in the above books should also serve as a departure for educators to jump start ideas for visual projects and holistic understanding. The possibilities for using these literary patterns and devices are discussed further in the conclusion where applications are discussed.

Results for Question 1b

Specifically, what themes are evidenced regarding the ethnic, cultural, and social issues of the works that use the human flying motif?

In researching the above question, the original codings of my research notes were divided into various subgroups and as the work progressed, a few were found unsubstantiated. The rest were divided into the subgroupings inherent to the question and are reported here accordingly.

Ethnicity

I began this research primarily with knowledge only of the books *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) and *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985), as well as a passing acquaintance with the story of *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991). Given that the first two of these works are based on African American stories and that the third was Hispanic in origin, my initial personal questions pertained to the ethnicity and historical perspectives of stories where humans could fly. The surprise in this research has been that the works

seem to cross many ethnic lines and exist in many cultures. Many people seem to find wonder and imaginative creativity in the prospect of flying humans.

As presented at the beginning of this chapter, the books studied contained ethnic backgrounds that were African American, English, Jewish (set in Israel), German, Hispanic (American), Irish, and Euro-American. Beyond a simple identification of ethnicity, it is important to take a closer look at the ethnic heritage and values that are identified, and at the educational opportunities afforded by them. In the first chapter of this study, I provided a definition of ethnicity as "a group's sense of identification, a common set of values, political and economic interests, behavioral patterns, and other culture elements that differ from those of other groups within a society. An ethnic group has a shared sense of peoplehood, culture, identity, and shared languages and dialect" (Banks, 1997, p. 13). Therefore, I specifically looked at aspects of the books that set them apart from each other in relation to the shared ethnic characteristics represented by each author. In so doing, given the nature of this research and the research questions, the question I asked each time is: what is the relationship of the ethnicity of the book and the author's intention to the fact that the motif of human flying was employed?

While many of the works were from various cultures, I present here three specific ethnicities developed within the books studied. Flying by humans is commonly considered by many to be a traditional theme of African American folktales and folklore (Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices, 1991). Representing that theme are *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985), *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994) and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). Secondly, a Jewish ethnic pattern is briefly looked at in

Flying Lessons (Semel, 1995). The third ethnicity examined is the Hispanic culture evidenced in *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) and *Isla* (Dorros, 1995).

Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* (1985) is an anthology with the namesake story being its best-known tale. The story tells "long ago in Africa, some of the people knew magic" (p. 166) and they could fly. When those people were captured for slavery, the ones who could fly "shed their wings. They couldn't take their wings across the water on the slave ships. Too crowded, don't you know" (p. 166). The misery and illness of the ocean crossing for the slaves and the subsequent conditions of slavery caused these Africans to forget how to fly.

According to the story, those who were able to keep the magic looked exactly the same as the Africans who could not fly. This story tells about Toby, Sarah, and a tiny baby strapped to Sarah's back. Because of the hard work and horrendous conditions, Sarah feared for her own and her baby's survival. She would tell Toby (the tale reveals later that he is her father) that she must go soon. When the conditions become truly unbearable, Toby raises his hands and chants magic words, and Sarah becomes airborne. She flies away with the overseer watching her. The following day Toby chants his magic words over another fallen slave who also rises to fly. This time all of the slaves who possessed the ability take to the skies. Toby follows them, just out of reach of the driver and overseer who are bent on capturing him. The slaves who are not able to fly had to stay and watch, being left behind (Hamilton, 1985, p. 166-173).

In a post story note, Hamilton (1985) tells us,

> " The People Could Fly' is one of the most extraordinary, moving tales in black folklore. It almost makes us believe that the people *could* fly. There

> are numerous separate accounts of flying Africans and slaves in the black folktale literature. Such accounts are often combined with tales of slaves disappearing. A plausible explanation might be the slaves running away from slavery, slipping away while in the fields or under cover of darkness. In code language murmured from one slave to another, 'Come fly away!" might have been the words used. Another explanation is the wish-fulfillment motif" (Hamilton, 1985, p172).

Debra Briatico, in a *Children's Literature* review refers to the "supernatural handed down by African slaves before and during the Civil War period. These stories, born out of the sorrow of slaves, focus on freedom and triumph and bring hope to all who read them" (Briatico, 1985). According to Hamilton, the flying stories "are often attributed to Gullah (Angolan) African slaves. Angolan slaves were thought by other slaves to have exceptional powers" (Hamilton, p. 172). *Publisher's Weekly*, with reference to "The People Who Could Fly," states that these are "the slaves from Gulla who, according to legend, escape the master's abuse one day" (Publisher's Weekly, 1985).

Imani and the Flying Africans (Liddel, 1994) is a picture book referred to previously for the quantity of text that makes it more of a short chapter book than a true picture book. This story is a "story within a story." A mother is taking her son, Imani, to Georgia to meet her parents and grandmother for the first time. The journey is a long car ride and Imani is impatient and bored. To entertain him, his mother tells him a story that she heard as a child. This is another version of the flying Africans story. The incident she relates to him was purported to have occurred on a plantation where her great-grandmother was a slave.

A group of newly arrived slaves, who were particularly resistant to obedience and captivity, were kept in a shed at the plantation after they were purchased in order to "break" them, and they were repeatedly whipped. When they were finally brought into the open field to work, they began to sing a song in a language no one else understood. They walked and danced in a circle and the whole scene was so hypnotizing that everyone, including the overseers, stopped to watch. Then one of the Africans jumped into the air and glided into the sky. The others followed him. The other slaves believed that they flew back to Africa, and they were never seen again (Liddel, 1994).

While *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddel, 1994) tells a story that has been handed down in his family, the primary story has, at its core, a story about family, roots and heritage. As Mama begins the story, Imani interrupts with, "Granny's mama was a slave for real, Mama? I never knew we had slaves in our family." His mother counters, "Boy, most of the Black people in America were slaves during slavery. That means almost all Black people have slaves as ancestors." The publisher, Africa World Press, states that in retelling the folklore and black history, she "reconnects Imani not only to his past, but to an extended family" (Africa World Press, 1994). Another reviewer claims that the story "helps him (Imani) find a place in his family's history" (Publisher's Weekly, 1984).

Imani, after hearing the family story, falls asleep and has a realistic dream that he has been kidnapped and driven into the woods. He escapes like the slaves, by flying away from his captor. The reader does not realize that the episode is a dream until Imani is awakened. An old woman, who helped him fly and escape in the dream abduction, is

the same woman, to whom he is introduced, as his great-grandmother (Liddell, 1994). By using the combination of relating a folktale and family history to an occurrence in Imani's own life, the author is presenting a many-faceted portrait of black history and ethnicity, with enough layers to engage children of all backgrounds.

Tar Beach (Ringgold, 1991) is Cassie's story, based on a story quilt, which Ringgold produced as part of a set of five quilts that were titled "Woman on a Bridge." The "Tar Beach" quilt-art is a permanent holding of the Guggenheim (New York) Museum although it is currently not on display. The museum catalog tells us:

> During the late 1960's and the 1970's Faith Ringgold played an instrumental role in the organization of protest and actions against museums that had neglected the work of women and people of color. Her paintings from this period are overtly political, and present an angry, critical reappraisal of the American dream glimpsed through the filter of race and gender relations. Ringgold's more recent aesthetic strategy, however, is not one of political agitation or blatant visual provocation. Instead, she has come to embrace the potential for social change by undermining racial and gender stereotypes through impassioned and optimistic presentations of black female heroines (Guggenheim Catalog, 2003).

Cassie is, indeed, just such a heroine. Her story tells of living in the African American community under the shadow of the George Washington Bridge, which is located in the most northern part of Manhattan, New York City. While the pictures are stunning, and they tell the reader much about Cassie's life, the text is both poignant and pointed. Her father cannot join the union, and thus is often out of work, because of race. They live without many amenities that many American children were able to take for granted, and she worries about how hard her parents work in order for them to survive.

Hearne (1991), in *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, compares Cassie to "the folk heroes in Virginia Hamilton's *The People Could Fly*." In this case Cassie is not escaping slavery but wishing to obtain "everything her family needs, from employment to ice cream." *Kirkus Review* (1991) refers to Ringgold's "combining the traditional association between flying and the escape of the slave to freedom with her own fantasies as a child" as a poignant story that relates hardship and deprivation based on race. Camper (1991) speaks of the book as "a celebration of the strength and the traditions of black families." A book description claims, "this allegorical tale sparkles with symbolic and historical references central to African-American culture" (Horn Book, 1990).

