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Using Children's Literature to Support Social and Emotional Learning in Third Through Sixth Grade Classrooms

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USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE TO SUPPORT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
LEARNING IN THIRD THROUGH SIXTH GRADE CLASSROOMS

by

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B.S. University of Central Florida, 2020

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the use of award-winning children's literature for social and emotional learning, focusing on its use for children in third through sixth grades. The world is ever-changing and, as a result, the need for children to learn basic social and emotional skills continues to increase. These skills include, but are not limited to perseverance, friendship, grit, caring, and the like. It has been found that teaching social and emotional skills through bibliotherapy is an engaging and successful method that can be used by schools and teachers. Teachers or other educational stakeholders can use this document to begin to understand the need for social and emotional learning and the benefits of bibliotherapy. Additionally, this document can be used as a reference to guide literature selection based on social and emotional traits and themes. At the time of the research, there were few other guides and references as such.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Introduction

For many years, children's literature has had an essential place in the elementary classroom. Students can often be seen thumbing through colorful picture books and short chapter books, eagerly absorbing information and hungering for more. It is evident from my work in elementary classrooms via volunteering and service-learning that most children love to read books made just for them. Fantastical stories, colorful pictures, and dynamic characters are all intriguing points of interest for young minds. Aside from an occasional read-aloud, though, children are often left to explore the literature on their own. It seems as though most reading instruction is focused on basal, standardized readings to prepare students for tests. Considering this, it seems as though their teachers are not taking advantage of the bibliophilia that is pervasive in their classrooms. This situation piqued my interest, and I asked myself, how can educators use what their students already love to expand their horizons and create meaningful learning? As I pondered this question, the concept of social and emotional learning came to my mind as, possibly, a very powerful answer. The purpose of my research was to investigate how children's literature could be used to engage students in social and emotional learning in a meaningful and impactful way.

These readers mentioned above, though they are only children, often face big, adult-

sized problems and complex emotions that can be difficult to process. The children in today's elementary school classrooms are increasingly more vulnerable and subject to stress, and educators may not even realize it. "Children under stress are [also] at greater risk than other children for developing emotional, social, and intellectual problems..." (Ableser, 2008, p. 74). In light of this, the question of "How can we help?" is raised. How can educators address the issues and stress that their students are going through in a way that is non-invasive, sensitive, and positive? One answer, I believe, is through children's literature. Children, hopefully, already enjoy reading these books and immersing themselves in the worlds within the pages; therefore, capitalizing on this interest has the potential to be a highly effective way to address these issues. There is a myriad of quality children's literature that addresses a wide variety of topics related to the struggles that students face, all under the guise of fictional storylines and unique characters. Among the issues found in children's literature are bullying, respect, kindness, coping skills, and other social skills which students sometimes find challenging.

These topics are all categorized under what is known as social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning is defined as "children's ability to learn about and manage their own emotions and interactions in ways that benefit themselves and others" (Jones & Doolittle, 2017, p. 4). Teaching children to manage their emotions and interactions allows them, ultimately, to become thinkers, problem-solvers, and resilient citizens in our 21st-century society. Coupling social and emotional learning curriculum with children's literature can help create a safe space for discussing emotions, stress, and problems that students face as it allows

students and teachers to discuss ongoing stressors and sophisticated emotions through the lens of characters and fictional worlds, rather than the situations specific to a student. Children's literature can be a means to open up complicated, but necessary, discussion as well as create a buffer when dealing with these, often times, serious and sensitive subjects.

In the next section, I will be discussing my rationale for researching the use of children's literature for social and emotional learning and discuss its importance in the classrooms of today. I will outline the goal for this research and give a brief overview.

Rationale

I have been working with elementary-aged children for over five years as a camp counselor, tutor, and as a pre-service teacher in my elementary education program. During this time, unfortunately, I have seen many, many tiny minds with enormous problems. I have worked with children in the foster care system and witnessed the difficulties with which many of them must deal. I have also worked with children with special needs, children who are victims of bullying or abuse, children of divorce or loss, and others. My heart is softened for children who need a little extra care and help in processing their situations, emotions, and life circumstances. I know that I will continue to work with children in my classroom who have big feelings and profound issues, and I want to be the educator that teaches them how to power through, keep their head up, and become emotionally stable, happy students and, someday, adults who exhibit those same characteristics. I want the children in my classroom to feel as if they are loved, safe,

and cared for, no matter their circumstances outside the school walls. Our society and our world are ever-changing, and it is difficult to tell whether these changes will end up being for better or worse in the end. Regardless, I want my students to be ready for whatever comes their way and understand how to cope with all kinds of situations: minor or major, positive or negative. Social and emotional learning is, in my opinion, just as important as the traditional academic curriculum and should be integrated into the elementary school classroom and beyond. My goal for this project was to create a resource list of quality children's literature that can be used by teachers, myself included, and thus, to integrate social and emotional learning into their everyday curriculum. It is organized by social-emotional trait and themes and categorized by grade level. The children's literature included is targeted at third through sixth grade students. I created charts with this information to make it simple and user-friendly.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the current research and academic literature regarding social and emotional learning and its use in the classroom. I will discuss the gaps in the body of research and address how I intend to help fill that gap through my work.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I will be discussing some the current literature in the fields of social and emotional learning, children’s literature, and bibliotherapy. I will discuss the importance of social skills and social and emotional learning, the integration of social and emotional learning using bibliotherapy, and address the gap in research that I wish to fill.

