Text Structures, Readings, and Retellings: An Exploration of Two Texts

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between children's use of reading strategies and language cues while reading and their comprehension after reading two texts: *Cherries and Cherry Pits* (Williams, 1986) and *There's Something in My Attic* (Mayer, 1988). The data were drawn from a larger study of the reading strategies of 110 urban second graders. Children read and retold an unfamiliar challenging text to a researcher. The texts were analyzed in several ways, including Walsh's (2000) framework for narrative texts. The children's readings were analyzed using the Classroom Procedure for miscue analysis (Goodman et al., 2005). The retellings were analyzed for cohesiveness, organization, and content following Morrow's (2001) retelling protocol. Though the number of readers for each text is small, the data show that familiarity with the structure of a text impacts readers' meaning making both *during* and *after* reading. This suggests that text structure needs to be considered when assessing comprehension since a resulting score may have more to do with the text than readers' abilities.

Editor's note: All names used in examples are pseudonyms.

Literacy Teaching and Learning
Volume 11, Number 2

pages 49–64

INTRODUCTION

Explorations of the effects of texts on reading and comprehension have a long history. Fountas and Pinnell (1996), for example, analyzed children's literature in terms of length, appearance, placement of print, support by illustrations, and predictability in order to create gradations that match text to children for instructional purposes. Readability formulas, such as the Fry (1977) and Flesch-Kincaid (Weitzel, 2003) formulas, count words and syllables in sentences to determine grade levels for texts (Weitzel). Perera (1984) felt these formulas were inadequate and studied the grammatical structures of what children read and wrote. She found that the structure and complexity of sentences within a text influenced children's understandings. Children's capability in oral and written language increased as they gained experience with more complex syntax.

The structure and organization of texts have also been found to impact children's readings and understandings (Pappas, 1991; Scott, 1988). Thorndyke (1977) demonstrated that readers develop a sense of story structure from their experiences with texts and draw on this structure (usually linear, including setting, characters, plot episodes, resolution, etc.) to recall what they read. Readers use their experiences with story structures to generate expectations for new texts. Other researchers have also demonstrated that readers use story structure to guide their comprehension during both their reading and recall of narrative texts (Englert & Thomas, 1987; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979).

In recent years postmodern books have emerged and grown in popularity. These texts do not follow the typical linear story structure, but rather, may include features such as nonlinear story lines, multiple narrators, multiple perspectives, contradiction, and irony (Anstey, 2002; Goldstone, 2002, 2004). While a few studies have examined students' responses to postmodern books, little direct research on these texts has been done (Pantaleo, 2004; Serafini, 2004).

In this article, we examine readers' comprehension of a text with postmodern features, *Cherries and Cherry Pits* (*Cherries*) (Williams, 1986), and a text with a traditional story structure, *There's Something in My Attic* (Attic) (Mayer, 1988). We distinguish between the readers' comprehension, "the cumulative interpretation of the text" after the reading and comprehending, "the ongoing sense-making of a text" during the reading (Goodman, et al., 2005, p. 56) in order to construct a richer and more complete understanding of readers' transactions with particular texts. *Attic* and *Cherries* are two of several texts that caught our attention during a recent study (Altwerger et al., 2004; Arya et al., 2005; Wilson, Martens, Arya, & Altwerger, 2004). In that study we noticed unexpected patterns in readers' comprehension, as measured through retellings, for some texts. *Attic,* for example, resulted in moderate to high retellings (69%–88%) while *Cherries* resulted in a split of either high (71%–79%) or low

(31%–38%) retellings. Since the students read texts that were at the challenging end of their instructional level and the content of both stories was common to the experience of second graders, we hypothesized that the structure of the stories was impacting the retellings. Even though we only had a few readers for each book, we were intrigued and decided to analyze the texts themselves, then relook at the children's readings and retellings in light of what we learned about each text. Consequently, our purpose was to study any relationships between these two texts and the children's readings and retellings of them.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data for this investigation comes from a larger study involving 110 children in four different schools. In the larger study, researchers met one-on-one with each child and asked the children to read and retell a story according to standard miscue analysis procedures (Goodman et al., 2005). We also administered and scored the Woodcock Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery–R, Word Attack subtest (Woodcock & Johnson, 1990) to assess children's ability to apply phonics knowledge when reading isolated pseudowords. All sessions were audiotaped and transcribed.

