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# The significance of quality creative writing in children's literature: A practical application of children's literature in an educational context

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The Significance of Quality Creative Writing in Children's Literature:  
A Practical Application of Children's Literature in an Educational Context

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An Honors Program Project Presented to  
the Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Education  
James Madison University

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by Nicole Marie Wittkopp

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for Graduation with Honors  
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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Education, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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## Introduction

It is 2016, a year in which smart phones rest in many hands, transportation is innovative enough to allow humans to navigate the globe easily, and opinions, ideas, and news are shared rampantly on the internet with simple clicks of buttons.

In this fast-paced 21<sup>st</sup> century environment, it may be challenging to picture something as seemingly placid as children's literature occupying a significant space in human lives. Images of a zooming train filled with busily typing people seem to be a sharp contrast from images of children sitting inside paging through children's literature. However, children's literature today is full of creative, colorful, purposeful, and meaningful writing and pictures designed to engage young readers and thereby promote their literacy development.

For elementary school students working on developing literacy skills, children's literature reigns as a truly meaningful and significant component of their education. Children's literature helps in preparation for these students' roles in the world in which they live. According to Leland, Lewison, and Harste (2013) "using and teaching children's literature is critical to the development of a sound elementary school and middle school curriculum...so as to prepare a critically literate citizenry for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (p. vii). It is true now more than ever that, as Leland et. al (2013) states, children as budding citizens are "bombarded from birth to death by an ongoing stream of stimuli" and that "to make sense of this continual input, we break it up into stories" (p. 7). It is here, then, that children's literature arrives to support the needs of students in an increasingly information heavy world;

it takes the input they are experiencing and organizes it into literature from which they can draw conclusions, learn, discover themselves, and grow. Arthur Applegate (1977) suggests that children's understanding of stories and their organizational view of concepts in their world are linked. He says "the stages in the development of narrative structure...show striking parallels to the stages in the development of concepts" so that children's grasp of narratives "reflect their changing expectations about what a story is, as well as their expanding interests and capabilities in their more general life experiences" (p. 344). Applegate is thus further cementing the notion that children's literature allows readers to reflect on and make sense of their lives. Overall, then, the teaching of children's literature, then, has a special place in this century.

Hancock (2008) further supports the basis for the significance of quality children's literature in this century when she posits that quality children's literature has the potential to support the "creation of lifelong readers whose emotions and empathy [are] fostered by literature [that will] reach beyond reading to influence their view of humanity" (p. 5). Children's literature has the potential to help students make sense of and define various themes and elements of their own lives and the lives of those around them, by realizing their significance through stories. This ability of children to use literature to comprehend their own lives uses, according to Kelly Gallagher in *Deeper Reading* (2004), "what Kenneth Burke calls 'imaginative rehearsals' for the world they [student readers] will soon inherit. Reading great literature provides young people with a practice ground to explore

these issues...and recognizing these universals enables students to carefully consider their place in society” (89-90).

With it clear that children’s literature is a useful and necessary part of a modern elementary school student’s education, it follows that modern elementary educators need to have a deep understanding of children’s literature. Only by comprehensively studying quality children’s literature can an elementary school teacher effectively use such literature in teaching her students. The following contextual essay thus aims to first define quality children’s literature. Then, it attempts to uncover merits found in recognized children’s literature. Finally, it works to describe the specific tasks of a creative writer of children’s literature. Once these dimensions have been thoroughly studied, I will write my own children’s literature picture book manuscript that will attempt to incorporate the elements of quality identified.

## Quality Children's Literature

Children's literature is a type of written work specifically tuned, like a radio dial, to a station that is received by children. According to Lesnik-Oberstein (1999):

the definition of 'children's literature' lies at the heart of its endeavor: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children...[it] is underpinned by purpose: it wants to be something in particular, because this is supposed to connect it with that particular audience-children-with which it declares itself to be overtly and purposefully concerned (p. 15).

Simply put, children's literature is a category of literature intended primarily for the audience of children.