Social Skills and Their Importance

There is no shortage of research suggesting that social and emotional learning is beneficial to students, teachers, and school environments as a whole (Devaney, O’Brien, Tavegia, & Resnik, 2005; Gresham, 2016; Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Children, arguably now more than ever, are facing a world of hostility, disrespect, and increased worry, often times leaving them at a loss emotionally without the knowledge of proper social skills and coping strategies. As parents become busier and family structures become increasingly non-traditional, social and emotional development inside the home may sometimes be neglected or overlooked. Overwhelmed parents work hard to address more overt needs such as completing schoolwork and getting food on the table. However, children need to learn how to be respectful, responsible citizens in our 21st-century society for them to not only survive, but to thrive. Simonsen, Myers, Everett, Sugai, Spencer, & Labreck (2012) explain, “Students who are fluent with social skills are more successful in school” (p. 259) because they are able to manage and regulate themselves

and their emotions, create and maintain social relationships, and meet behavioral expectations. According to the research, the traits and topics identified as pertinent to social fluency are justice, self-discipline, responsibility, respect, selflessness, joy, love, honesty, friendliness, and tolerance (Helterbran, 2009; Sanderse, 2013; Chumdari, Sri Anitah, Budiyono, & Suryani, 2018). These traits are commonly addressed in social skills instruction and character education programs and are recommended by experts for implementation in elementary and middle schools (Almerico, 2014). Character education programs, regularly found in elementary schools, can be defined as programs that guide students in building and exemplifying traits that are generally associated with becoming an effectively functioning member of a democratic society. (Helterbran, 2009). Students spend approximately seven to eight hours a day in schools, so it seems as though the classroom would be an effective and efficient place to implement social and emotional learning curriculum to help address the needs of students beyond traditional academic subjects.

In Promoting Children's Ethical Development Through Social and Emotional Learning, Devaney et. al (2005), emphasize the importance of social and emotional curriculum in the classroom in a world where, according to the researchers, only 35 percent of youth say that they respect the values and beliefs of others. This is a shocking statistic and shows a clear need for a curriculum that teaches empathy, respect, and kindness. Many teachers and schools, however, struggle to incorporate social and emotional learning into high stakes testing environments in which reading, mathematics, and other tested subjects receive the majority of instructional minutes. Teachers find it difficult enough to balance four or five subjects with testing, special

activities, recess, and other requirements, so adding in the aspect of social and emotional learning seems like a daunting, if not impossible, task. Educators know that the inclusion of social and emotional curriculum is in the best interest of their students, but how can it be done? I believe the answer lies in integration children's literature, and specifically the use of bibliotherapy within the classroom.

In the next section, I will explain bibliotherapy and its importance according to research. I aim to show that bibliotherapy is simple to integrate, even in a busy elementary classroom.

Integrating Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum Using Children's Literature and Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is the use of literature, in this case, children's literature, to "expand an individual's level of self-understanding and to expand the understanding of others' perceptions" (Heath, Smith, & Young, 2017, p. 550). In other words, through the use of bibliotherapy, literature can help teach students to reflect upon and manage their own emotions as well as show empathy to others and understand and adapt to their emotions. Bibliotherapy came about in the early 1900s when Samuel Crothers began prescribing books to his patients to help them understand their problems (Myracle, 1995). Myracle (1995) notes that "the application of bibliotherapy was initially limited to hospitals" (p.1) and was not applied to children until 1946 when children's literature began to become less serious and more entertaining. Today, bibliotherapy can be used by teachers and psychological professionals alike, with both "normal" teenagers and children and "specialized populations", such as students with special

needs, trauma survivors, or those who are at-risk (Myracle, 1995). However, based on the literature, bibliotherapy, and social and emotional learning in general, do not seem to be used as widely as they could.

Researchers Heath, Smith, and Young (2017) addressed the deficit in social and emotional learning in a world where there is an increased necessity for a well-rounded education that meets the emotional, academic, and social needs of students. The researchers suggested bibliotherapy as a proactive method of addressing issues that may arise among students. Using bibliotherapy proactively, as the researchers suggest, has been proven effective in a myriad of studies (Elley, 2014; Kara-Soteriou & Rose, 2008; Ableser, 2008), suggesting that its implementation may be an effective avenue for schools and teachers who are unsure about addressing social and emotional concerns.

Across the nation, school budgets have been cut in the areas of social and emotional learning and mental health services. When schools do have these services and curricula, they are more often than not reactionary, in other words, used “when individuals are in crisis, often placing the affected individuals... in volatile and dangerous situations” (Heath, Smith, & Young, 2017, p. 544). The researchers argue that bibliotherapy may not be as effective when used reactively; however, Heath et. al posit that it can be a more effective method to process emotions and events that have already occurred in students’ lives as compared to traditional approaches, such as stand-alone talk therapy, or ignoring the issues altogether.

Bibliotherapy requires little, if any, additional budgeting or time, as it can be integrated

using existing materials such as books in classroom and school libraries and within pre-existing academic lessons and curriculum. Bibliotherapy can be an effective way to help students connect with and understand their emotions, creating a safe space for students to talk about what is going on in their world. This can be accomplished by using the characters and storylines as a starter for discussion. Students can become embarrassed or closed off when they feel exposed and vulnerable, so, as previously stated, discussing sensitive or difficult issues through the lens of characters and stories may make opening up and understanding emotions seem much less intimidating for students.

Not only can bibliotherapy be used to help individual students process emotions, but teachers can also use it as a form of classroom and behavior management. By selecting engaging texts that focus on social and emotional issues, teachers can address behavioral concerns that they observe in their classroom. So far in my experience, I have noted some common issues in the classrooms in which I have worked, such as calling out, being disrespectful, and demonstrating carelessness. Researcher Sara Elley (2014) noticed that in her third-grade classroom, students often interrupted each other, bickered constantly, and had trouble reflecting on their behavior (Elley, 2014). By using critically selected texts and incorporating bibliotherapy into her classroom meetings, Elley noticed that “literature seemed to be an effective tool to initiate honest talk and self-reflection” (p. 96). Her use of bibliotherapy was an effective, non-threatening way to address and solve issues that were pervasive in her classroom in an engaging and meaningful way. Sara Elley recommends, based on her research, that teachers spend “more time on fewer books rather than reading multiple books with similar meanings” (p. 96) in order

to focus on the themes and lessons in a more profound and meaningful way in order to build students' social and emotional skills most effectively. Teachers can be reassured that there is no training required to implement bibliotherapy in a casual way. All that is needed is appropriate literature and a willingness for open discussion. However, bibliotherapy can become more skillful and effective with continuous professional development in areas such as culturally responsive teaching. Teachers who wish to implement bibliotherapy can also benefit from forming relationships with a professional in the field, such as a school psychologist, should students need extra discussion or counseling around topics that might arise. In the next section, I will explain the gap in research surrounding social and emotional learning and children's literature.