Flying Lessons (Semel, 1995) is the story of Hadara, a twelve-year-old Jewish girl living in Israel in the 1950's. Hadara wants desperately to fly and the story revolves around her relationship with an elderly shoemaker who lives next door. The shoemaker, Monsieur Maurice, tells her about "flying" Jews he has known and promises to teach her to fly someday. This novel is far more advanced reading than the works studied thus far while looking at the ethnicity issues. Hadara feels "swallowed" up by the close village life and the nearly unbearable sameness of it all, and by the loss of her mother, and she wants to fly, to rise above it all. Monsieur Maurice, the neighbor, is actually telling Hadara in symbolic ways, about escaping the Holocaust. His difficulty in facing his own horrifying memories has him creating new ones that contain a circus and flying Jews. Interestingly, Rochman (1995), in a review in *Booklist* claims, "There are echoes here of

Hamilton's exquisite story *The People Could Fly* (1985), about slaves who flew away to freedom..."

Abuela (Dorros, 1991) and *Isla* (Dorros, 1995) are Hispanic picture books about a child, Rosalba, and her grandmother, Abuela, who go on imaginary and delightfully creative flying journeys, which become a picture map for the reader to learn Spanish words and Hispanic culture. In contrast to the African American themed books where flying was symbolic of the need to escape or gain power in the life circumstances, the Dorros books "sing out a celebration of the love and joy" (McClelland, 1991) found in the communities the author portrays. The text and illustrations make "collages of sparkling images and patterns, crammed with intriguing details, effectively transmit Rosalba's joy..."(Kirkus, 1991). McClelland also called *Abuela* a "more artfully natural approach to multicultural material" (1991). While great joy and love are evidenced in the books that find the grandmother and her granddaughter flying high over first the city in *Abuela* and then the Caribbean in *Isla*, the reader is being taken on a cultural tour and short lesson in Hispanic heritage.

While Imani's mother tells him a story of slave boats and overseers in the African American story, Abuela flies near the airport where the plane landed that first brought her to New York City emphasizing the difference in Hispanic emigration. In *Isla* (Dorros, 1995) Abuela takes Rosalba to visit her homeland, and introduces both Rosalba and the reader to the varied and colorful world of a tropical island. "Each stop of the glorious journey evokes a vivid memory for Rosalba's grandmother and reveals a new glimpse of the woman's colorful ethnic origins. Dorros's text seamlessly weaves Spanish words and

phrases into the English narrative..."(Publisher's Weekly, 1991). Abbott (1991), in a *Booklist* review, tells us "This is similar in some ways to Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach*, and used together, these 'wish' books would make a powerful foundation for a multicultural unit..." Abbott sums up the general effect of *Abuela* this way:

> Exquisite color collages convey the special relationship between white-haired Abuela and her granddaughter. Each painting is a tableau of details. The animated tableau features a rainbow of ethnic characters, pets, flowers, and bright curtains with the general excitement of a city street.

"In a believable leap for the reader's imagination, Rosalba becomes el pajaro, the bird, and calls to Abuela to fly with her on a bird's eye view of the city...in a spectacular dance of languages, fantasy, and love" (Banta, 1991). "Through their eyes, New York City has become a fiesta."

In both *Abuela* (1991) and *Isla* (1995), Dorros introduces his readers to family members of Abuela and Rosalba, and emphasizes the interconnectedness of the communities. In Abuela, the "fliers" drop in on an aunt and uncle who run a tiny store that sells groceries and notions. The flying duo is rewarded with lemonade from the friendly proprietors before moving on. A two-page spread which illustrates a colorful dock scene and fruit being unloaded bears this text:

> We'd fly to where the ships are docked, and watch people unload fruits from the land where Abuela grew up. Mangos, bananas, papayas - those are all Spanish words. So are rodeo, patio, and burro. Maybe we'd see a cousin of Abuela's hooking boxes of fruit to a crane. We saw her cousin Daniel once, unloading and loading the ships (Dorros, 1991).

Isla (Dorros, 1995) portrays an even stronger sense of family and shared heritage. Abuela and Rosalba go to her ancestral home on a tropical island. Rosalba visits the

home that her grandparents shared when her mother and her uncle were young. The uncle lives there now with his family. Dorros has used this scenario to introduce family relations and generational connections. Abuela shows Rosalba family pictures and tells her that they once ran a store in the front of the house. A story about her uncle when he was young and caught a large fish serves to bind the generational connections together, as does a picture of Rosalba's mother and uncle when they were young. As well as family heritage, the book takes the two flying over a city that has grown considerably since Abuela lived there. Abuela leaves the big city behind to show Rosalba a market where local farmers and villagers exchange goods. The illustrations and text portray a colorful, ethnic market that Abuela remembers as the venue that her family sold pineapples from when Abuela, herself, was a young girl. The two also fly to a swimming spot that is encircled by the rainforest where generations of the family have cooled off from the hot tropical weather (Dorros, 1995).

In summary, two distinct ethnic patterns were traced and another briefly mentioned. The first was based on black folklore regarding slaves who were able to fly and thus escape slavery. These stories appear to have originated with the Angolans, and the best-known retelling of one of these tales is that found in Hamilton's *The People Could Fly* (1995). The theme is reiterated in *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994) and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). Both of the latter books deal with the escape from other, more modern, kinds of oppression. Further, another book studied, *Flying Lessons* (Semel, 1995), while Jewish in origin, follows a similar pattern which is recognized by book reviewers. The second pattern was that of celebration and joy, with

the intention of teaching and sharing a rich Hispanic cultural past and present. The Dorros books *Abuela* (1991) and *Isla* (1995) are colorful, entertaining, and culturally rich picture books that use the human flying motif for the purpose of presentation.

Cultural Issues

The predominant cultural issue that occurred in the books studied was the human desire for freedom. Almost exclusively the books were about some sort of freedom: getting it, wanting it, or not knowing what to do with it when one had it. Using hand coding methods and standard qualitative research methods, I found that the most common recurring themes included freedom from oppression, loneliness, and from ordinariness that made life seem unbearable. Flying was used as symbolic escape, actual escape, and/or imaginary relief from oppressive forces.

Freedom from oppression and bondage.

"For Ringgold (1991), this phantasmic flight through the urban night sky symbolizes the potential for freedom and self-possession" (Spector, 2003). Ringgold, in reference to *Tar Beach* (1991) and its pre-existing quilt by the same name, states, "My women are actually flying: they are just free totally. They take their liberation by confronting this huge masculine icon – the bridge." The bridge she refers to is the George Washington Bridge in *Tar Beach*, which was a part of a larger work of story quilts she produced titled Woman on a Bridge.

Virginia Hamilton (1985) reflects in a post story note in *The People Could Fly*:

> "The People Could Fly" is a detailed fantasy tales of suffering, of magic power exerted against the so-called Master and his underlings. Finally, it is a powerful testament to the millions of slaves who never had the opportunity to "fly" away. They remained slaves, as did their children.

> "The People Could Fly" was first told and retold by those who had only their imaginations to set them free (1985).

Publisher's Weekly (1985) further sees the story as being representative of the "human need for freedom." Liddell's (1994) story of *Imani and the Flying African* uses the folklore of flying Africans who use their ability to fly to escape from slavery in a duplicated story within a story for a "modern day" adventure story to allow his protagonist, Imani, to fly and escape the tyranny of a kidnapper. As Imani's mother tells him the African story, she states, "they flew back home because they were not going to be slaves" (Liddell, 1994).

These three books, *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1985), *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994), and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) use human flying to symbolically represent the need for freedom, and specifically as imagery to help children understand the concept of freedom for African Americans in the United States. Two of the works are based on the oppression of actual slavery and the third, *Tar Beach* (1991), represents freedom from the prejudice and racial constraints of being African American a century later.

A fourth book, *Granny Learns to Fly* (Hickey, 1996) takes a unique look at the familiar theme. Granny's oppression is not found in slavery or race (she is Irish) but rather by age and financial constraints often found in society by the elderly. Granny wishes to continue living in the countryside, where her home has always been. In fact, she has been the enabler for many of the elderly living in her valley as she has been able to retain the ability to drive, and thus helps her friends and neighbors by doing the

grocery shopping and getting them to appointments. When Granny's car breaks down and the mechanic tells her that it would be very expensive to fix it, she is devastated. This short chapter fantasy then takes the reader on a tale of older people teaching themselves to fly. The fantasy ends, telling the reader that the elderly "fliers" become famous and are starting plans for setting up "flying" schools for the elderly all over the world. An interesting additional facet of this story is that the grandchildren are told that they will probably not be able to fly, until they actually *need* that ability – it is reserved for those who have no other choice.