The books the children read were authentic literature that had an identifiable story grammar and had been leveled according to Fountas and Pinnell's leveling system (1996), which researchers have found to be largely accurate and valid (Hoffman, Roser, Salas, Patterson, & Pennington, 2000). The children were matched with books that were at the challenging end of their instructional levels and new to them. We wanted the books to be challenging in order to have sufficient miscues to analyze for emerging patterns (Goodman et al., 2005). Both a child's reading accuracy (as indicated in their miscues per hundred words) and the quality of the retelling were considered when determining whether to move the child to a more (or less) advanced-level book.

We collected the retellings by asking the children to tell the story in their own words. The retellings included two parts: In the unaided part the children shared, without being interrupted, what they remembered about the story. Then, in the aided part, researchers asked questions but avoided giving information about the text. These questions were rephrasings of the readers' comments or general prompts, such as "Can you tell me more about…?" (Goodman et al., 2005).

Participants

All of the children in the larger study attended schools in urban settings and were matched on percentages of free and reduced-price lunch (87%–95%).

Further, the children had been in their respective schools for at least 2 years and did not receive special education or English as a second language services. The present study focuses on nine children from the larger study. Five children read and retold *Attic*, while four children read and retold *Cherries*.

Data Analysis

For the study discussed here we analyzed the two texts and the children's comprehending (i.e., their use of reading strategies with a focus on making meaning *as* they were reading) and their comprehension as evidenced in their retellings *after* reading.

To examine the two texts, we used Walsh's (2000) framework for narrative texts to analyze the wider sociocultural context of the story, the narrative (i.e., theme/message and characters, setting, and actions), the verbal text (i.e., how language is used in the narrative), and the visual text. We also applied the Fry Readability formula (Fry, 1977) to further analyze the verbal text and have a point of comparison with Fountas and Pinnell's (1996) leveling. In addition, we analyzed sentence complexity by coding each sentence as either simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex. Finally, we drew on Golden's work (1990, cited in Lewis, 2001) to analyze the visual text to learn to what degree the information in the illustrations matched the information in the verbal text.

To study the children's comprehending and comprehension we used the Classroom Procedure for miscue analysis (Goodman et al., 2005). The language sense score in this procedure reveals the children's comprehending *as* they are reading by indicating their concern with producing sentences that are fully acceptable, namely, sentences that make sense and sound like language. The language sense scores we report here reflect "strength;" that is, they are the percentage of total sentences the student read that had no miscues, miscues that were acceptable with no meaning change, and miscues corrected that otherwise would have kept the sentences from being acceptable. Readers who focus primarily on reproducing the visible text as it is printed, rather than constructing meaning, have high language sense (comprehending) scores with minimal understanding of what they read (comprehension). Thus, language sense scores are always considered in concert with retelling scores reflecting comprehension. The Classroom Procedure also examines the degree to which students' miscues look and sound like the printed text to learn the students' knowledge and use of phonics in context.

For the retellings we analyzed the content and the organizational form the children used. To analyze the content we followed Morrow's (2001) retelling protocol that scores story elements (i.e., setting, characters, plot episodes, and inferences/connections) on a scale of 0-2 depending on completeness of the element. We analyzed the form of the retellings for cohesiveness and organization:

scattered details (facts in no sequence), gist (the basic plot with no elaboration), or story (a narrative) (Martens, Wilson, Arya, & Lang, 2003). We also analyzed how much the students drew on the text and illustrations in their retellings by writing each phrase or clause a student said on self-adhesive notes and placing the notes on the pages to which they related.