The Gap in Research

While the research is useful in explaining social and emotional learning, its importance in the classroom, and how to integrate it using bibliotherapy, there seems to be a lack of clear identification and explanation of specific materials and children's literature that can be used for social and emotional learning. There are a small number of resources for educators on the topic (Brown & Varady, 1997; Elley, 2014; Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009), but I have not yet found any widely comprehensive resources. In *Examining the Use of Bibliotherapy in a Third-Grade Classroom*, for example, researcher Sara Elley (2014) shares four specific picture books she used to address coping skills and social skills deficits she observed in her classroom. Meller, Richardson, & Hatch (2009) offer one particular book that they found useful in their research.

Kara-Soteriou & Rose (2008) created the most exhaustive list I found in my research, highlighting thirteen examples of children's books that teach positive character traits, however, these books are appropriate for primary students, and the researchers do not go into detail as to their use in social and emotional learning and what traits or skills they emphasize. There seems to be a significant lack of research that names books that have been, or could be, useful when integrated with social and emotional curriculum, and none that emphasize award-winning literature. There also appears to be a dearth in research regarding the use of children's literature for social and emotional learning in intermediate grades (i.e., third through sixth grades). This gap is what I addressed in my research; however, I am certainly not dismissing the importance of social and emotional learning in the primary (kindergarten through second grades). Each of these age groups do benefit from social and emotional learning, but there is a larger gap in the academic field of social and emotional learning for third through sixth graders. Therefore, I have created a resource for educators that contains multiple social and emotional learning topics, age groups, genres, and conceptual levels of literature so that educators can choose what serves their students and classroom most effectively.

Next, I will discuss my methodology for research. I will explain my research timeline, methods, and criteria, explaining how I chose children's literature and how my resource list will be organized.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This section introduces the methods used in my project. My research is purely qualitative, as I sought after children's literature for grades three through six that corresponded with a variety of traits associated with social and emotional learning. I will discuss my timeline for the project, my research methods, and my criteria for selecting appropriate literature.

Timeline

The timeline for my research process was as follows:

- May 2019: Met with my thesis chair to discuss the topic
- June-October 2019: Researched using articles relating to the topic of interest and began writing and editing of proposal
- October 30, 2019: Submitted proposal to thesis chair and committee member for initial review
- November 2019: Defended proposal
- September 2019-February 2020: Began selecting and reading children's literature and grouping it into categories and grade levels; wrote summaries of books and the skills and traits they addressed
- February-April 2020: Wrote a thesis

- April 16, 2020: Defended thesis

Research Methods and Criteria

I began my inquiry using the John C. Hitt library's online database, ERIC (EBSCOhost), searching for literature related to social and emotional learning and its integration through the use of children's literature, focusing specifically on the elementary school level. I was able to find literature that defined social and emotional learning and its importance, bibliotherapy and its importance, and examples from field research of both the positive impacts and possible downsides of social and emotional learning and integration of bibliotherapy. I conducted all of my research using online, peer-reviewed articles in academic journals.

To create my resource list, I used the University of Central Florida's Curriculum Materials Center (CMC), as well as the Orange County Library System to locate, read, and analyze children's literature that addresses topics under the umbrella of social and emotional learning. First, I reviewed the particular resources previously identified in my review of the literature (Elley, 2014; Meller, Richardson, & Heath, 2009; Kara-Soteriou & Rose, 2008). Additionally, I used the ERIC (EBSCOhost) online database coupled with search engines to find appropriate children's literature to review.

I assessed quality by choosing books that have won coveted awards, focusing on the Caldecott Award and Newbery Award. The Caldecott Award is given to picture books by United States illustrators that are distinguished, whereas the Newbery Award is given to United

States authors of children's chapter books that stand out in their field. I plan to use books written from 1980 to the present day, 2019, in order for them to be relevant to the times, relatable to students, and easy to access. I was able to find quality children's literature that addresses a wide range of social and emotional themes and skills targeted at third through sixth grade students.

As stated previously, the skills and themes related to social and emotional learning I aimed to address will include, but are not limited to: justice, self-discipline, responsibility, respect, selflessness, joy, love, honesty, friendliness, and tolerance. These are all critical aspects of social and emotional learning that can help children develop the skills necessary for them to grow into adults who are ready to handle whatever life has in store for them. I categorized the books by social and emotional skill, theme, and then by grade-level (third through sixth) subcategories which will be determined by the content and reading level of the book. I read each book and used Scholastic's Book Wizard to determine into which age group the book should be sorted. Additionally, after reading the literature and carefully considering the content and storyline, I decided which social and emotional skills, and themes the book addresses. Finally, I compiled my findings into charts categorized by skills, themes and appropriate grade level or levels. I also included a short description of each book's plot, and any awards it has won as well as suggested classroom use to create a list that is accessible and easy to use. For social-emotional traits and themes addressed and suggested grade levels, see Appendix A. For a description of each book, the awards it has won, and suggested classroom use, see Appendix B. In the next section, I will discuss the results of my research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The process of research started by finding the award-winning titles through the American Library Association's website. As previously stated, I looked at literature published from 1980 to 2019. I then found the novels and picture books at the University of Central Florida's Curriculum Materials Center (CMC) and checked them out to read at home. After reading and analyzing 61 pieces of award-winning literature, I noticed a handful of themes and social-emotional skills that were pervasive across multiple novels and books. These themes and skills can be found in Appendix A. Though each piece of literature had its unique characters and plot, many novels seemed to cover similar themes and traits, leading me to believe that those things are, and will continue to be, important to many children. It is pertinent to note that although the research identified traits such as justice, self-discipline, responsibility, joy, love, and tolerance as common traits in social and emotional learning, these were not the most common traits among the children's literature. I did not go into my research looking for the traits identified in the research, but rather took a more holistic approach and examined the research inductively. Some common themes addressed in the children's literature were loss, family, and history. Some common social-emotional skills addressed in the children's literature included perseverance, friendship, and grit.