I Can Hear the Sun (Polacco, 1996) calls itself a "modern myth" and is the story of a little boy named Fondo and an animal keeper named Stephanie Michele. Stephanie works at Lake Merritt in Oakland, California, and Fondo is a frequent visitor to the park. The park ranger and the homeless who call the park home begin to notice Fondo and become protective of him. Stephanie involves him in the care of the geese and soon Fondo works tirelessly every day at the lake game preserve. The reader learns that Fondo is parentless and lives in a settlement home, both facts he refuses to talk about. But when the authorities who run the home decide Fondo is a special needs child and that they will send him away for his own good, Fondo, who feels he has finally found his place in life with the geese he helps care for, decides he will not go. When it comes time for the geese to migrate, Fondo becomes convinced he can fly away with them, and does so. This pattern of flight from societal oppression is well represented by this work.

A second book where oppression is shown to be more personal, and human flight in the story represents the need for freedom from those constraints, is *Night Flying*

(Murphy, 2000). In this tale, Georgia is nearly sixteen and begins the story by telling the reader that the unusual thing about her family is that the women can fly. They have been able to do so for many years, going back four generations. The catch is that, because the flying sets them apart from society, Georgia's grandmother has become a tyrannical old woman who makes arbitrary rules about every part of their lives. In fact, flying is the only freedom Georgia experiences, and even that is regulated mercilessly.

When Georgia reaches a breaking point she takes off flying in the daytime, alone – breaking two cardinal rules. The conflict resolution finds all of the young female family members breaking loose from the oppression the grandmother has brought to the household, and flying for sheer joy and freedom. *Kirkus* (2000) calls this ability to fly "metaphorical in every way." Coulter (2000) in an editorial review found on amazon.com makes the point even stronger:

> "Georgia is a strong, resourceful girl, who must choose between soul-crushing loyalty to a rigid matriarch and the terrifying freedom of independence. (This is a) beautiful metaphor for the wrenching transition from childhood to adulthood. *Night Flying* will speak volumes to all teenagers who yearn to soar."

I have delineated the flight for freedom of oppression in the books *Tar Beach* (Ringgold 1991), *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1995), *Imani and the Flying African* (Liddell, 1994), *Granny Learns to Fly* (Hickey, 1996), *I Can Hear the Sun* (Polacco, 1996), and *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000). The first three of these originate from African American folklore and the flying is symbolic of the desperate need for freedom from slavery and limitations placed on their lives by virtue of race. The last three

metaphorically represent freedom from oppression that students will be able to identify with in their own lives, or in that of their families.

Freedom from loneliness.

Loneliness and the solutions offered by the ability to fly is a strong theme in many of the books I researched. *Fly By Night* (Jarrell, 1976) finds David living alone with his family, and looking forward daily to the delivery of mail, so that he will have someone to talk to. However, at night, his life becomes richer because he can fly. "Jarrell writes with simple force and grace about the essential loneliness of life..." (Snelson, 2002). Flying in this story adds the interest and excitement to David's life that he believes is missing otherwise. The author and illustrator (Maurice Sendak) have used this piece to create a quiet, idyllic setting where a lonely child safely experiences high adventure through the miracle of human flight.

The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor (Taylor, 2002) is the quintessential tale of a lonely boy. Jon has been moved by his parents to a tiny island named Clementine because his father, who works for the Coast Guard, will be tending the lighthouse for one year. Jon's only friend is his dog and he believes himself to be the loneliest person on earth. Jon believes that all of his problems will be solved if he can learn to fly. Flying is the escape he is looking for.

In *Flying Dimitri* (Drawson, 1997) we find another little boy, whose loneliness is not quite as blatant, but far more poignant. Corsaro (1997) in *Booklist* refers to "the lonely boy looking out the third-story window of a very big gray house, so it is not surprising when Dimitri suddenly 'zooms up to the ceiling through the top of my head'

(Drawson, 1997)." We learn eventually in the story that Dimitri lives in the large house with his father and that his mother is apparently deceased. *Kirkus Reviews* (1997) suggests that the "emptiness extends to the boy's heart and so he soars over the ocean..." but when Dimitri comes tumbling back to earth in an unsuccessful effort to find his mother, the reviewer states "the flight has failed, and perhaps all such flights are doomed to fail..."

Freedom from loneliness is the paramount theme for human flight in *Fly By Night* (Jarrell, 1976), *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor* (Taylor, 2002), and *Flying Dimitri* (Drawson, 1997). All three male protagonists consider themselves lonely and sad and in each case, the flight is seen symbolically as the escape route, the path to find freedom from a condition that none can alter in the least.

Freedom from ordinariness.

This was, perhaps, the most surprising theme identified, but nevertheless, quite prevalent. An editorial synopsis for *The Boy Who Could Fly* (Gardner, 2001) summarizes: "One day the Fat Fairy turns up at Thomas Top's house to grant him a birthday wish. Thomas can't think what to ask for, so he wishes he could fly. That's how Thomas goes from being just an ordinary boy who no one notices to being the most poplar boy in the school" (amazon.com, 2003). This delightful short chapter book develops this concept complexly. Thomas's father actually delights in his family being ordinary, to the point that he will tolerate nothing else. Thomas's school expects all of their students to be quite ordinary. Thomas is devastated as he learns to fly brilliantly

that, although other children notice and admire his skill, his parents and other adults refuse to acknowledge his talent or to see anything that is not ordinary.

Another tale of parents, and most other adults, who are not able to notice more than what they expect to notice, is *Sophy and Auntie Pearl* (Titherington, 1995). Wilde (1995) in *Children's Literature* explains the concept best with "Sophy and Auntie Pearl are delighted that they can fly, amazed that no one seems to notice, and find great pleasure in an aerial adventure that will encourage young children to let their own imaginations take flight." Dole (1995), from *School Library Journal*, points out that it is "too bad that lovely flights of fancy seem to be limited to the young and old, who are so much less immersed in mundane matters." For those grounded by ordinary lives, it is apparently not possible to see the "Sophys" and "Auntie Pearls" of the world.

Two other works, *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg, 1999) and *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996) allude to the concept of the defeat of the ordinary by virtue of the ability to fly. The book description points out "the boy's airborne adventure provides a magical-if temporary escape from the routine of everyday life" (amazon.com, 1999) referring to *Flying Over Brooklyn*. *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Book* describes *The Ring* and the child represented there: "Into his dismal black-and-white world comes a bright yellow ring: through the ring, he can see color, and when he puts it on, his world turns to bright-hued summer and he gain the ability to fly" (Stevenson, 1996). This flight experience provides with child with "a literal pick-me-up."

In an enchanting twist to the rise from the ordinary seen in the previous four books, *Billy the Bird* (King-Smith, 2001) brings relief, not for the flier, but for his sister,

who finds herself to be anything but ordinary with a brother who can fly. Billy, unfortunately, never remembers his flight adventures that occur during the night. But Mary, his older sister, is delighted with the part that she plays in the adventures. She knows that there are many "Marys" in the world with little brothers named Billy, but, she asks herself, how many have a brother who can fly (p. 5)?

Although the freedom from the ordinary theme is clearly not as important or culturally significant as that of oppression, this theme runs through many of the works and may have considerable impact on children who read these works. While many cannot comprehend slavery or even severe loneliness, most all, at one point or another in their lives, will understand wishing to rise above the oppressive sameness that shadows their lives.

Social Issues

Many of the issues explored in the books that I researched with human flying also occur in most literature written for children. There were, however, some unique treatments and emphasis made possible by stories with flying people. Of particular interest were a number of works that pursued themes related to individualism and the rights of the individual to be unique and true to himself. Further, it is plausible to believe that the "lighter" something is, the more likely it is to be able to become airborne. Therefore, metaphorical stories where the "lightness" of flight was related to a lighter spirit, conscience, or heart tied into much of the moral fiber of the works.

Wings (Myers, 2000) is a stunning picture book about the new kid at school. This new kid happens to have wings, and to fly beautifully. Myers (2000) specifically

"focuses on the importance of celebrating a person's individuality and accepting his or her unique qualities, even if those characteristics are different from the crowd" (Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices, 2001). Ikarus Jackson is ostracized by everyone. His wings take up too much space, he distracts his class, and he is just too different. One child, who has also been the brunt of cruelty from other students and teachers herself, finds the courage to take a stand and to tell Ikarus that his flying is beautiful.

This tale is a modernization of the myth of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun. Instead, the heat that damages Ikarus Jackson is that of hate and cruelty. The more he is taunted, the weaker and sadder he becomes. "The symbolism of the 'wings,' of the rising above criticism, plus the examination of the role of the nonconformist; even the relations of this story to the traditional tale of Icarus and Daedalus, all can greatly enrich the reading of this deceptively simple story" (Marantz, 2001).