CHILDREN'S READINGS AND RETELLINGS OF TWO CONTRASTING TEXTS

To contextualize the findings, we begin by analyzing *Attic* and *Cherries* to show what the readers needed to navigate to read and understand the stories. Then we share the readers' comprehending and comprehension performance through the analysis of their language sense and retelling scores. The highlighted key aspects of these analyses are presented in Table 1 and in Table 2 that summarize the readers' miscue analysis and retelling scores.

There's Something in My Attic (Mayer, 1988)

Analysis of the text

Attic is the story of a young girl who hears a nightmare in the attic of the country home into which her family has recently moved and reports it to her parents. When her parents don't believe her, she decides to be brave and sneak up the stairs, lasso in hand, to capture the nightmare. The story has a theme of "adventure" and focuses heavily on children's imagination and fears. The open space on many pages, full moon, light shining in one of the windows in the house, and the absence of framing on the first page of the text set a tone of suspense.

Attic has a simple and conventional story structure, common in many books for young readers. It begins by detailing the setting; moves on to plot development; then to the complication where the nightmare steals the girl's teddy bear; and to resolution where she captures the nightmare. The story ends with the nightmare running away, taking the bear with it. The girl narrates the story, with the absence of an adult narrator, which helps young readers understand and relate to the story.

The story is told in past tense with heavy use of the pronoun *I*. Most of the vocabulary is simple with a few specialized words, such as, *lasso* and *nightmare*. Overall 58% of the sentences are simple and 42% are compound and complex. The Fry Readability formula for *Attic* was 2.5, which matches Fountas and Pinnell's (1996) classification as Level J (middle of second grade). A unique feature of the verbal text in *Attic* is that in the beginning of the story, some of the sentences stretch across multiple pages. For example, the sentence starts as

Table 1. Analysis of *There's Something in My Attic* and *Cherries and Cherry Pits*

Category	*There Something in My Attic*	*Cherries and Cherry Pits*
Sociocultural Context	• Rural setting • Adventure, imagination childhood fears	• Urban setting • Wishing, sharing • Imagination, self-expression
Narrative	• Simple story structure • Told in the voice of the little girl	• Postmodern story structure • Two narrators: Bidemmi and her friend • Separate substories threaded together by the theme of loving and sharing cherries
Verbal Text	• Told in first person and past tense • Dialogue between girl and nightmare • Sentence stretches across several pages • Overall 58% simple sentences and 42% compound and complex • Fry Readability: 2.5	• Told in present tense • Monologue and dialogue • Overall 64% simple sentences, 36% compound and complex • Text begins with 24% complex sentences and ends with 51% complex • Fry Readability: 3.2
Visual Text	• Bright colors, borders • Double-page illustrations • Symmetry between text and illustrations	• Illustrations of narrators are watercolors in soft blues and greens; borderless • Bidemmi's illustrations of her stories are childlike and in bold markers • Illustrations become more complex and collage-like by the end • Over half of the illustrations not as detailed as text

Cherries and Cherry Pits (Williams, 1986)
There's Something in My Attic (Mayer, 1988)

Table 2. Miscue Analysis and Retelling Scores for Readers of *There's Something in My Attic* and *Cherries and Cherry Pits*

	Miscue Analysis Scores				Retellings	
	Language Sense	Graphic/Sound Similarity	Phonics (Standard*)	Accuracy	Score	Organization
Attic						
Cassie	65%	81% / 86%	97	83%	88%	story
Tim	42%	100% / 100%	95	80%	75%	gist
Jim	62%	96% / 91%	90	87%	75%	gist
Drew	42%	91% / 82%	95	83%	69%	scattered details
Mark	62%	92% / 87%	76	84%	69%	scattered details
Cherries						
Debbie	83%	84% / 64%	106	89%	79%	gist
Sherry	63%	100% / 94%	97	91%	71%	gist
Nate	88%	89% / 84%	126	97%	38%	scattered details
Carol	76%	78% / 79%	97	93%	31%	scattered details

Note: *Woodcock Johnson Word Attack subtest standard score average range for second grade is 85–115.