While there is no definitive answer as to why the research did not align with the children's literature I studied, I believe that the authors' desire to create a more compelling plot could be a possible reason. Characters who demonstrate traits such as perseverance and grit likely went through difficult and exciting trials, creating a fascinating and engaging plot. On the other hand, books and novels that teach traits like joy and love, while still important, are less

likely to have plots that are highly captivating.

Each of these common themes and skills are equally as important in the lives of children. Many children face loss in their lives, and nearly all children have some sort of family, whether they be blood-related or not. Of course, every child will benefit from learning about and understanding history. All children need to develop perseverance, friendship skills, and grit. Therefore, these novels and picture books are the perfect starting point for social and emotional learning.

I will further discuss the pervasive themes among the award-winning literature in the following three sections.

Loss

Loss is most often addressed in the children's literature as the death of a loved one. Multiple characters in these stories are facing the loss of a family member, creating an extra challenge in their lives. This problem is not just limited to characters in literature. Children are susceptible to the loss of a loved one, and this can be a life-changing event. Children need to develop the coping skills to deal with this change, and characters in literature can become a role model for them. For example, Josh Bell in *The Crossover* (Alexander, 2014) deals with the loss of his father. While it is a challenging time for him, he seeks to restore his relationship with his brother to fill the gap his father left. Josh describes the importance of family and the necessity to mend the relationship with his brother in the poem "Basketball Rule #1":

In this game of life
your family is the court

and the ball is your heart.
No matter how good you are,
no matter how down you get,
always leave
your heart
on the court. (Alexander, 2014, p. 26)

Following in Josh's footsteps, children can learn to turn to those around them when they experience loss. While those who have passed on can never be replaced, turning to those around them can help fill the gap left in children's lives, creating a sense of comfort and stability.

Another character who experiences the loss of a loved one is Summer in the novel *Missing May* (Rylant, 1992), as she and her Uncle Ob are experiencing the passing of beloved Aunt May. After an attempt to communicate with her spirit fails, they are feeling hopeless. However, Summer sees an owl fly overhead and is reminded of May, and she begins to let herself grieve.

I began to cry. I had not ever really cried for May... But nothing could keep them back once that owl had disappeared from my eyes and I knew... that I would never, ever, see May on this earth again... I cried... until finally my body was emptied of those tears and I was no more burdened. (Rylant, 1992, pp. 74-76)

It is imperative that children allow themselves to grieve after experiencing loss, and May is a great role model of how and why to grieve.

Family

Almost all children have a family in one form or another. Whether it be a traditional family, a foster family, a group of friends, or any other combination of loved ones, practically all students can relate to the adventures and struggles that come with family. Some children may be searching for a family, and they can relate to a character such as Jeffrey of *Maniac Magee* (Spinelli, 1999). After running away from his loveless home, Jeffrey struggles to find family and a place to call home in his new town of Two Mills, Pennsylvania. However, after searching and reconciling some differences, he finds that family can be found anywhere, and with anyone. After running away from the Beale family, who had taken him in, because of racial tensions, Maniac finds family and home with them again, against all odds. “Maniac said nothing... He knew that finally, truly, at long last, someone was calling him home” (Spinelli, 1999, p. 192). Maniac was able to find family outside of bloodlines, and even outside of race. He began to trust and open up to the Beales, allowing himself to be cared for and loved. Children who learn this important lesson will be able to find family in those around them, even when their blood family is distant, unhappy, or nonexistent. Having a family brings children a sense of belonging, an important foundation for highly functioning and thriving students.

Another character who learns, and therefore teaches, the importance of family is the narrating character of *The Hello, Goodbye Window* (Juster, 2005). Her family is a more traditional one, and she reflects on how much she appreciates time at her Nana and Poppy’s house. She demonstrates her appreciation when she says, “Mommy and Daddy pick me up after work. I’m glad because I know we’re going home, but it makes me sad too because I have to leave Nanna and Poppy” (Juster, 2005, p. 25). The girl illustrates her appreciation for her family

implicitly through her sadness about leaving them. Students can look to this character to learn how to appreciate the little things that happen in their families, even when they are frustrated or annoyed with their family members. It is important for students to be thankful for and appreciative of their families and those who love them.

History

Philosopher George Santayana famously said, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Clairmont, 2013). Therefore, it is important that students begin to learn and understand aspects of history to make informed decisions for the future. However, it is no secret that many students find history boring. Children's literature can change that! A handful of award-winning literature takes place in an era long gone. These novels and books are considered historical fiction, that is "a novel which is set fifty or more years in the past", and many scholars believe that this genre has to reflect the time period with great accuracy (Johnson, 2002). Historical fiction not only teaches history in an engaging way, but the characters' experiences and lessons can often be translated into the modern world.

One example of a novel with a historical theme is *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985). This novel is set in the late 1800s, in the days of the American pioneers. Students can learn about the way families lived and their daily responsibilities and other tasks through the plot of the novel. For example, students can learn about some aspects of daily pioneer-era life in the following paragraphs:

I rocked on the porch and Caleb rolled a marble on the wood floor. Back and forth. Back and forth. The marble was blue.

We saw the dust from the wagon first, rising above the road, above the heads of Jack and Old Bess. Caleb climbed up onto the porch roof and shaded his eyes. “A bonnet!” he cried. “I see a yellow bonnet!” (MacLachlan, 1985, p. 18)

In addition to learning about history through novels as such, students can learn important social-emotional skills like adapting to change and finding family, just like Sarah did.

Students can also learn about history from the book *Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World’s Most Famous Bear* (Mattick, 2015). This book focuses on one particular event in history, the finding and raising of Winnie, who later inspired the Winnie the Pooh books. She was bought by a man named Harry and taken in by soldiers in 1914, during the first World War.

