



## INTERPRETING CHILDREN'S APPRECIATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE VISUAL LITERACY ERA

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### Abstract

This current research explores children's appreciation of children's literature in the context of the visual literacy era. The ability of early childhood to appreciate visual literature can be viewed as an early childhood creative ability in the context of early childhood visual literacy. This current research aims to examine how early childhood (age 5-6) appreciates children's literature (children's stories on screen) and interpret their appreciation. The theoretical framework of this paper is the concepts of children's literature, appreciation of literature, and visual literacy. This current qualitative research positions children's appreciation of children's literature (children's stories on screen) in a reader-response approach. Two girls aged 5 and 6 who still could not read and write were involved as the participants (visual text readers). In the initial phase, the two readers have been enjoying their favourite story series, My Little Pony, on YouTube Kids every day for more than a year. The data obtained from the question and answer session was documented and interpreted. The findings show that children appreciate visual literature on screen by configuring particular ideas on the basis of the story's detailed images. The findings show that children can able to explore the life narratives in the stories: the conditions denoting 'the being' and 'the becoming' and the struggle between good and bad as the situations demonstrate the conflicts and the solutions. The interpretation of children's appreciation suggests that their appreciation of the visual literature on digital broadcast platforms refers to two major meanings: imagination and philosophy.

**Keywords:** appreciation, children's literature, visual literacy

### INTRODUCTION

Children's literature generally can be defined as stories targeted at children. Children's literature is any story that concerns life's problems so that it can provide information and a better understanding of life itself to children (Nurgiantoro, 2004). Children's stories present idolized images, offer role models, and propagate culture in action to children (Nurgiantoro, 2010). These stories correlate with the children's world and the language used is in accordance with cognitive and affective development. Children's literature follows the level of child development and is generally divided into fiction and non-fiction. Children's stories are mostly accompanied by pictures because the visuals make the creative narratives alive and the visual stories offer children learning experiences in a more interesting way (Olshansky, 2008).

Media development has changed the form of children's stories. It has changed from the oral to the written form, from the written to the printed form, and from the printed to the digital screen form. For instance, Oral tales, like Cinderella and sleeping beauty, were published by Charles Perrault in 1697 in Tales of Mother Goose. In the media development, the fairy tales in Tales of Mother Goose have been presented in animation to appear on television and digital platform. The media development has offered a popular perspective on children's literature. Children's stories are delivered in various narrative styles and the stories are reproduced in various forms and platforms.

Many children's stories have changed form from books to animated films and vice versa from animated films to book form. This makes the repertoire of children's literature grow. Children's stories in children's literature that highlight the visual aspect give rise to a new concept, namely visual literature. Children's visual literature includes books, drawings, images, graphics, and animations that can be presented in digital and non-digital forms specifically aimed at children. Children who are exposed to visual literature become visually literate. Visual literacy emphasizes the ability to identify, understand, criticize, interpret, and interpret messages

in pictures or visuals. In this case, children's literature (children's stories on screen) becomes connected with the problem of children's visual literacy.

Previous studies regarding visual literacy have confirmed that the method of using visual media can improve children's reading intelligence (Lathifah, 2020) and object literacy skills, especially at the informational and epistemic levels (Wiyatasari, Marini, and Sumardi, 2018). The understanding gained from visual literacy can be put into writing as a creative form of visual literacy (Rahmawati, Damaianti, and Anshori, 2021). Visual literacy emerges as a solution to train children's way of thinking from an early age (0-8 years). These ages are the golden age where at that age children's thinking abilities can develop rapidly. This has been confirmed by previous studies. The storytelling method through audio-visual media is applied to increase early childhood understanding of natural disasters (Putri, 2019). The same method also has a positive impact on language acquisition (Pujiatuti, 2015) and increases empathy skills in early childhood (Limarga, 2017). Visual literacy hones critical thinking skills, supports understanding of concepts, improves memory, and recalls information in early childhood (Ayu, 2019). Methods of using digital media, such as flip books, can increase visual literacy in children (Hadiapurwa, Listiana, and Efendi, 2021).