Cherries and Cherry Pits (Williams, 1986)
There's Something in My Attic (Mayer, 1988)

"At night when the lights go out, I get scared," then moves to the next page, "because I can hear," and continues to a third page, "a nightmare in the attic" and finally ends on the fourth page, "right above my head." This creates a sense of anxiety and fear in readers as they proceed through the text.

The illustrations add to the atmosphere of adventure, fear, and the unknown created in the text. As the sentence described above moves across four pages, the illustrations continually get smaller and the white spaces around them increase. Generally, the illustrations are bright and colorful. When the girl is alone, the illustrations are framed. When other characters appear with her, the illustrations are borderless and sometimes spread across two pages making the event seem large and open as the imagination of a child.

Analysis of the miscues and retellings

The children's readings and retellings of *Attic* showed that though they had comparable retelling scores (see Table 2) and used graphophonic cues in and

out of context in similar ways, there was variation in their use of other strategies. Tim and Drew used twice as many nonwords as the other readers and tended to continue when their reading wasn't making sense. Cassie, Jim, and Mark, on the other hand, tended to correct and had more high-quality substitutions. As a result, Tim and Drew had lower language sense scores (42% each) than did Cassie, Jim and Mark (62%–65%), which indicates that Tim and Drew were less concerned with producing sentences that made sense and sounded like language while reading.

The language sense scores which reveal the readers' comprehending (meaning making *as* they were reading) (42%–65%) were lower than the readers' retelling scores (69%–88%) showing their comprehension and indicating that the children communicated more understanding of the text *after* their reading than was indicated *while* they were reading. We hypothesize that a possible reason for this is the children's familiarity with the text structure and story content. The conventional text structure (setting, characters, problem, resolution, etc.) provides a familiar frame for organizing and sharing their retellings. The content is also familiar. Since children have experienced being afraid, facing fears, and nightmares, they have background knowledge that facilitates their transactions with the story and grounds their retellings (Rosenblatt, 1978).

In their retellings all of the children named the characters and mentioned that the story took place in the attic. They also all elaborated more on the interaction between the girl and the nightmare and how the girl took control of the situation (middle and end of story) than they did on the beginning of the story when the girl heard the sound and was afraid.

Although all the retelling scores were moderate to high, ranging from 69%–88%, there were distinct differences among them. Cassie's retelling (88%) was a cohesive story with a beginning, middle, and end. She identified the setting and characters and discussed the plot episodes fairly completely, as seen here.

> Cassie: This story was about a little girl who heard a big sound. And she got her boots, put them on and got the rope and the flashlight and her hat and opened the attic door and went up. . . Then the ghost snuck up the steps and was just staring right at her with the teddy bear in his hand. . . .took her rope and tied it and swinged it and put it on the ghost, then pulled the ghost, tried to get her teddy back and she said, "be careful with it cause it will wreck. . . And, she said, "I just have to get my bear tomorrow." The end.

Cassie's mention of "a flashlight" indicated her use of the illustrations since the flashlight was in the illustrations but not the text. Cassie and Drew were the only two readers to make inferences. Drew and Mark (69%) opened

their retellings with a summary statement and moved on to isolated events. Their retellings did not include complete discussions of two plot episodes and were not cohesive, as this excerpt from Drew's retelling shows.

> Drew: This story was about a girl who was scared of the attic. This girl was afraid to go upstairs to see what was wrong. When they turned off the light, she was scared. And at the end, the midnight, and then she showed her dad, . . . when she caught the midnight he slipped away . . . [caught the nightmare] by the rope . . . Nightmare hugging her bear. . . She said, "she just have to wait tomorrow."

Tim and Jim (75%) retold the gist of *Attic* in a generally sequenced manner with some cohesion, mentioning all but one of the plot episodes.

To summarize, *Attic* has a traditional story structure, familiar content, and variations in the layout of the verbal text. All five readers had language sense scores that were lower than their retelling scores, which were moderate to high.