Harry thought for a long time. Then he said to himself, “There is something special about that Bear.” He felt inside his pocket and said, “I shouldn’t”... Then his heart made up his mind, and he walked up to the trapper and said, “I’ll give you twenty dollars for the bear” (Mattick, 2015, p. 11).

This book tells Winnie’s unique story and teaches students about the way that soldiers lived and fought in war time, as well as teaches the importance of caring for others, both animals and people.

I will discuss common social and emotional traits from the award-winning literature in the following three sections.

Perseverance

Perseverance can be defined as “continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition” (merriam-webster.com, 2020). It can be tempting for students

to give up when they face difficulties, but perseverance is an important social-emotional trait that will help them to power through and push onward to success. Students can look to a character like Billie Jo in *Out of the Dust* (Hesse, 1997) as a shining example of perseverance. Billie Jo faced drought, dust storms, the loss of her mother, and the loss of her own hands; yet, she persevered and pushed on through life. It was never easy for her, but she restored her relationship with her father, regained some strength and agility in what was left of her hands, and found contentment even during one of the toughest eras in history. She begins to accept herself and her circumstances toward the end of the book, explaining that

I know now that all the time I was trying to get
out of the dust,
the fact is,
what I am,
I am because of the dust.
And what I am is good enough.
Even for me. (Hesse, 1997, p. 222)

Students can look to Billie Jo for hope, as she is a great example of what perseverance can do for a child.

Another character who shows perseverance, though on a smaller scale than Billie Jo, is Mirette in *Mirette on the High Wire* (McCully, 1992). After meeting the great Bellini, a famous daredevil and tight rope walker, Mirette is determined to learn how to walk on a tight rope, because “surely she could do it too if she kept trying” (McCully, 1992, p. 11). She fails time and time again, but perseveres and keeps practicing, leading to a fantastic display of her newfound

skill. Perseverance, in this regard, is a skill many children need to develop as they are exploring their talents and hobbies. Mirette is an example of how persevering in learning a new skill can lead to great success in the end.

Friendship

Virtually every child has at least one friend; therefore, developing and maintaining friendships are crucial social-emotional skills for all students. A book like *The One and Only Ivan* (Applegate, 2012) explores how friendships form and the ways that friends can support and care for each other. Ivan, a gorilla, befriends the other animals in the Big Top Mall—Stella and Ruby the elephants and Bob the dog. Ruby is a new baby elephant whom the others befriend and care for. This caring and friendship is demonstrated distinctly in the chapter “stella and ruby”.

All morning, Stella strokes Ruby, pats her, smells her. They flap their ears. They rumble and roar. They sway as if they’re dancing. Ruby clings to Stella’s tail. She slips under Stella’s belly. Sometimes they just lean into each other, their trunks twirled together like jungle vines. Stella looks so happy (Applegate, 2012, p. 35).

The face many events and trials together and learn how to best support, encourage, and cheer on each other toward happiness and success. These are all things that children can learn to do in order to be a kind and loving friend to others and learning it by way of animals adds an element of whimsy and engagement.

Holes (Sachar, 1998) is another novel where friendship is a major theme. Without developing friendships, Stanley would likely not have survived Camp Green Lake. His friends, especially Zero, became his emotional anchor and challenged him in new ways. After

befriending Zero, even in the midst of the hot sun and physical challenges of Camp Green Lake, Stanley begins to feel content, even joyful, because he finally has a true friend.

As Stanley stared at the glittering night sky, he thought there was no place he would rather be. He was glad Zero put the shoes on the parked car. He was glad they fell from the overpass and hit him on the head (Sachar, 1998, p. 82).

Students can learn the importance of building friendships and the joy they can bring by looking to Stanley as an example.

Grit

Grit is similar to perseverance in that it has to do with the act of pressing on through trials. However, there is nuance that sets it apart. Grit can be defined as “unyielding courage in the face of hardship or danger” (merriam-webster.com, 2020). Having grit requires being courageous in the moment, whereas perseverance requires overcoming obstacle after obstacle, whether or not it takes courage. Having grit can be helpful to students in situations like bullying or making a difficult choice. *The Undefeated* (Alexander, 2019) reveres different figures of color who have showed immense grit. People like Martin Luther King, Jr., LeBron James, and many other unnamed people of color. Kwame Alexander dedicates this book to those figures of color “who shine their light for the world to see and don’t stop ‘til the break of dawn” (p. 12), alongside illustrations of African-American leaders and world-changers. Students can look to these figures to learn that hard work, courage, and grit, can help them overcome any trial that life may throw at them.

Another book that can inspire students to show grit is the aforementioned *Holes* (Sachar, 1998). Stanley shows immense grit in the moment as he works to save his friend Zero from death.

Stanley took hold of Zero's forearms and pulled him upright. Then he stooped down and let Zero fall over his right shoulder. He stood up, lifting Zero's worn-out body off the ground.

He left the shovel and sack of jars behind as he continued up the mountain. Zero's legs dangled in front of him.

Stanley couldn't see his feet, which made it difficult to walk through the tangled patches of weeds and vines. He concentrated on one step at a time, carefully raising and setting down each foot. He thought only about each step, and not the impossible task that lay before him. (Sachar, 1998, p. 75)

While this is an extreme circumstance that few, if any, students will ever experience, Stanley's extreme display of grit can teach students the power and value of developing this social-emotional skill.

In the next section I will discuss some of the texts that were not included in my research and the reasons for their exclusion.

Texts Excluded

Despite them being highly regarded, award-winning literature, not all books were relevant to the research. Although I read 61 pieces of literature, only 31 books were decidedly relevant to the topic of research, and these texts will be discussed later in this chapter. These

books were excluded due to two main reasons: the first being a lack of prominent social and emotional traits or themes and the second being that the book was targeted at an age range outside of the field of research.