Previous studies have confirmed that children's stories on screen can improve children's visual literacy. The problem of visual literacy can also be connected with another problem, namely visual instructional design. Visual instructional making can be integrated into visual literacy to make it easier for learners to identify, select, organize, or make integrations and conclusions on something learned (Nurannisa, 2017). In this current research, the ability of early childhood (ages 5-6) to appreciate children's literature is positioned in the context of children's visual literacy. This current research aims to examine how early childhood (age 5-6) appreciates children's literature (children's stories on screen) and interpret their appreciation. At these ages, children's ability is still at the stage of recognizing numbers and letters and is not yet able to read and write words and sentences. However, at these ages, children are able to respond verbally to children's stories enjoyed through digital platforms. This current research looks at the relationship between children's appreciation of children's literature (children's stories on screen) and children's visual literacy. The ability of early childhood to appreciate visual literature can be viewed as an early childhood creative ability in the context of early childhood visual literacy. Media developments have turned books into screens. This encourages great leaps in early childhood. Literacy in young children exposed to children's literature on screens (children's stories without written text) is preceded by visual literacy. This means that the ability to identify, understand, criticize, interpret, and interpret messages contained in pictures or visuals precedes their ability to read and write.

YouTube Kids' digital platform has become a reference for parents to meet their children's visual literature needs. YouTube Kids presents foreign entertaining and exciting stories with various narrative styles for children. The activity of watching children's stories is a form of direct appreciation of children's literature. When children watch children's stories, children can immediately appreciate, understand, respond to, and give an assessment or appreciation of them. In this current research, children's visual literature used as a stimulus in training early childhood appreciation in the context of visual literacy is children's stories on screen trending on YouTube Kids. This current research follows children's interest in children's stories that are trending on the platform. Children have a great interest in English children's stories trending on YouTube Kids. It is *My Little Pony*, the American animated children's television series, that first aired in 1986. From the first broadcast until 2022, *My Little Pony*'s stories have had five series, each consisting of several seasons. Each season consists of several episodes. Networks in *My Little Pony* series and films are syndications, Disney Channel, The Hub/Hub Network, Discovery Family, and Netflix. *My Little Pony* official was on YouTube in 2013. *My Little Pony* stories have also appeared in the form of picture storybooks (comics) which have been published every month since 2012 by IDW Publishing. As the title suggests, the characters in the story are a group of ponies. The presence of *My Little Pony* meets the need for children's literature, especially in the form of animated shows, and helps parents to train early childhood in appreciating literature directly. Interpretation of how early childhood appreciation of children's stories contributes to formulating the direction of early childhood visual literacy in the digital era.

## **METHOD**

Referring to the concept of children's literature stated by Hartati (2018), children's literature is a story that tells experiences that children can enjoy and understand in accordance with children's knowledge. Children's literature is not limited by who the author is but to whom the work is intended (Hunk, 1987). These stories are imaginative, and entertaining, putting the child as the focus and reflecting the feelings and experiences of children through the eyes of children (Norton, 1993). Literature offers two things, namely pleasure, and understanding;

Literature comes to readers, first of all, to provide fun entertainment by presenting interesting stories and indulging fantasy (Lukens, 1999). Children's literature, however, intended to entertain, is still educational because children are whole human beings who need cognitive, social, and moral development (Toha-Sarumpaet, 2010). Children's literature can be in the form of fantasy stories with animal figures as the main characters, representing humans, or kinds of behavior or types of people. Fable can have enigmatic meanings and complicated themes; however, fundamentally it remains a didactic form, is designed to attract children through a compelling and appealing story, and uses allegory to teach important lessons (Greenby, 2008).

Introducing children's literature can be done by appreciating children's literary works. Appreciation of children's literature can provide an understanding of what children imagine, the diversity of thoughts, cultures, and the joy of life that exists in the world of children (Toha-Sarumpaet, 2010). Appreciation of literary works is a study of literature that emphasizes understanding as one of the stages of literary appreciation (Moody 1970). According to Hartati (2018), appreciation is the activity of receptively enjoying literary works which can be done through reading, listening, and watching the literary performance. Furthermore, according to Hartati, receptive literary appreciation has three approaches, namely emotive, didactic, and analytical, the three approaches have almost the same goal, namely focusing on enjoying, understanding, and studying literary works. A child's ability to appreciate children's literature depends on the age of the child. Early childhood (ages 3-7) are able to understand story structure symbolically through language, games and pictures, and plot or story relationships (Tarigan, 2011). For young children, visualization of literature on screens provides a broader definition of children's literature.