Cherries and Cherry Pits (Williams, 1986)

Analysis of the text

Cherries is the story of a young girl, Bidemmi, who lives in an urban area with subways and apartment buildings. Bidemmi enjoys drawing pictures and telling stories about people who love cherries as she does. As her neighbor watches, Bidemmi draws and tells about a man who brings cherries to his children, a woman who shares cherries with her parrot, and a boy who gives a cherry to his sister. Bidemmi's final story is about herself and her wish for a forest of cherry trees in her neighborhood and cherries she can share with the world. The book highlights the power of imagination, self-expression, and love.

Different aspects of *Cherries* make it a complex text. First, it has several features common to postmodern picture books (Anstey, 2002; Goldstone, 2002, 2004; Pantaleo, 2004). It does not have the typical linear sequential story line. Rather, four separate sub-stories, each with different characters and settings, are embedded in the larger narrative and are connected only by their focus on cherries and exchanges between Bidemmi and her neighbor. In addition, Bidemmi and her neighbor both assume the role of narrator at different points in the story and readers must use their knowledge of language, story, and social relationships to discern which narrator is speaking.

Aspects of the verbal text also add to *Cherries*' complexity. The story is told in present tense which is not typical for picture books. While the vocabulary and sentence structures are not unusual, the sentence structures become more complex as the story progresses. In comparing equivalent portions of the begin-

ning and end, the sentences go from being 24% complex to 51% complex. Fry's Readability formula also indicates this, rating the beginning portions as late- second/early-third grade and one section towards the end as late-seventh/early-eighth grade. The overall Fry Readability for *Cherries* was 3.2, which is similar to Fountas and Pinnell's (1996) classification of *Cherries* as Level M (late-second/early-third grade).

The illustrations and how they relate to the text also add complexity to *Cherries*. The illustrations of Bidemmi and her neighbor are in soft blue and green watercolors that are borderless and extend to the edges of the pages. In contrast, the pictures Bidemmi draws as she tells her stories are more childlike, done in bold red and yellow markers and with borders. Similar to the verbal text, the illustrations also become more complex. Towards the end of the book, Bidemmi's drawings become collage-like with multiple scenes depicted in each. While the illustrations support the text throughout the book, for almost two-thirds of them the text provides more information. Thus, children who take picture-walks by reading the illustrations would find it virtually impossible to understand *Cherries* without reading the verbal text.

Analysis of the miscues and retellings

The four readers of *Cherries* read it with varying degrees of success, as shown in Table 2. There was a definite distinction between the higher (71%–79%) and lower (31%–38%) retelling scores and, with the exception of Sherry, the readers of *Cherries* had higher language sense scores than they did retelling scores. The strategies Sherry used account for her lower language sense score (63%). Her numerous omissions of words she didn't know (i.e., *Bidemmi*), changes in verb tense, and substitutions of real words that didn't make sense (i.e., *picks* for *pits*) made some sentences unacceptable. Debbie, on the other hand, made no deliberate omissions and usually corrected her predictions that didn't make sense, resulting in her contrasting language sense score (83%). Despite the differences in their strategy use and comprehending as they were reading, Debbie (79%) and Sherry (71%) had similar retelling scores for *Cherries*.

While Nate (88%) and Carol (76%) had language sense scores (i.e., comprehending *as* they were reading) similar to Debbie's and Sherry's (see Table 2), their low retelling scores (i.e., comprehension *after* they read) indicate they had different focuses while they were reading. Nate's language sense score was the highest of the four readers, due largely to his more-accurate reading. However, he frequently continued reading without correcting miscues that didn't make sense. Carol also read without correcting for meaning and had one of the higher accuracy scores. As Table 2 indicates, all four children made strong use of phonics cues in and out of context.

There were common aspects to the four retellings. All four readers, for example, mentioned the first story Bidemmi tells about the man bringing cherries to his children and the last one about herself. They also all made at least

one inference (i.e., "The roots suck up the water to grow and grow"). These similarities indicate the content of *Cherries* was not difficult for the children.