Being true to oneself, and celebrating uniqueness is apparent in *The Boy Who Could Fly* (Gardner, 2001), a short chapter book. Thomas's newfound ability to fly actually triggers changes in the family that sees all three members of the family become individuals. Thomas's mother has spent many years becoming who her husband wants her to be. Even the father has become who he thinks he should be, instead of who he had been or could be or most importantly, wants to be. The freedom that Thomas's flying affords him starts a nearly disastrous altercation in his parents' marriage, but in the end both parents come to celebrate who they really are, and to admire who their son has become.

Flying Boy (McConnachie, 1987) is the story of Buddy who learns to fly quite accidentally one day. When a con man from the circus discovers Buddy's gift, he tells the boy that he will need to change who he is, "Kid, you're too important to do favors for people." After agreeing to not do errands and to not "fly for free," Billy is changed. Suddenly, as a result of his change of heart, Billy loses his ability to fly. *Publishers Weekly* (1987) states that the story is "a touching and honest celebration of being true to one's own nature."

Newman's *The Boy Who Could Fly* (1967) is genuinely a story about being unique. Flying is incidental to the story line, but the significance of the act of flying and the theme of being true to oneself is highlighted in the story when Joey is pushed to "prove" that he is different and has special abilities. Alone, and without fanfare, he works very hard to determine whether or not he could fly. And indeed he could. He makes the choice, however, to be unique without having to prove himself to anyone else. With the help of an older brother, he faces his future with optimism for what he can accomplish with his special "gifts" without regard to whether or not anyone else is aware of them.

Georgia, the female protagonist of *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000), is challenged to determine who she really is. She finds that there are several family members who have decided who she should be, and "flying" is used in that social context to wield power, to give or take away independence. Georgia is not the only character who benefits from her decision to free herself of artificial constraints, and she gains tremendous support from

other family members who also learn to "fly," figuratively and literally, each becoming her own person for the first time in her life.

The metaphorical use of flight to present morality themes such as heavy being bad and light representing good is most clearly seen in *Flying Boy* (McConnachie, 1987), the picture book tale of Buddy, who can never seem to get where he wants to go on time because along the way he finds people to help and things that need to be done. He is everyone's friend, listening to lonely elders and helping small children. One particular day he has been delayed again and again from his intention to play ball at the park. Finally, the moment arrives when there is a bit of time available for him to do what he wants to do, which is go to the park and play baseball. While running downhill, he trips and begins to fall. "And then something extraordinary happened. He didn't fall. In fact, little by little, he started going up. And up" (McConnachie, 1987). Buddy is flying, and loves it! The other children cheer and watch.

Just as Buddy is beginning to enjoy his new status, a man from the circus tells him that he will make him rich and famous. But the condition is that Buddy must no longer do errands, be helpful, or fly without being paid. Buddy agrees to all of this and shows up the next day at the circus, ready for his first performance (McConnachie, 1987). "But the grand event fizzles; Buddy has a heavy feeling because he didn't stop to help people who needed him, and he can't get off the ground. Later as he walks home, the weighty feeling lifts and the old Buddy returns" (Publisher's Weekly, 1987). The pictures further reinforce the light versus heavy theme. The reader sees Buddy become

visibly lighter for the second time as he thinks about all of those he can now help on his way home from the circus.

Mrs. Meyer, The Bird (Erlbruch, 1995) finds another opportunity for the protagonist to be "weighted" down followed by "flight" to lighten the character. Mrs. Meyer worries about everything. She imagines things to worry about, and she is nearly immobilized with her fears. But her life changes forever when she finds a baby bird that needs her help. She cares for the bird until it is ready to learn to fly. Forgetting her own fears and worry, she climbs out on a limb (literally) with the bird to teach it to fly, and finds that she can fly too. *School Library Journal* says of the book "Poor Mrs. Meyer is literally and figuratively weighted down with worry in this slightly skewed, not-quite-a-transformation tale...it is only when she trusts her heart that the stocky woman becomes airborne..." Wilson (1997).

Jon from *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Mot*or (Taylor, 2002) symbolically is forced to carry about heavy paint cans in each hand or to put large rocks in his pockets to keep him on the ground when he does not wish to fly. Ikarus Jackson, the winged boy in *Wings* (Myers, 2000) "nearly falls from the sky, not because he flies too high...but because jeering kids in the schoolyard and repressive adults don't like his being different and try to break his soaring spirit" (Rochman, 2000). Ikarus eventually is able to "lighten his load" when a young girl (the story's narrator) stands up to the bullies and tells Ikarus that his flying is beautiful.

The social issues examined here were divided into two categories. The first looked at individualism and the importance of being true to oneself. In each of the stories

reviewed this motif was embodied by the character or characters that flew. These stories included *Wings* (Myers, 2000), *The Boy Who Could Fly* (Gardner, 2001), *Flying Boy* (McConnachie, 1987), *The Boy Who Could Fly* (Newman, 1967), and *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000). The second theme examined morality, expressed as lightness versus darkness or light compared to heavy. I explored this theme in the works *Flying Boy* (McConnachie, 1987), *Mrs. Meyer, The Bird* (Erlbruch, 1995), *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Mot*or (Taylor, 2002), and *Wings* (Myers, 2000).

Results for Question 2

What response patterns do children exhibit as they read and discuss these works?

Data analysis for this phase of the study was conducted by hand coding (Creswell, 2002). Transcripts of purposeful conversations and discussions were reviewed first, because I believed that the students conversational and discussion remarks would represent a more "first impression" point of view and that journal entries, stories, essays, and projects would reveal more insight and deeper thought. Both sources of data were studied and coded chronologically so that emerging and shifting themes could be noted. I have examined two themes here that resulted from this procedure. For review, I have listed here the books that were studied by the students, in the order that they were introduced.

Week 1

The Flying Grandmother (Kojima, 1981)

The Ring (Maizlish, 1996)

Flying Jake (Smith, 1988)

Week 2

Flying Dimitri (Drawson, 1997)

Imani and the Flying Africans (Liddell, 1994)

Flying Over Brooklyn (Uhlberg, 1999)

I Can Hear the Sun (Polacco, 1996)

Week 3

Abuela (Dorros, 1991)

Tar Beach (Ringgold, 1991)

Week 4

The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor (Taylor, 2002)

Week 5 and 6

Night Flying (Murphy, 2000)

Week 7

The People Could Fly (Hamilton, 1985)

Results for Question 2a

What do children believe that the stories and the symbolism mean?

I could not examine emerging themes without acknowledging that the types of books the students were presented with, and that the order that they were presented in affected data collected, at least chronologically. The first week of the study, which was begun in February of 2003, the students were given three wordless picture books. Each succeeding week the books presented were more complex, both in theme and in readability. Thus, the two themes recorded here follow a somewhat chronological

pattern, but by no means were the themes seen exclusively in this arrangement. The first apparent pattern in the student data is imagination. They believed that the author wanted them to experience imagination by reading them and to encourage them to use their own imaginations. Secondly, the students also consistently believed that the major theme of the books was freedom, especially in the later weeks of the study, and much of their writing and discussion included these topics.

Imagination

The participating students of this study were universally convinced that the primary purpose or theme of the literature they were introduced to in the first two weeks was to encourage and exemplify imagination. The word "imagination" showed up fifty three times in journal entries and quite frequently in the tapes of their discussions. Reference to imagination was more pronounced early in the study and was increasingly replaced by "freedom" in the last several weeks. As suggested previously, this was greatly influenced, I believe, by the fact that the wordless books and picture books were presented before the short chapter books and novel. However, there appeared to be other factors involved here as well. When the unit was introduced, the students were not told that all of the books would have human flying as a motif.

The first three books were wordless picture books and that, in itself, was a novelty. I found that during the first week of tape transcriptions and journal entries, there was no mention of the fact that all three had "fliers." Therefore, it is undoubtedly true that much of the reference to "imagination" was due to the fact that the subject matter was unusual, the motif was a concept they had had little exposure to, and the books

seemed to be quite inventive to the students. Further, for a human to fly, it undoubtedly occurred to them, it would necessitate using his or her imagination.

Regarding *Flying Jake* (Smith, 1988), one of the wordless picture books, the following were taken from journal entries:

Vivian: I think that it is a very interesting book very imaginative, colorful.

Chloe: I think this book is also very imaginative...

Mike: I think this book is about a boy who dreams about being a bird. Well he dreams it in his imagination I guess.

Regarding *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996), Vivian wrote:

> I love the fact that this book is made of blown up pictures and that it is so imaginative. This book is also showing that the child or children in this book have vivid imaginations and the author of the book is also hinting that all children in the world have very vivid imaginations and that it takes something so small such as a small yellow ring to set their imaginations off.

Regarding *Flying Dimitri* (Drawson, 1997), Paul explained his reaction with this entry:

> I think the book *Flying Dimitri* is about wishing for something you can't have. I think it's okay to dream about something you want, and have it in your imagination, but fantasy should not overcome reality. Not only did Dimitri dream about having a mother, but he also dreamed about having another life. Wishing for something won't make it true, that still doesn't mean he can't have hope.