The broader understanding of literacy is supported by the role of various forms of media in the development of visual literacy skills. Children's visual literacy explores children's position as readers and viewers of the text and the point of view offered by the storyteller to the child. Children's visual literacy is fostered, developed, and scaffolded through visual texts and replicates children's narrative experiences across media (Taylor and Bulman, 2019). Children's visual literacy emphasizes what is referred to as the 'paragon,' the defense of the superior claims of the verbal over the visual or competing relationship between literature and film (Cartmell, 2007).

This current qualitative research positions children's appreciation of children's literature (children's stories on screen) in a reader-response approach. The reader-response approach is text-based, every text carries meaning and the reader plays a role in finding that meaning. Reader response criticism is a postmodern hermeneutical method that basically has the principle of open-mindedness (Sumaryono, 2018) and changed from text-based to reader-based. The reader determines meaning while the writer is a natural part of text production (Schmitz, 2008; Grimaud and Tompkins, 1982). Meaning is a combination of text and reader response; The reader's interpretation of the text is subjective, therefore, it can produce new meanings that may differ from the author's intent (Osborne, 2006).

Applying the reader response approach, this current research explores how children make meaning of the children's stories on the screen they watch. This current research involved two participants (visual text readers), namely girls aged 5 and 6. In the initial phase, the two participants (visual text readers) have been enjoying their favorite story series, My Little Pony, on the YouTube Kids platform every day for a year. Data collection was carried out by conducting a questions (visual text readers) and answers session at the children's house, in a pleasant situation for the children. Both participants (visual text readers) still could not read and write. They were asked to tell why they like My Little Pony series. During the questions and answers session, the two participants (visual text readers) naturally explored what was in My Little Pony series, conveyed their thoughts about the stories, imagined the stories, and conveyed their reasons for loving the stories. The questions and answers session ended when the participants (visual text readers) felt that they had finished explaining. The data obtained from the question and answer session was documented and interpreted.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings show that the children are able to appreciate the stories verbally. Even though children's appreciation is done verbally, this still shows what Hartati (2018) calls a creative and creative process that emphasizes literary appreciation. The findings show that the children's creative process and creation are presented in their ability to verbally and naturally explored what was in My Little Pony series, conveyed their thoughts about the stories, imagined the stories, and conveyed their reasons for loving the stories. The children's appreciation of the stories contains several main ideas which can be classified as follows.

**Table 1. Main Ideas Cluster**

<b>Moral</b>	<b>Power</b>	<b>Material</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Devil defeat Goodness number over the bad Kindness victory in every battle	Having ability to fly Having magical power Having cutie marks of power Having different elements of power Having big and small weapons Having ability to turn into a princess Having ability to turn their shapes	Having parties Having beautiful houses Having different pets	Having cute characteristic Having pretty characteristic

The children's appreciation of *My Little Pony* shows that the stories narrate life, life problems, and problem-solving. The stories require children's understanding of a complex matter because they engaged with the stories at early ages. Though the children are difficult to discriminate fiction from reality, they are able to explore the life narratives in the stories: the conditions denoting 'the being' and 'the becoming' and the situations demonstrating the conflicts and the solutions to these conflicts.

The children's appreciation of the conditions expressing 'the being' is in terms of an understanding of material possessions and inherent characteristics. The children appreciate certain characteristics in the stories, for example, beautiful and funny. Beauty and aesthetics as a concept attached to material and immaterial things are also appreciated, for example, a party atmosphere, beautiful houses, and the beauty of relationships with pets. The children's appreciation of the conditions stating 'the becoming' refers to their understanding of power. The state of 'becoming' is appreciated in terms of the involvement of 'magical power' marked by cutie marks, elements, and weapons; it denotes the transformation process of the main characters (the group of pony). The children's appreciation of the transformation of the main characters is in terms of the ability to fly and change shape into a beautiful princess. Beauty, aesthetics, and 'magical power' in the stories exposed to the children bring children not only fun, joy, and enjoyment, but also present and introduce the whole experience to children; stories provide new experiences as if the children experienced by themselves (Tarigan, 2011).