Many books that lack quality can fit this definition, however. The distinction between what is a widely available and poorly composed "book for kids" and what constitutes quality children's literature lies in the components that comprise it. As Tomlinson and Lynch Brown (2002) put it, "Books ranging in quality from excellent to poor are now readily available to parents, teachers, and children through bookstores and libraries...department stores, drugstores, and even grocery stores" (p. 2). To detect what is (and what is not) quality, readers should judge children's literature just as seriously and critically as other subsets of literature. According to Lehman (2007), "...literature must undergo the scrutiny of literary criticism and bear literary merit, and children's literature is no exception. But because the primary intended audience is children, it also must... have child appeal" (p.3).

The question then becomes trying to decipher what affords a piece of children's literature literary merit. According to Tunnell (2012) "[q]uality children's books are judged on the basis of their merit in the following categories: "style and

language, character, plot, pacing, setting, tension, mood, tone, point of view, theme, and accuracy” (p. 11). Similarly, according to Huck, Hepler, & Hickman (1987), “the basic considerations for the evaluation of fiction for children are a well-constructed plot that moves, a significant theme, authentic setting, a credible point of view, convincing characterization, appropriate style, and attractive format” (p. 27).

Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (2002) add as important the “originality and importance of ideas, imaginative use of language, and beauty of literary and artistic style” (p.3). If there is something meaningful happening in the story to create a certain emotional response and it takes place in a believable place with believable characters at a good speed with creative language, the story likely qualifies as a text of literary merit.

While including these elements in a piece of children’s literature may help its construction, it does not guarantee a book that includes them will resonate with every child reader. This is because writing for an audience of children means the author is obligated to consider not only the structure and story elements of the work, but also what children will think while they read it. Reader response, according to Hancock (2008) is “the unique interaction that occurs within the mind and heart of the individual reader throughout the literature event” (p. 38).

Information about the countless potential children who could read a certain text is not, and could not ever be, available to the children’s literature author. Consideration of reader response for children’s literature is too vast and varied to be deconstructed, as there is a vast and varied group of readers. Thus, positive and

sweeping reader response should not be, on its own, what an author attempts to align his or her writing to reach. Children are likely to respond differently when evaluating any given text. This is best illustrated, defined, and explained by reader response theory, introduced by Dr. Louise Rosenblatt in 1938 (Hancock, 2008, p. 5). According to this theory, it is not the text in isolation that creates meaning, but the distinct experiences with which readers who engage with the text arrive at their reading of that text. A child who lives on a farm, for example, will likely have a different response (such as one of humor, skepticism, or cemented love for animals) to *Click Clack Moo Cows that Type* by Doreen Cronin than the response of a child who has spent his or her life living in the city and has never seen a cow (such as one of confusion, disinterest, or inaccuracy of understanding of farm life). A book can be a home run for one reader and a flop for another; each child has a unique combination of experiences and “long-term and short-term interests, their home environment (family makeup, siblings, pets), their friends and social activities, their hobbies, their skills (athletic, academic, artistic), and their hopes and plans for the future” (Tomlinson & Lynch-Brown, 2002, p. 9) which all play into their responses to the children’s literature they read.

This could seem to indicate a crossroads of infinite choices for the author of children’s literature, as any direction in which they take their writing could never possibly work for *all* readers. Instead, it points to the necessity that the author has an understanding of children in general. The author needs to grasp the context within children will consume their work in order to best create it. The author can

obtain this understanding through thorough study of child development and elementary education.

Thus, consideration of the learning and personal needs of young elementary school students helps to inform the writing of quality children's literature. Quality books in this category must not, according to Huck et. al (1987) "oversimplify or write down to today's knowledgeable and sophisticated child" (p. 216). Authors of children's literature know that children in general are in various developmental stages, but that equating this understanding with a misplaced belief that children are unable to work with and understand literature with substance would be misguided. Instead, they take into account the developmental level of children and create a work that is at the best fitting zone of proximal development so that student readers can continue progressing in their literacy development, with scaffolding, using the work. This suggests significant value in having knowledge about child development for authors of children's literature.