During the discussion of the same story, Mike and I had this conversation.

Mike: I thought the story changed a little in the middle of the story.

KH: In what way?

Mike: Like, he's doing something real back down on earth, and all of a sudden, he's

going to Mars.

KH: That's a pretty big change.

Mike: Yea, I guess it was sort his imagination and then he really wanted something too, I guess his mom.

It was not until the book *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg) was introduced that the students made note (as determined by the transcriptions of the taped conversations) that all the books had flying people in them. After this book, the following comments occurred:

Chloe: I think that this really happened to the writer and the boy in the book is flying...

Vivian: I think that maybe he was trying to explain it to us but in a way we could understand it, or maybe he is trying to tell us that he wished it to snow and that was his dream that he would never forget.

Paul: He just wanted us to use our imagination and think what it would look like from, like on top, if you were looking down. He doesn't expect you to believe he was flying!

When *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) was presented to the students, the following comments were noted:

Mike: It's about a Spanish girl and her grandmother who, like, uses their imagination that flying stuff, and they fly like over a bunch of buildings.

Chloe: I think the author is saying that if we try hard enough and use our imagination, we can do just about anything.

Vivian: I thought the author was trying to tell us that our imaginations are what make us fly and that we will always have somebody to imagine with.

Mike: I thought the author was trying to confuse us sort of with some of the words, but then I changed my mind about that after I read the book a few times. And she was only trying to make us use our imaginations.

Paul: Yeah, if you imagine it from a place, like flying, it makes more sense and you can get the whole thing, kind of.

These students were fascinated by the imaginative use of flight, but also somewhat convinced that the authors' purpose was to convince them to use their own imaginations. I encouraged the students to use one of the options for response that they were offered, that of producing an illustration to demonstrate their understanding of the story or a specific theme, and even suggested that an appropriate response might be an illustration that would demonstrate the imagination the books encouraged. However, despite the fact that both of the girls are quite artistic and have, in the past, chosen artistic alternatives for other activities, this option was only chosen twice. Both times the pictures showed human flying from the ground, looking up at the flier, in spite of the fact that a large majority of the artwork in the books showed the perspective of a "flier" from the top looking down.

Freedom

Although there was early mention of freedom as a theme in the works studied by the students, this theme did not become pronounced until the third week of the study,

when the books *Abuela* (Dorros, 1991) and *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991) were introduced. This exchange was recorded as we finished *Abuela*:

KH: Anything else you want to say about *Abuela* before we move on?

Chloe: Maybe they're (the characters are) Latin because in the beginning they say that her grandmother moved to the city, and I think maybe they're gonna write it so they move back to the city and they fly, like a symbol.

KH: What do you think the flying represents?

Chloe: That they can do what they want.

Vivian: They can feel free, yeah.

Paul: They weren't treated equal.

KH: Who?

Paul: People who could fly, maybe they didn't feel free.

In subsequent discussions, I began asking the students what symbolism they were finding in the books, and suggested they further their understanding by rereading their own journals and essays. Invariably, the subject returned to freedom. In a discussion concerning *Tar Be*ach (Ringgold, 1991) as well as *Abuela*:

Chloe: Well, I also think that they made them fly because they're free because in this book they're African-Americans.

Vivian: Yeah, I agree with her.

KH: So the common theme in both books...

Chloe: That they're free.

Vivian: To do as they wish.

Mike: They're free to do what they want.

Paul: You don't see change.

Vivian: Well, that's the point. Is it like the ultimate freedom?

Chloe: Well, not the ultimate.

Vivian: Well, like politics or like from the law or anything. They still have to follow politics and the law, but they're free to live their life as they wish.

KH: How did the author show that?

Chloe: Because they fly.

The concept of flight suggesting freedom was the most pronounced during the two weeks in which we read *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000). This is the story of Georgia, who is soon going to be sixteen. In her family, all the women fly. The sixteenth birthday serves as an initiation into the world of solo flying, and as the story begins, Georgia has been practicing with her aunt for her solo. The freedom of flying, however, has become so entwined within the family secrets and grudges and "rules," as Georgia calls them, that the Hanson household has become joyless.

Georgia wonders if she can really break free of the hold that the secrets have on all of them. In the complicated plot, which reveals these many secrets, Georgia learns many painful truths about the past, including the fact that her Aunt Carmen, who was long ago banished from the house, is actually her mother. In her anger and confusion, she also broke two of the strictest rules, flying alone before the initiation ceremony and flying during the day. In order to be "initiated" she would have needed to answer several questions, and for things to go harmoniously, Georgia knew that she would have to lie.

When the time came, she chose truth and her individual freedom over safety and conformity to her grandmother's rules. A partial transcript of the discussion at the end of this book reading follows:

KH: Any ideas what flying might represent in this book?

Chloe: Not having rules. Like you've got people telling you – you can't go somewhere.

Vivian: You can control your own actions.

Mike: They flew when they were angry – two (characters) of them.

Chloe: That might be the key that…

KH: The key?

Chloe: That would get them to want to fly. We do that sometimes when we are angry or in a bad situation.

KH: Do what?

Vivian Go somewhere.

Paul: Disappear.

Chloe: Run, hide.

Mike: Flying means freedom in this book.

Vivian: Yes, leaving was something that Carmen wants, so she was free too.

Paul: But freedom was restricted. Because to fly they had to follow all the rules, so really, there was no freedom, not until the end.

When we were ready to culminate the project, the students chose to do a collage with pictures and artwork that would be representative of the books. In early

conversations regarding this plan, there was some discussion that the collage would include people who appeared to be flying. One student, Paul, brought two pictures from home for the collage that were realistic human pictures. One was of a soccer player who appeared to be in midair while kicking. The other was a rock singer whose legs were bent back and had clearly jumped into the air. During the period of time when the students constructed the collage, there was a protracted conversation as to whether these pictures should be added, and if so, where. By unanimous decision at the end of this discourse, it was decided to not use the pictures, because, as Mike said, "people don't really fly, you know."

The collage consisted of multiple images of pixies, fairies, balloons, airplanes, butterflies, angels, and clouds to depict the *idea* of flight, but no real flight by humans was displayed at all. Other symbols and pictures that were included in the collage were primarily thematic of American freedom and included several bald eagles, two American flags, and a "liberty tree" so named by Chloe. The only pictures of people were two that were clearly African and there was a tiny map of Africa. When questioned about these inclusions, Mike pointed out, "Well, some of these stories were about Africans." While the children clearly identified a freedom theme in the stories, they were less interested, it would appear, in the actual idea of human flight.

Results for question 2b:

What cultural, social and ethnic links become apparent that might impact choices for and by children in educational settings?

When this study was begun, and the decision was made to use the unique group of students that I taught for this research study, it was hoped that some insight might be shed on the use of this specific type of literature with other children, knowing that qualitativc research cannot be generalized. The students who were studied, with histories of school difficulties and learning difficulties, might, I hoped, give me a better understanding of the issues other children might see in the books. Each student was asked, at the end of the project, to write in his or her journal whatever concluding remarks or thoughts that they might have about the unit we had just finished, and if they could fly themselves, where they would go and why. The results of this data analysis are as follows:

Vivian wrote in her journal:

> I think all of these books have something to do with freedom, courage, love and even restriction. I also think that these books were very imaginative but there are differences between the first eight books and *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000). *Night Flying* is truly about trust and freedom.... It would be really cool if I could fly. I could fly to a place far away if I was angry, and then come back.

Vivian was consistent, throughout her journal entries, writing projects, and discussions in finding the freedom theme paramount. She particularly was engaged in the reading of the story "The People Could Fly" and produced excellent artwork that showed all of the black slaves in the field rising to the sky. In an interview with her, I asked her why she had them <u>all</u> rising, instead of a few selected ones, as in the story, and she replied, "I drew it the way I wanted it to happen. It is too bad they couldn't all just fly away. Just think, slavery would have ended right there." Vivian wrote passionately about Georgia's (Murphy, 2000) need for freedom and autonomy from the constrictive family hierarchy.

Her last essay, however, was poignant and in places, much too telling to reprint here. To paraphrase, she stated that if she had the power to fly away from anything, it would be her past. She would fly far away from the unhappiness and bad memories. She states, "If flying could give me that freedom, then I would take the plunge without another thought."