A handful of award-winners had beautiful words or detailed illustrations but did not hit the mark on being relevant to social and emotional learning. One example of a book I decided not to include in the research was *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread* by Kate DiCamillo (2003). While this novel is unique and engaging with its fantastical plot and talking animals, it does not hit on many social-emotional themes or skills prominently. *Despereaux* is a well-loved and highly regarded work of literature, it just was not relevant to my field of research.

The other reason children's literature was not included in my research was that it was targeted toward an age group that was outside of my field of study. This came in to play mostly while reading and analyzing Caldecott Medal winners, as this award focuses on outstanding illustration and picture books are usually targeted at younger learners. One example of a book targeted at an age group outside my field of research is *My Friend Rabbit* by Eric Rohmann (2002). The book's storyline is juvenile, and its text complexity is too simple for the majority of students in third through sixth grades. This book is better suited to learners in primary elementary grades. While all of the award-winning literature can be relevant in one field or another, I wanted my resource list to be highly relevant to both social and emotional learning and the targeted age group.

In the next section I will share a discussion of my research, focusing specifically on suggested uses for the award-winning literature and some of the limitations of my research. I will also share further research and professional development ideas regarding the topic of social-

emotional learning and children's literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Award-winning children's literature has immeasurable value in teaching students social and emotional skills in a unique and engaging way. The above skills and themes, though, only scratch the surface of what children's literature can teach students. These novels can be paired with multiple subject areas including, but not limited to, history and social studies, writing and poetry, and the arts. Teachers can use these novels as starting points for discussions, journal prompts, and reflection, all while teaching important social and emotional skills and connecting with students in ways beyond academics. For example, *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (MacLachlan, 1985) is set in the pioneer era of the late 1800s. This book can easily be coupled with a unit on that era of American history as an engaging method of investigating the lives and responsibilities of people in that era. *The Crossover* (Alexander, 2015) is a story told in free-verse poetry. This unique novel can serve as a model for students to use as they write their own poetry. Students can also be exposed to the fine arts through a book like *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* (Step toe, 2016), and teachers can use it as a starting point and reference material for biography writing. I also believe, of course, that educators can use these novels for bibliotherapy as a method of addressing behavioral concerns, teaching social-emotional skills, and creating a more well-managed and safe classroom environment, thus, a positive classroom climate. For further information on suggested classroom use of this literature, see Appendix B.

I aimed to make my research and, thus, my resource charts (Appendices A and B) as comprehensive as possible in order to create a useful resource for educators. However, as in any research, there were limitations. One of the biggest limitations in this particular project was the

inability to include literature that is not award-winning. In order to ensure a high quality of children's literature, I held books to the standard of being award-winning. However, there is a myriad of high-quality, well-respected literature that has not won Caldecott or Newbery awards, i.e., books by Dr. Seuss, Roald Dahl, and other beloved authors. Another limitation in my research was my being unable to read these books to and with students in order to gauge their responses to the literature and its effectiveness in the teaching of social-emotional learning. Because this research was done under the oversight of honors undergraduate studies at the University of Central Florida, the ability to work in schools with other people and children was limited.

I would love to continue to expand my knowledge of social-emotional learning through literature and begin to build a library of children's literature and resources that can reach to and impact the students I will be working with in my classroom and school. I understand the value of both social-emotional learning and children's literature and plan to continue to help others, especially fellow educators, the same. I encourage you to dig into the appendices and, of course, the books themselves to see how you can help your students build their repertoire of social and emotional skills, developing them into well-rounded, successful students and citizens.

APPENDIX A: THEMES AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL TRAITS ADDRESSED
IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Title of Book and Author	Grade Level(s)	Themes addressed	Social-emotional trait(s) addressed
<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis	5 th -6 th	Foster care, homelessness, family/home	Belonging, courage, friendship
<i>Dear Mr. Henshaw</i> by Beverly Cleary	3 rd -6 th	Divorce, absent family members, adjusting to change	Contentment, flexibility, anger management
<i>Fables</i> by Arnold Lobel	3 rd -5 th	Animals, learning lessons	Friendship, trust, decision making
<i>Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear</i> by Lindsay Mattick	3 rd -6 th	Animals, history, war	Friendship, caring
<i>Hey, Al</i> by Arthur Yorinks	3 rd	"The grass isn't always greener"	Contentment, friendship, trustworthiness
<i>Holes</i> by Louis Sachar	5 th -6 th	Consequences, family history, authority, redemption	Perseverance, grit, determination, friendship
<i>Jumanji</i> by Chris Van Allsburg	3 rd -6 th	Action, adventure, consequences	Perseverance, following instructions
<i>Kira-Kira</i> by Cynthia Kadohata	5 th -6 th	Illness, grief, racism, adjusting to change	Justice, apologizing, appreciation, hope
<i>Kitten's First Full Moon</i> by Kevin Henkes	3 rd	Animals	Perseverance, patience, determination
<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de la Peña	3 rd -5 th	Socioeconomics, city life	Appreciation, contentment
<i>Lon Po Po</i> by Ed Young	3 rd -6 th	Fairy tales, multicultural	Following directions, teamwork
<i>Maniac Magee</i> by Jerry Spinelli	3 rd -6 th	Racism, homelessness, loss	Grit, determination, courage, friendship
<i>Mirrette on the High Wire</i> by Emily Arnold McCully	3 rd -4 th	History, circus culture	Perseverance, determination, respect, courage
<i>Missing May</i> by Cynthia Rylant	3 rd -5 th	Loss, grieving	Resilience, hope, friendship
<i>Number the Stars</i> by Lois Lowry	5 th -6 th	History, war, loss, community	Grit, courage, friendship, caring
<i>Out of the Dust</i> by Karen Hesse	5 th -6 th	History, loss, disability	Perseverance, forgiveness, grit
<i>Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat</i> by Javaka Steptoe	3 rd -6 th	Art, illness	Perseverance, goal-setting, hard work, determination
<i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i> by Patricia MacLachlan	3 rd -4 th	History, family, change	Adaptation, acceptance, contentment, love
<i>Shiloh</i> by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor	3 rd -4 th	Animal abuse, communities, right versus wrong	Justice, love, honesty, courage
<i>Smoky Night</i> by Eve Bunting	4 th -6 th	Riots, housefires, unrest, diversity	Friendship, acceptance, citizenship
<i>The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend</i> by Dan Santat	3 rd	Imagination	Courage, creativity, friendship, perseverance
<i>The Crossover</i> by Kwame Alexander	4 th -6 th	Loss, grief, illness	Resilience, forgiveness