The children's appreciation of conflicts and solutions denotes their understanding of morality. The children's image of morality is somewhere between black and white, between good and evil. The two sides are facing each other, opposite and fighting. The children appreciate that there are more good ones than bad ones, the good ones always win, the bad one is the devil, and the devil will lose. The children's ability to appreciate the morality in stories is in line with the moral development of children aged 5-6 years. At these ages, the process of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action is taking place; it is the process by which children develop aspects of intellectual intelligence, the ability to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, and determining what is useful (Lickona, 1991). The children's appreciation of the stories shows that the children are simply able to understand the story structures symbolically through language and pictures. Simply, the children are also able to understand the story plot or relationships (problems and solutions). The children's appreciation of the stories shows that children idolize beauty and aesthetics. These two things are understood as 'being beautiful' and 'becoming beautiful.' Devil defeat, goodness number over the bad, and kindness victory in every battle are also their reasons for loving the stories. The involvement of magical power marked by cutie marks, elements, and weapons drives their interest. The transformation of the figures inspires them.

The children's stories with digital broadcast platform function as media in visual literacy; it is useful to improve critical thinking in children. The excellent quality of visualization (animation) in stories supports the children's interest in storytelling and stimulates the children's emotional responses. The visualization of stories supports the children's understanding and interpretation of the stories. The use of English in the stories is not an obstacle because visualization simplifies the information that is difficult to explain in words to children. The visualization of the stories also supports the children to quickly grasp the meaning of the dialogue in the stories. The result of enjoying stories is that the children are able to retell the contents of the stories in their own language orally; based on the content of the stories they understand; they state the reasons for loving the stories. The children's abilities and reasons are forms of their creative activity. Creativity is a reproductive

activity that is very closely linked to memory; Essentially the children resurrected traces of earlier impressions (Vygotsky, 2004).

The retelling carried out by the children contains their perception of the story which may be different from what the story maker intended. For example, children see the image of a party in the story as something that stands out while it might only be a minor part for the story maker. The children's perception of the part that tells about the party supports their imagination. Another example is the narrative about the pets in the story. In the perception of children, the narrative about the pets in the story also stands out; while for the story maker, the part of the story about pets does not represent anything. In this case, the children's ability to appreciate is a form of creativity based on their imagination. The children's perception of pets encourages their imagination to see the part that tells about it as something interesting. These two sources of the children's perceptions described above support two forms of children's imagination: the previous is not correlated with reality and the latter is embodied with the actual thing. Imagination can refer to what is not actually true and also is embodied in reality (Vygotsky, 2004). The children's appreciation of the stories is not simply a reproduction of what they have understood, but a creative reworking of the impressions they have acquired. They combine them and use them to construct a 'new reality' in the stories.

The battle between the good and the evil in the narrative stimulates the children's critical discussion and allows them to articulate and substantiate their own views on the issue of kindness and the appropriate attitude to take toward righteousness. The children's critical thought of what they perceive to be right and wrong from the stories acknowledge their philosophical abilities. The battle between what is right and wrong is such a great deal the children think. It stimulates a big question about what is good and bad. Childhood is a time during which philosophical issues arise that children think about a great deal (Wartenberg, 2009). The stories mobilize the children's natural curiosity and help them discern, convey, and support their own answers to philosophical questions that concern them.

The stories about the struggle between good and evil strengthen the children's perceptions of good and evil as a great deal (philosophical issue). To the children, a great deal of good and evil in the stories reflect the meaning of ordinary experiences. The children's appreciation of the stories reveals that they develop an understanding of themselves, others, and the world. The stories help the children to understand the way things work and make sense of their world. The stories support the children to be more reasonable. The children's experience of enjoying the stories is full of images, ideas, and ethical issues, although they may simply be alert of it. Instead of dictating prescribed values to the children, the stories support them and reinforce their capacity to appreciate and react to the images, ideas, and ethical issues in the stories. In this respect, the stories provide egalitarian nature by which the children develop multi viewpoints.

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded that children appreciate visual literature on screen by configuring particular ideas on the basis of the story's detail images. Children's appreciation of the visual literature on digital broadcast platforms refers to two major meanings: imagination and philosophy. Stories strengthen the children's imagination and reinforce their imaginative world. Children show an interest in details but are simple and basic in the stories. These things are important factors for the workings of imagination in children. As written and printed literature are taught to children to strengthen their logic, visual literature on digital broadcast platforms also supports their capacity to make a reasoning. Children's engagement with the stories stimulates simple philosophical questions about kindness and evil. Children perceive the world in the stories as alternative possibilities. Varying viewpoints and the egalitarian nature of the stories support children's perspectives and foster empathy. In the visual literacy context, the implication of the findings expands the definition of children's literature and reinforces the use of children's stories based on digital broadcast platforms.

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