Chloe included revealing commentary in her journal entries too. One issue that was repeated several times in discussing some of the characters was the fear (for the character) that he or she would be made fun of. In fact at one point she thought the character might get nicknamed "levi-boy" (for levitation). An interesting remark was made in regard to *The Flying Grandmother* (Kojimo, 1981): "It is also a flying book; I think the writer is saying we all have a kid in us somewhere. Because he/she made the grandma so fearless." She referred to the concept several times that anything was possible if one tried hard enough. Her ending essay stated, "I would love to fly away in the sky at night so I could look at the stars and get away from all the worries in the world. I would like to fly right when somebody asks me to do something. I wouldn't care if they knew I could fly." She also specifically delineated problems that she would like to "escape." Little mention was made of other cultural or ethnic themes in her writings, although others that appeared in discussions have been documented.

Paul, the student who was less vocally communicative, was poorly represented in the transcriptions. This was compounded by the fact that his speech is hard to understand, and the transcription of his comments was very difficult. Further, nearly all of him comments were made when someone else was speaking as "asides" rather than

directly addressing the group with his opinions. Virtually all of his comments that were recorded resulted from my efforts to repeat what he had said in order to enter them into the recording. His comments were generally incomplete and often, if I did not understand them the first time, they were not repeated. His writing throughout this unit was below the standards he had previously achieved in my classroom, and it appears throughout that he was uncomfortable with the subjects, the questions, and perhaps the idea of being included in the study, even though he had appeared willing and interested in the beginning. There is simply not enough data to triangulate conclusions for this question for this young man.

Mike, conversely, in spite of his difficulty with writing and making his thoughts clear, was quite anxious to communicate his theories and opinions. In his journal notes regarding *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994) he wrote ".... that my journal report so for this story is about slavery, too. The need to be free, you know." He also showed concerns about belonging, pointing out in *Night Flying* (Murphy, 2000) that: "I think Maeve fits in not so good because she doesn't like the rules she doesn't like Carmen coming to visit.... so I don't think she fits in very well with the others." He further commented, regarding the primary protagonist, Georgia, "she thinks that there should be no rules that you should follow your own feelings. I think she needs to control herself, and she should control her anger, and her flying." In reviewing his own work, Mike had these reflections:

> I think all the essays showed belonging like being free and flying and making your own choices, not following other peoples' rules and making your own ones. They also represent belonging and fitting in like in *Night Flying* - was about not having people to boss you around and that there

> should be no secrets kept. They show you to imagine stuff by looking through a ring or flying in the air and knowing you have a chance to do stuff you think you can't. If I could fly I'd be like a falcon. What I thought about *Night Flying* is that it is about having your own life to live instead of following other peoples' decisions.

It appeared that, in general, each of the student's comments and opinions reflected their own personal perspectives and did show some grasp of the cultural and ethnic principles that the books presented.

In Chapter 4, I have presented the results for the research questions that I began with in Chapter 1. Because the study was in two very distinct parts, the results have been related in this format. Chapter 5 will discuss the connections and relationships found between the two sets of results, and offer discussion regarding the use of this information.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Summary of Results

The ability for students to read and understand a variety of literature is important, not only to educators, but obviously to the students who are developing their own emerging literacy (Creighton, 1997), and it is argued that children should be taught to acknowledge and strive toward understanding of the social complexity of reading, and the motifs found within texts. Multicultural literature offers a unique opportunity for developing important literacy skills, both for educators and for their students. Mathis (1999) suggests that the literature students read and have read to them should stress the common elements of human life, and bring about an understanding that children can build upon concerning the human condition. One method for this to occur is through the identification of themes and motifs within the body of children's literature that is pedagogically appropriate.

This qualitative study was divided into two research plans and studied the specific motif of human flying as it occurs in children's literature. The first phase of the study identified, reviewed, and analyzed the specified type of literature. The second phase introduced a portion of that literature to four students and data were collected with regard to their impressions and reactions concerning the works to which they were exposed. In this study, I documented the methods that I used to locate the literature, including the criteria by which the works were judged appropriate for the research. Qualitative

procedures were used for coding the patterns, themes, and ethnic issues which were then traced and documented. Two primary patterns for the books were noted:

1) Authors and illustrators used dreams and/or daydreams to make the ability to fly plausible. Within this pattern, authors chose a wide variety of templates for the flying motif that included flying in dreams that could not be remembered, day dreams of many varieties, and flight that appeared to have been a dream but some "evidence" is left at the end of the story to keep the reader wondering.
2) In the picture book genre, the flight motif was often invoked for literary and visual purposes, specifically to teach or tell a story with a broad point of view. The books that fell in this category included the Hispanic books *Abuela* and *Isla* that author Dorros (1991, 1995) used to teach both culture and language.

The themes of the books were traced through ethnic, cultural and social pathways. In particular, the African American heritage of folklore involving slaves who could fly was traced through *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton, 1995), *Imani and the Flying Africans* (Liddell, 1994), and even as background for the more modern tale of *Tar Beach* (Ringgold, 1991). One work about a Jewish child, *Flying Lessons* (Semel, 1995) was cited and the Dorros (1991, 1995) books introduced the Spanish language and culture into the ethnicity of the works.

The cultural theme that was identified involved freedom from oppressions, loneliness and ordinariness. Although African American literature contained wish fulfillment style themes for the escape from slavery, less weighty types of oppression were common themes in the works as well. Loneliness and isolation were the forms of

oppression seen in several of the books, specifically loneliness in children. However, one book, *Granny Learns to Fly* (Hickey, 1996), saw the flight motif as an appropriate "escape " from the loneliness and isolation of the elderly.

Social themes included the right to be an individual, and morality portrayed in metaphorical terms. *Wings* by Christopher Myers (2000) leads the works that exemplify individualism, and rights of the individual to "fly" in his own way. Flying Boy (McConnachie, 1987) clearly sets out to define a happy, loving heart as "light" and the more negative sides of life become "heavy." Many of the researched works place flying in a symbolic role for morality and/or decency.

The second set of data analyzed evolved from a project I completed with four of my students, for the purpose of studying the reactions of children to works selected from the literature identified to use in this research. The students participated in a seven-week unit using twelve of the twenty-five books. Data collected from this work included transcriptions of tape-recorded conversations and discussions, copies of journal entries and other writings completed by the students, and field notes made pertaining to visual projects executed by the students. This made possible triangulation of data and coding of the materials, which led to the identification of two specific themes that existed within the students' work and conversations. These two themes included imagination, the author's and illustrator's use of it and belief in it, and the students' belief that the works were intended to encourage their own (children's) imagination. The second theme was freedom, found most notably in the writings and discussions that centered on the African American works of "flight" from slavery.

Analysis Across the Phases of the Study

Clearly, the patterns and themes that I identified and developed for this research were more numerous, and achieved a closer examination of the literary works, than was possible for students to recount in the context of their study of the books. Therefore, I felt it to be of value to compare and contrast the research findings in each phase, looking for connections and deviations that may serve to give a clearer picture of the research outcome.

Of the twelve works that the students reviewed, five had dream or daydream patterns. Two were of the variety that used flying for a literary device. In virtually every instance of a response where "imagination" was noted, the reference was to one of the books using the dream/daydream pattern. In discussing the two works that I had previously identified as the author's use of flight as a literary device, numerous instances of student comments were noted as:

- The author wants us to...
- The author is showing us...
- The author is trying to show...
- The book wants you to learn Spanish...

suggesting that the literary device use was effective in its "teaching" purpose and that the students were able to discern this.

In response to the second half of Question 1, I looked at ethnic, cultural, and social issues identified in the works. Ethnic works discussed were African American, Hispanic and Jewish. The students specifically responded to the ethnic themes in the

African American books, and Vivian in particular appeared to be actively engaged in response to this theme, triangulated in written, verbal and visual art responses. Mike and Chloe also made ethnic based remarks in the data analyzed, and appeared to grasp the thematic use of a traditional motif in the three African American books. Paul did not appear to show any particular understanding, and as suggested in the previous discussion of his data, no conclusions can be drawn for him. As could be expected, there was little response to the Hispanic books that was of a specifically ethnic nature. Instead, the students' responses were grounded solidly in their interpretations of the literary device of the flier's presentation. They did, however, all mention the author's intention to educate the reader in the Spanish language. Chloe, who is semi-literate in Spanish, was particularly enthused about this concept, and at least momentarily, functioned as class leader in the discussion regarding pronunciation and meaning. The Jewish book, *Flying Lessons* (Semel, 1995) was not introduced to the children.