<i>The Hello, Goodbye Window</i> by Norton Juster	3 rd	Family	Appreciation, imagination, love
<i>The Invention of Hugo Cabret</i> by Brian Selznick	5 th -6 th	Orphan/homelessness, history, art, family	Self-esteem, friendship, encouraging others, truth
<i>The One and Only Ivan</i> by Katherine Applegate	3 rd -6 th	Animal rights, activism, loss	Friendship, justice, perseverance, resilience
<i>The Undefeated</i> by Kwame Alexander	3 rd -6 th	Diversity, racism	Inclusion, perseverance, grit, hard work
<i>Walk Two Moons</i> by Sharon Creech	6 th	Broken families, meaningful connections, loss, adjusting to change	Empathy, appreciation

APPENDIX B: AWARDS, SUMMARIES, AND SUGGESTED USES OF
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Title of Book and Author	Awards Won	Brief summary of the plot	Suggested Use
<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> by Christopher Paul Curtis	Newbery Medal, Coretta Scott King Award	In the height of the Great Depression, ten-year-old Bud is on the run from his third foster home. He is in search of his father, some food, and a home. Bud meets a diverse cast of characters on his journey and discovers an answer he didn't know he was looking for.	This book could be coupled with a social studies unit on the Great Depression as a way to give one possible perspective on the time period.
<i>Dear Mr. Henshaw</i> by Beverly Cleary	Newbery Medal	Leigh Botts is author Boyd Henshaw's biggest fan. Through a series of letters to Mr. Henshaw, Leigh opens up about his life, and receives some surprising answers in return.	This book couples well with teaching letter writing. Students could write to their favorite authors, using Leigh's style as a guide.
<i>Fables</i> by Arnold Lobel	Caldecott Medal	A mash-up of original fables feature various animals and their adventures. Each fable gives a brief lesson or moral.	Read one fable a day, focusing on practicing the character trait or moral that the fable gives.
<i>Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear</i> by Lindsay Mattick	Caldecott Medal	This book tells the true story of the beloved bear behind Winnie the Pooh. It's a lot different than you might imagine!	Students can read fiction Winnie the Pooh stories alongside this book as part of a paired text system.
<i>Hey, Al</i> by Arthur Yorinks	Caldecott Medal	Al and his dog, Eddie, live in a one-room apartment in the city. Eddie desperately longs for a change, and better accommodations. As if his mind was read, a large bird appears to Al and Eddie, saying he can take them to a better place. They go, and soon realize that paradise isn't quite what they had imagined.	Students could use this book as a guide to reflect on their lives and what they love about it. Students can write about what "the grass isn't always greener on the other side" means to them.
<i>Holes</i> by Louis Sachar	Newbery Medal, National Book Award	Stanley Yelnats is sent, unfairly, to a boys' juvenile detention camp, Camp Green Lake. There, he is forced to dig a five by five hole every single day to "build character". He befriends Zero, another boy in the camp, and they embark on a journey for the truth.	<i>Holes</i> was adapted into a well-loved film by Disney. Students could read the novel and watch the film in order to compare and contrast the two.
<i>Jumanji</i> by Chris Van Allsburg	Caldecott Medal	Judy and Peter discover a "jungle adventure game" called Jumanji. The directions are simple, but state that you MUST finish playing the game. When the game comes to life in their home, Judy and Peter have to play quickly and cleverly to finish the game without being harmed.	This book was made into a well-known film of the same name. Students can compare and contrast the two media.
<i>Kira-Kira</i> by Cynthia Kadohata	Newbery Medal	Katie Takeshima's sister, Lynn, has a way of making everything seem glittering and magical, or kira-kira. When the Takeshima family moves to the Deep South,	Students could begin journaling about the kira-kira, or the "glittering" things in their lives. This

		Katie’s world is turned upside down. Will she be able to find the kira-kira?	will help to develop an appreciation for life and awareness of their surroundings.
<i>Kitten’s First Full Moon</i> by Kevin Henkes	Caldecott Medal	Kitten sees a big bowl of milk in the sky; that is, a full moon. She knows she just has to have it! She chases that bowl of milk with all of her might, even when it seems impossible. Will she finally get that big bowl of milk?	Students can write about a time that they chased and chased something and did not give up, using the story as a guide.
<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de la Peña	Newbery Medal	This picture book follows the story of CJ and his Nana as they ride the bus from church through town to volunteer at the soup kitchen. CJ often asks, “why do we have to do this?”, but Nana teaches him to appreciate the beauty in his life.	Students could use this book as a starting point for appreciating the beauty in their lives. Have students journal about the little things that they appreciate each day.
<i>Lon Po Po</i> by Ed Young	Caldecott Medal	This is a “Little Red Riding Hood” story from China. While the mother is away, 3 children encounter their Po Po, or so they think. Po Po is really a wolf in disguise! They must work together to stay safe and get rid of the wolf.	This story can be compared to the familiar tale of Little Red Riding Hood. Other country’s similar stories can be compared, too.
<i>Maniac Magee</i> by Jerry Spinelli	Newbery Medal, Boston Globe-Horn book	Jeffrey Magee is on the run, literally. He runs a couple hundred miles from his loveless home and finds himself in Two Mills, Pennsylvania, a town divided by race. He meets people of all colors, lives in multiple homes, faces one obstacle after another, but ultimately finds what he’s been looking for—family.	Students can create their family tree, including those who aren’t family by blood, but by love. This will help to build a deeper appreciation for their loved ones.
<i>Mirette on the High Wire</i> by Emily Arnold McCully	Caldecott Medal	Mirette lives with her mother in a bed and breakfast frequented by circus performers. After seeing Bellini, a tight rope walker, she aches to learn. Bellini agrees to teach her, even though she falls again and again. He is a tough teacher, but she perseveres. When Bellini finds himself in fear of the wire, can Mirette help him find courage?	The character of Bellini is likely based on famous tightrope walker Charles Blondin. Students could use this book as a paired text as they learn about the great daredevil.
<i>Missing May</i> by Cynthia Rylant	Newbery Medal, Boston Globe-Horn Book	Twelve-year-old Summer and her Uncle Ob are missing May. That is, Aunt May, who has recently passed away. Summer, Uncle Ob, and their friend Cletus embark on a journey to communicate with Aunt May for closure, but find much more than they were expecting.	This book could be a way to open up a discussion about different beliefs. Students could also create whirligigs, like Uncle Ob, to integrate STEAM.
<i>Number the Stars</i> by Lois Lowry	Newbery Medal	Annemarie Johansen and her best friend Ellen have grown up in Copenhagen, Denmark in the era of Nazi occupation. When Ellen’s parents flee Denmark to escape Nazi persecution, Ellen moves in with the Johansen family and must pretend she is not Jewish for	This novel takes place during the World War II era and Nazi persecution of Jews; therefore, it can be used a companion to a social studies unit.