We found distinct contrasting differences, however, between the retellings that were higher and those that were lower, relating largely to *Cherries*' postmodern text structure. Debbie (retelling score 79%) and Sherry (retelling score 71%) retold the gist of *Cherries* in a generally sequenced and cohesive manner, mentioned aspects of the story stated in the text but not shown in the illustrations, touched on each of the plot episodes, and both clearly perceived the complex story structure. They both stated that Bidemmi told different stories as she drew pictures and gave indications through their descriptions and use of pronouns that there were two narrators. The following excerpt from Debbie's retelling with comparisons to the text's language provides an example.

Debbie: …She always, we always push it [the door] back and forth a lot of times…She always use a new marker right away… first she draws…and when she's doing it she tells the story about it…[The story was about] a man who was about to go on the subway…he was leaning on the door and we would think he wasn't gonna fall…

Text from *Cherries and Cherry Pits*:

Neighbor: …We [Bidemmi and the neighbor] visit back and forth a lot…She [Bidemmi] always tries a new marker right away…As she draws, she tells the story of what she is drawing…

Bidemmi: …This is the door to the subway and this is a man leaning on the door. I hope he doesn't fall out when the door opens all of a sudden. His face is a nice face…

In her initial shift from "She always" to "we always…" Debbie assumes the voice of Bidemmi's neighbor, who on the first pages of the book establishes who she is and her relationship with Bidemmi. When Debbie describes the different stories, however, she takes Bidemmi's voice. Bidemmi primarily tells her stories in third person but occasionally interjects her personal thoughts and beliefs, which Debbie picks up on in her retelling of Bidemmi's stories when she says, "we would think he wasn't gonna fall."

Nate's (score 38%) and Carol's (score 31%) retellings were very different. They both told isolated details with no cohesion, omitted three plot episodes, and did not understand that the story was structured with four substories. They both tried to weave the characters and substories together into one large story. This excerpt from Nate's retelling is an example.

Nate: …Talking about cherries and planting cherries and taking care of the cherries…. [She got the cherries] from her dad in a mar-

> ket...inside this, that big truck, it was inside the train station… that's where her father got and put 'em in the bag and took 'em home. [I know the man's her dad because] he was sitting down with her in the house…the family got on the couch and was with their father.

Nate states that the man selling cherries from the back of his truck is Bidemmi's dad and is also the same man who brought cherries home to his children in the first of her stories. Thus, though Nate and Carol had higher language sense while reading, their retelling scores indicate their difficulty in understanding the text. Their focus on accuracy, and perhaps a lack of experience with postmodern text structures, may have been influencing factors.

In summary, *Cherries* has content that is familiar but as a postmodern picture book, other aspects of it engage and challenge readers in new and different ways (Anstey, 2002). With one exception, the children's language sense scores were higher than their retelling scores; yet there were distinct differences between the higher and lower retellings themselves.

TEXT STRUCTURES, READINGS, AND RETELLINGS

We find the relationship between the language sense scores and the retelling scores of the children who read and retold *Attic* and *Cherries* striking. Though we have too few readers on which to base strong statements, they are nevertheless real readers in real classrooms reading real texts, and thus raise interesting questions about text structures, readings, and retellings. In our discussions we considered several possible reasons for the higher retelling than language sense scores for *Attic* and generally higher language sense than retelling scores for *Cherries*.

One possibility is the influence of readers' background knowledge and experience with the content of the texts. Rosenblatt (1978) and others have argued that readers transactions with texts are impacted by their background knowledge and experience. The content of both of these stories is not unusual, though. In *Attic,* the girl hears and confronts a nightmare and in *Cherries*, Bidemmi draws and tells stories about cherries. While we have no direct information about how the children relate to this content, there is nothing in it that is unusual or out of the range of these second graders' experiences.

A second possibility is differences in the readers of each text and their strategy use. Perhaps, for example, the children who read *Attic* were stronger readers and used more efficient strategies than the readers of *Cherries*. But, the children with the highest retelling scores (comprehension) did not all have the highest language sense scores (comprehending as they were reading). For *Attic*, Tim and Jim had retelling scores of 75% and Drew and Mark of 69%, but their

language sense scores in both cases varied widely (42% and 62%). For *Cherries*, Nate had one of the lowest retelling scores (38%) but the highest language sense score (88%). Similarly, the students with the highest (or lowest) accuracy scores or the highest (or lowest) phonics scores in (graphic/sound similarity) or out (phonics standard score) of context did not consistently have the highest (or lowest) retelling score (see Table 2).