This study found "freedom" the predominant cultural issue thematically found in the books. This discussion was further divided into three types of freedom:

- From oppression or bondage
- From loneliness
- From ordinariness

The student's reaction to the freedom theme was detailed in Chapter 4 but pertained almost exclusively to the first designation of freedom. This dovetailed tightly into their understanding the ethnicity of the African American books. I suggested, however, in the discussion of freedom from "ordinariness" that while this was not as lofty a theme, it

might be more relevant to children who read these works. This proved not to be the case for the study participants. They were introduced to several of the books that evidenced this theme, but when asked at one point if all the books were about freedom, Mike's response was, "not *The Ring* (Maizlish, 1996) or *Flying Over Brooklyn* (Uhlberg, 1999)." The others agreed with him. Even when we pursued this subject, and I suggested that there were many kinds of freedom, they did not willingly embrace the concept of freedom from boredom or ordinariness. By far the best work with this theme was *The Boy Who Could Fly* (Gardner, 2001) and this book was not used in the second phase of the study. Using this work might well have changed this outcome. None of the books that I researched in detail regarding the social themes of individualism and symbolic morality were introduced to the students.

Applications of the Results

A number of ideas for student response activities surfaced in the research conducted and detailed in the first half of Chapter 4. Specific suggestions for students creating their own "flying stories" include using the patterns discussed on page 40 and 41 of this study. Further, many of the stories studied, which were not presented to the research participants, could provide worthwhile and positive reader responses. Further, I obtained *Learning Through Art, The Guggenheim Museum Collection* (Goodman, 2001) that details activities for "Tar Beach," the quilt-art that the book by the same name (Ringgold, 1991) was based. This activity book is primarily for younger children but reinforces the concept of the "overview" of a family story both in use of the flying motif and the quilt motif.

Limitations of the Study

Various limitations existed in both phases of the research. A primary limitation in the literary research was that of language. Because human flying would appear to be a universal motif worthy of studying in cross cultural designs, it would have been preferable to have included books from many cultures. This was carried out whenever possible but I had to rely on translations for the foreign originated works that I included. The two books that I am aware of that were not originally written in English were *Mrs. Meyer the Bird* (Erlbruch, 1995) originally written in German, and *Flying Lessons* (Semel, 1995) first written in Hebrew.

A second limitation was evidenced in the results obtained from the students. The limitations relate to the students' disabilities, particularly seen in Paul's poor communication skills and Mike's difficulty with writing. In spite of the limitations these issues bestowed, participation by these students inherently enriched the study because of the students' unique personal experiences in many of the social and cultural issues that were raised in these works.

Conclusions

Research literature was not previously available with regard to the human flying motif. This study was designed and implemented to fill that void. In order to adequately provide an overview of literature, and to describe qualitatively the patterns and themes that existed within that body of literature, it was necessary to use various methods of search to locate the works. The research progressed by developing data that were obtained from reviewers and researchers in a systematic search. As the data files

developed for each work, I hand coded and charted specifics, in the ongoing effort to identify themes and patterns that were relative to the materials being studied. Those findings are reported in Chapter 4 in substantial detail.

As the second half of the research study, twelve of the identified works were introduced systematically to four students. Using a qualitative approach to observing and recording data, and an action research design to encourage student response, the data were compiled from transcripts of discussions and purposeful conversations, and from copies of the students' journal entries, essays, other writing, and visual art projects. The results of these data were compiled, also using hand coding, but with an emphasis on looking for trends and development of themes. The students' responses indicated that positive gains in understanding of specific cultural and ethnic concepts were achieved.

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Appendix A:

Parental Consent Form

University of Nebraska Omaha

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Teacher Education

IRB#021-03-EX

Parental Consent
Research in Children's Literature Which Contains the Motif of Human Flight

1. This consent form is to grant permission for my minor child to participate in a study directed by Kathleen Hinman in association with her master's degree program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

2. I understand the following: This study will look at children's literature with a specific motif.

   - My child's part will be reading the literature and responding to that literature in a variety of ways which will include, but may not be limited to, journal entries, class discussion, writing assignments, and artwork.
   - Participation in the study will be during the regular classroom schedule. Involvement in the study will be part of my child's regular language arts instruction.
   - Data will be collected in the form of observational field notes, transcribed audio tapes of students' conversation during class discussion times, documents which the students produce, and purposeful discussions between the student and the researcher.
   - Participation in the study is voluntary.
   - The following benefits can be expected from the research: results will assist educators in the understanding of student response to this specific motif in literature.
   - My child's identity will be confidential and will be assure by the following steps:
     a. Pseudonyms will be used for student responses.
     b. Responses will be coded.
   - The results of the research may be published, but neither I nor my child nor the school will be identified in any such publication.

3. If have further questions about this study, I will contact Kathleen Hinman at 216-3461.

4. My questions about this study have been answered, and I agree to allow Kathleen Hinman to proceed with the research referred to above, report her findings to her program committee, and publish her findings.

Signature_____ Date_____

IRB APPROVED
VALID UNTIL 1-17-06

6001 Dodge Street / Omaha, NE 68182-0163 / 402-554-3666 / FAX: 402-554-3744

Appendix B:

Student Agreement to Participate Form

University of Nebraska Omaha

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Teacher Education

IRB# 021-03-EX

STUDENT AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE

To my students:

In the next few weeks we will be involved in a unit for language arts with books that I have chosen for a special reason. I am a student at the university and I want to learn what you think about these books. I will be taking notes as we discuss the books and I will also use a tape recorder much of the time. I will need copies of the writing and journals that you do for this project, and I will ask you some questions from time to time.

I appreciate your help and cooperation with my project. The end result of our work will be a thesis which I will finish writing when we have finished our unit. I hope you will do the work for this unit just as you have done many other assignments in our class, because this will give us the best information.

Please sign the slip of paper below that says you are willing to participate in my study. Your parents are being asked to sign a paper, too. Thank you for your help.

Kathleen Hinman

I agree to participate in the study that Mrs. Hinman is pursuing. I agree to let her tape record our discussions, copy my writing, and to talk to her about the books.

Signature_____ Date_____
(student)

IRB APPROVED
VALID UNTIL 1-19-04

6001 Dodge Street / Omaha, NE 68182-0163 / 402-554-3666 / FAX: 402-554-3744

Appendix C:

IRB Exemption Letter

University of Nebraska Medical Center

NEBRASKA'S HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER
A Partner with Nebraska Health System

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)

January 29, 2003

Kathleen Hinman
Teacher Education - Kayser Hall 514
UNO - VIA COURIER

IRB#: 021-03-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: The Motif of Human Flying in Children's Literature

Dear Ms. Hinman:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 1. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest D. Prentice, PhD /gdk

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/gdk

Appendix D:

Annotated Bibliography of Children's Books

Used in Research Study

Appendix C: Annotated Bibliography of Children's Books

Dillon, D. & Dillon, L. (1985). *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales told by Virginia Hamilton.* New York, NY. Alfred A. Knopf.

American Black Folktales are related and retold in this book. The book's title story is the only one that was studied for this research. The notes after the story give valuable background regarding the motif of human flying in black literature. The folktale bearing the title name tells the story of Toby and African slaves who have the power to fly. They use this power to escape the tyrannies of slavery, sadly leaving behind the slaves who were not "flyers."

Dorros, A. (1991). *Abuela.* New York, NY. The Trumpet Club.

Rosalba and her abuela imagine their community as it would look if they could fly over it. The story weaves Spanish and English phrases into the storyline and depicts a colorful world in the Hispanic community.

Dorros, A. (1995). *Isla.* New York, NY. Puffins Books.

Abuela and Rosalba take another imaginary flying trip to visit Abuela's childhood home, where her son and his family still live in the family home. The reader is introduced to tropical sights and sounds, a rain forest and life in a Caribbean country. Although the flying begins as imaginary, it is used by the characters throughout the story as they entertain street folk, retrieve tropical fruit, and move from cite to cite.

Drawson, B. (1997). *The Flying Dimitri.* New York, NY. Orchard Books.

Dimitri joins in celebrating his father's birthday and then gets ready for bed. The text and pictures tell the reader that just the two of them live together in a big house, which perhaps is somewhat lonely. Dimitri watches in the mirror as he sees himself float up and away, and out the window. Through a fantasy journey to Mars and a meeting with a dragon and a fair lady, the reader learns that Dimitri's mother is dead and his loneliness is probably the motive for his imaginary journey.

Erlbruch, W. (1995). *Mrs. Meyer The Bird.* New York, NY. Orchard Books.

Mrs. Meyer, a born worrier, makes her life miserable with irrational worrying. Then she finds a baby bird who needs her help and turns her worrying toward helping the bird. When the black bird doesn't learn to fly on its own, Mrs. Meyer becomes a flier and the two of them take flight.

Gardner, S. (2001). *The Boy Who Could Fly.* London, UK. Onion House.

Thomas Top lives a very ordinary life with his mom and dad in a very ordinary house. His father has lost all the fun of life and he has taken it from his wife and son too. Thomas is visited on his birthday by the "Fat Fairy" and is granted his wish to fly. Soon it becomes obvious that the adults in his life are not ready for this "extraordinary" change in Thomas. Mom and Dad first must face their shattered dreams and "ordinariness" before they can become the loving and fun parents that Thomas needs.