		her safety. The family embarks near Sweden, a neutral country, but their trials have just begun.	
<i>Out of the Dust</i> by Karen Hesse	Newbery Medal	Billie Jo tells the story of her survival in the Dust Bowl era through poetry. This novel chronicles the many trials families faced as well as how they kept hope and continued to persevere in a troubling time.	This book would best be coupled with a unit on the Dust Bowl Era. It chronicles the potential experiences of people in that era in a unique, engaging way.
<i>Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat</i> by Javaka Steptoe	Caldecott Medal	Jean-Michel Basquiat knew he wanted to be an artist all his life, and he knew he had to work for it. This book tells his unique story and will inspire readers to never give up!	Students can write a biography on Jean-Michel Basquiat, using this book as a reference. They can attempt to copy his iconic art style as an accompaniment to the writing.
<i>Sarah, Plain and Tall</i> by Patricia MacLachlan	Newbery Medal	Anna, Caleb, and their father live in a rural area with rolling hills and grass as far as the eye can see. The mother and wife of their family died after the birth of Caleb, so their father puts out an ad for a wife. A young woman named Sarah answers, and joins their family in the spring. Sarah misses her home by the sea, and Anna and Caleb begin to wonder if she will stay.	This novel is set in the pioneer period in rural America. Students could use this coupled with nonfiction text to study how people of that time lived.
<i>Shiloh</i> by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor	Newbery Medal	Marty Preston lives in a rural community and loves to spend his time outside. One summer day, Marty comes across something different on his usual outdoor route, a young beagle. Marty suspects this dog is being mistreated and vows to do anything to save him.	This book encourages love and proper treatment of animals; therefore, students could partner with a local animal shelter to do a service project. They could raise money, donate toys and treats, or donate their time.
<i>Smoky Night</i> by Eve Bunting	Caldecott Medal	Daniel and his mother watch rioters on the street below, then soon go to bed. They are awoken abruptly by the realization that their building has been set on fire by the rioters. They escape to a shelter but cannot find their beloved cat, Jasmine. The experience of being in the shelter and looking for the cat bonds the neighbors, who realize that being different from each other is not a bad thing.	This book can pair alongside a lesson on civil rights, protests, and riots, as it can open avenues for discussion about these topics.
<i>The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend</i> by Dan Santat	Caldecott Medal	Beekle lives in the imaginary world, just waiting to be imagined by his new friend. After waiting and waiting, he finally decides to journey into the real world to find his friend for himself. He searches, never giving up, and meets Alice. The world starts to feel a little less strange for the two of them.	Students can write creatively to create an imaginary friend character like Beekle. What is he or she like? What could they do with him or her?
<i>The Crossover</i> by Kwame Alexander	Newbery Medal, Coretta Scott King Award	Narrated in verse, this story follows Josh Bell, a teenaged basketball star, through his team's winning season. Josh narrates through the ups and downs of his life, including the loss of his father.	This book can be used to teach vocabulary and elements of poetry.

<i>The Hello, Goodbye Window</i> by Norton Juster	Caldecott Medal	Nanna and Poppy have a kitchen window that is the narrator's favorite. She loves spending time with them no matter what, but something about the window makes time with them extra special.	Students can work together to find a place in their classroom or school that feels as special as the hello, goodbye window.
<i>The Invention of Hugo Cabret</i> by Brian Selznick	Caldecott Medal	Hugo is an orphaned boy who lives inside the walls in a historic Parisian train station. He runs the clocks and is interested in all things mechanical. A series of events leads him to meeting Georges Meilies and his goddaughter Isabelle. He and Isabelle discover something curious and are on the hunt to find the hidden truth about Georges.	While this book is partially text, it often features lots of artwork in lieu of words. Students can write words to accompany the artwork, keeping with the flow of the story.
<i>The One and Only Ivan</i> by Katherine Applegate	Newbery Medal	Ivan is a gorilla in captivity who does not miss his old life in the jungle. That is, until he meets Ruby, a baby elephant who was taken from her family. Together, they begin to fight for a change for the better.	This book could be coupled with units on figures in history who fought for justice. Students could advocate for their own change in their worlds.
<i>The Undefeated</i> by Kwame Alexander	Caldecott Medal	This book talks about the traits of various famous people of color, honoring them and admiring them for the hard work they put in and the role models that they are.	This book covers many historically famous people, yielding itself to research on these figures.
<i>Walk Two Moons</i> by Sharon Creech	Newbery Medal	Salamanca Tree Hiddle, or Sal for short, narrates a road trip to see her mother. Sal is accompanied by her grandparents, and along the way, she tells the story of how her friend Phoebe's missing mother. A story in a story that keeps the reader hooked.	This book could easily be coupled with geography and mapping skills. Students could map out Sal's road trip and research the sites she and her grandparents stop at.

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