The readers also varied in their use of strategies. For example, Cassie (88%), who read *Attic,* and Debbie (79%), who read *Cherries*, had the highest retellings and tended to correct miscues that didn't make sense. Tim and Jim, who both read *Attic* with retellings of 75% (third-highest scores), used different strategies. Tim used many nonwords and tended to continue when his reading wasn't making sense, while Jim tended to correct miscues that didn't make sense. Carol (*Cherries* retelling score 31%), like Tim, used a number of nonwords and didn't correct but had the lowest retelling score of all the readers. Readers, then, can use the same strategies with different results, depending on how focused they are on constructing meaning as they read. It doesn't appear to be specific strategies as much as it is how the reader uses those strategies to transact with the text.

Throughout our discussions we have continually returned to the contrasting text structures as the most compelling explanation for the relationship between the language sense and retelling scores for *Attic* and *Cherries*. *Attic* has a traditional story structure with a setting, linear plot, consistent characters throughout, problem, and resolution. The lower language sense (comprehending) than retelling (comprehension) scores for all five readers indicates the lower acceptability of their sentences as they were reading and higher meaning construction when they finished reading. The strategies the children used while reading, the text layout, challenging sentence constructions, and vocabulary in parts of the text influenced the children while they were reading and affected their language sense scores. The traditional story structure, however, provided a framework that led to their stronger retellings of familiar content.

Cherries, on the other hand, is a postmodern text with a nonlinear story line, multiple substories with different settings and characters, and two narrators. The higher language sense than retelling scores for all but one reader indicates that as they were reading the children had higher percentages of sentences that were meaningful and acceptable than they did understanding when they finished reading. The higher language sense scores reflect the familiar sentence constructions and vocabulary and the children's use of reading strategies. Debbie and Sherry, who had considerably higher retelling scores, clearly understood the unfamiliar complex story structure while Nate and Carol did not. One possibility is that Debbie and Sherry were more experienced readers who had read a wider range of books with different text structures than Nate and Carol had (Thorndyke, 1977).

We are left with questions. One limitation to this study is the small number of readers for each story. We are left wondering (and intend to explore in more depth) how others readers of these texts would respond. Also, how might the same reader respond to stories with two different text structures? Finally, how would the four readers of *Cherries* and five of *Attic* respond to the same content written in a contrasting text structure? We wonder.

FINAL THOUGHTS

We live in an era of accountability and test scores. Children are assessed and decisions are made about their academic lives on the basis of their readings and comprehension of texts. If text structure impacts comprehension, the structure of the texts used to assess comprehension needs to be considered. This statement gives us pause for two reasons. First, if a text with a postmodern structure like *Cherries* is used to assess children's comprehension, the resulting comprehension score may have more to do with the text used than it does with the readers' abilities to comprehend what they read. Second, in our experience, stories with traditional text structures, like *Attic,* are not only used to assess children's comprehension but are used regularly in classrooms to prepare children for those assessments. But how representative are those traditionally structured texts of the texts children encounter in our changing world? Books with alternate structures, such as postmodern texts, are growing in popularity. Knowing a child's comprehension of those and other 'nontraditional' texts will give insights into children's thinking and experiences that 'traditional' texts won't.

We are confident that there are other influences on retellings that we have not investigated directly in this study, including sociocultural environment of the reading situation, the directions given for the retelling, and the readers' beliefs about reading and themselves as readers. Our hope is that this study will make teachers and researchers aware of the many complex influences on readers, readings, and retellings, and the need for further research.

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Literacy Teaching and Learning: An International Journal of Early Reading and Writing (ISSN 1538-6805) is published by the Reading Recovery Council of North America as a service to its members.