Heckman, P. (1996). *Waking Upside Down.* New York, NY. Atheneum Books.

Morton has been moved to his baby sisters' smaller room because they needed more space, and he is not a bit happy about having to sleep in their pink bunny decorated nursery. During the night he discovers himself flying and has an adventure exploring the house from the ceiling.

Hickey, T. (1996). *Granny Learns to Fly.* Dublin, Ireland. The Children's Press.

Granny Green is not going to be able to live independently much longer, or to help her other elderly friends, because her car is not running, and she cannot afford to fix it. Many of her friends can't get around for various reasons. Then she discovers an old book of her great-grandmother's with instructions on learning to fly. The elderly of the village Dara decide to follow the instructions and learn to fly.

Jarrell, R. (1969). *Fly By Night.* New York, NY. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

David lives a quiet ordinary life during the day with a cat and dog for company. At night he floats through his house and out over the neighborhood and farm to interact with animals. The story is told in a surreal way with heavy reliance on verse and a long side story that a mother owl tells her offspring.

King-Smith, D. (2001). *Billy the Bird.* New York, NY. Scholastic, Inc.

Mary's little brother, Billy, is normal in most ways, except that he can fly. Actually, he can only fly on the nights of the full moon. And, he never remembers it the next day. The only one who fully knows the story is Mary. Billy causes much excitement in town about a UFO and foils a cat burglar one night. A lunar eclipse brings an end to Billy's abilities.

Kojima, N. (1981). *The Flying Grandmother.* New York, NY. Thomas W. Crowell.

A child who dreams of flying convinces her grandmother to help her. Along the way they get a lot of help from friendly birds, before they come up with wings that work. Spotting a trio of robbers, the two attempt to stop the crime in progress. However, the public sees it differently and the flying pair is blamed for the crime. All is well in the end of this wordless picture book of black and white, pencil drawn and numbered pictures.

Liddell, J (1996). *Imani and the Flying Africans.* Trenton, NJ. Africa World Press, Inc.

Imani and his mother travel from Detroit to Savannah in a long car trip to see her parents and grandmother. Imani has never met them and his mama admits that they did not know he existed until a month before. Mama tells Imani a story she was told as a child about the Flying Africans. After Imani has fallen asleep and Mama has stopped for gas and to call her parents, Imani is kidnapped and driven away with by a stranger. In the forest where he escapes, he finds an old woman who tells him he can save himself by flying, and he does. The end twists reality and a dream together but leaves no doubt that the family is reunited.

Mailish, L. (1996). *The Ring*. New York, NY. Greenwillow Books.

A young boy is shown in black and white pictures in a winter scene looking bored. He discovers a yellow ring, which is obvious to the reader because it is the only colored object in the picture. The ring gives flight – and color- to the child's adventure and he views New York City from far above. The delightful use of photographic tricks using the interspersion of black and white photos with color in this wordless book is captivating.

Mellecker, J. (1991). *Randolph's Dream*. New York, NY. Alfred A Knopf.

During WWII Randolph, who lives in London, is sent into the country, as our many other children, to live with extended family. His father is stationed in North Africa. David is sad and quiet because of his separation from his family and his worry for his father. He begins having dreams in which he can fly. When his mother comes for a visit and admits that she has not heard from his dad in many weeks, David becomes more concerned. His dream that night takes him to find his father and to save him. When he awakens the next morning, there are a number of clues that suggest it was not a dream.

McConnachie, B. (1987). *Flying Boy*. New York, NY. Crown Publishers, Inc

Buddy is a goodhearted boy who puts his chores and helping others above his own wants. However, one day he gains the gift of flight and is seen by a circus master, who suggests to him that he no longer can be doing favors for free because he can get money and fame from his gift. When Buddy tries this new lifestyle, the burden of it weighs him down so much that he cannot fly anymore. He quickly goes back to who he really is and finds himself getting lighter and lighter.

Murphy, R. (2000). *Night Flying*. New York, NY. Delacorte Press.

Hanson women have been flying for five generations, and know that the only "trick" to flying for all women is believing completely that they can. Even the tiniest doubt will make a woman drop to the ground. The freedom of flying, however, has become so entwined with family secrets and grudges and "rules," as Georgia calls them, that the Hanson household is quickly becoming joyless. Georgia wonders if she can really break free of the hold that the secret has on all of them, and as she strives to find out, she learns who she is and where she came from.

Myers, C. (2000). *Wings*. New York, NY. Scholastics Inc.

Ikarus Jackson is different. He has wings and he can fly. He is taunted and teased by children and adults. One child who has experienced those same feelings finally stands apart from the crowd and says – STOP. Look how beautiful different can be. Christopher Myers makes a moving statement about his intentions in producing the book in helping all children marvel at individuality.

Newman, R. (1967). *The Boy Who Could Fly*. New York, NY. Avon Books.

Mark has always known that his brother, Joey, is special and different. Orphaned and shuttled between relatives, Mark has taken the responsibility for protecting Joey and

his secrets. Moving to a small town in outstate New York, however, combines with Joey's first year of school to mean that many of Joey's special abilities because known to others. Mark must learn to balance his relationship with his brother and his need for his own life and independence. Mark, in the heat of the moment, tells his uncle's political foe that Joey can do anything, probably even fly.

Polacco, P. (1996). *I Can Hear the Sun.* New York, NY. Philomel Books.

Fondo, a cast-off little boy from a nearby settlement house, becomes a regular at the reserve on the lake in Oakland. Stephanie Michele, an animal keeper, and two homeless people who make the reserve their home befriend him. When Fondo is to be relocated by the settlement house authorities, he chooses to simply fly away with the geese.

Ringgold, F. (1991). *Tar Beach.* New York, NY. Crown Publishers, Inc.

Cassie lives near the George Washington Bridge, which her father helped build. Her flying takes her over the Union Building, where her father works but cannot belong. She dreams of her flying are her imaginary way out of the poverty and racial injustice that the family faces.

Riordan, J. (1995). *A Treasury of Irish Stories.* New York, NY. Kingfisher.

Riordan has selected many fanciful stories in this book of short Irish tales. The only one used in this research was "The Flying Display" by Tony Hickey, which is a very condensed version of the book *Granny Learns to Fly.* See Hickey, Tony. The story includes the description of the flying display and works in the talking and flying cat, but does not make the commentary on the treatment of the elderly that the book does.

Semel, N. (1995). *Flying Lessons.* New York, NY. Simon and Schuster.

Hadara, a young Jewish girl living in a small Israeli village in the 1950's, has decided that the mission of her life must be to learn to fly. Monsieur Maurice, a shoemaker who lives next door, unwittingly encourages her. Maurice tells stories to Hadara of flying Jews and circuses, often mixing the references and points of his stories. When Hadara leaps from a tree and breaks her leg, Maurice is devastated.

Smith, J. (1988). *Flying Jake.* New York, NY. McMillan Publishing Co.

Jake accidentally lets his pet bird out of the cage. When he attempts to catch the bird, he discovers that he can fly, too, and joins his bird in the joy and beauty of flight. When Jakes gets too tired to continue, he returns home without his bird, apparently believing that something that was born to fly should be allowed to. This is a textless picture book with several pictures to a page and a tremendous amount of detail in the artwork.

Taylor, T. (2002). *The Boy Who Could Fly Without a Motor.* New York, NY. Harcourt Books.

Jon Jeffer's father, serving in the U. S. Coast Guard in the late 1930's, has been assigned to a lighthouse on an island off the shore of California and Jon knows he is the loneliest child on earth. With only a dog and his parents for company, Jon finds a source of magic in a "mysterious man" and gains the power to fly. Flying, he reasons, will make him less lonely. But he soon learns that flying also brings more problems than he had bargained for.

Titherington, J. (1995). *Sophy and Auntie Pearl.* New York, NY. Greenwillow Books.

Sophy wakes up one day and discovers she can fly. When her parents don't pay any attention, she visits Aunty Pearl who tells her she can fly, too. Aunty Pearl claims she told Sophy's parents once but they didn't pay attention to her either. Sophy and Aunty Pearl spend a delightful day together investigating the world from above.

Uhlberg, M. (1999). *Flying Over Brooklyn.* Atlanta, GA. Peachtree Publishers, LTD.

A young boy, who had always wanted to fly, is suddenly blown into the sky during a snowstorm. His adventure takes him over familiar landmarks of Brooklyn, seen from his new perspective and under the heavy blanket of snow that is falling. He awakens to find himself at home as the snowstorm brings the city to a halt. The author's note tells us that, as a young boy, he witnessed the 1947 record-breaking snowstorm in Brooklyn that brought 25.8 inches to the city.