Given the importance of understanding child development when penning children's literature, Table A.1: Aspects of Children's Literature that Support Child Development in the Appendix, synthesizes researched elements of children's literature that have been shown to support various aspects of child development in the elementary years, ages 6-12. The contents of this table are compiled using Donna E. Norton's work in *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature* (2003). These elements are useful for the children's literature

author to bear in mind when crafting his or her story so that the story may best meet students in typical developmental stages for the elementary years.

If a piece of children's literature combines some of these elements that align with elementary child development, a work of children's literature is more likely to be in consideration of its audience of children; this, in turn, should increase the likelihood it is a well-received book and earns positive reader response.

In order to write well for children, it is also important to recognize that words alone are often not as meaningful or attractive to some children as stories also told through pictures. The picture book is one form of children's literature that combines visuals and words into a story that fits within the confines of, typically, about thirty-two pages. In fact, "Picture books usually contain minimal text and are illustrated in full colour, most often in large, 32-page format" (Rosoff, 2008). As Hancock (2008) puts it, a picture book is a text "in which story blends with compelling illustrations or photographs for a visual and verbal adventure through story" (p. 33) and the picture storybook is one that "shares a story with the reader through well-written text that is blended with effective illustrations" (p. 68). Picture books, according to author Bishop (2000), are "no better or worse than any other literary form" and yet are still unique in that they "have their own conventions, traditions, and a specific audience" (p.3).

Beyond just a textual focus when writing in the format of the children's picture book, then, authors must be cognizant of the sharing of space of the visuals and text on each page. Authors must consider showing just enough in their diction

that illustrators can represent the story, but still be afforded some creative license themselves. Illustrations can serve many functions in the book (and in some cases, where there are no words to a picture book, can be the only element at play), but these illustrations work best when a particular balance between illustration and text is struck. Often this entails moments where illustrations tell stories beyond the words on the page and instances where the words on the page give insight that the illustrations might not cover. As Bishop (2000) asserts, “pictures...tell a story in combination with the text” (p.4). In the end, both the writing and the illustrations of a children’s picture book serve their functions<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Out of respect for, and recognition of, the vital role that illustration also plays in the art form that is a children’s book, the manuscript that is a product of this thesis project will be written as though it will be the text to go alongside visuals in an eventual children’s picture book.

## Critical Reviews

With all of the above considerations noted, what follows is a series of ten critical reviews of children's books that have received The Charlotte Zolotow Award. This award, bestowed by professionals in the field of children's literature working for the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin, implies that the chosen book and author were the group's choice for the best picture book published the prior year in the United States. This component of the thesis is significant in that books given this award take on the same format as the manuscript I have constructed: a picture book for children. Additionally, in contrast to more well-known awards such as the Caldecott, the focus of the Charlotte Zolotow Award is on the *writing* within the selected books; since I will be writing, but not illustrating, a picture book, this particular award seemed most fitting to study in replicating and emulating elements of quality children's picture book literature writing.

The form of the following critical reviews is based on Kathleen T. Horning's (1997) claim that "a good review will briefly describe the contents, scope, and style of a book; critically assess its quality; and suggest its potential audience" (p.173).

**KHAN**, Rukhsana. *Big Red Lollipop*. 31 p. Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 2010. RTE \$16.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-670-06287-4.

**Gr PK-4**. In this childhood tale of frustration, empathy, and lessons learned, Rubina is invited to her first American birthday party. Attempting to mold herself to fit her new culture, she recognizes that bringing along her younger sister Sana is

not the norm. After enduring the social isolation of not getting invited to many more parties, Rubina decides to give Sana, now older, the experience she never had for herself. Electing to be the better person, she suggests to her mother that Sana should not have to bring her younger sister along to the party to which she has now been invited. Khan is masterful at intertwining a moral lesson into a text that seems to center around birthday parties and lollipops in goody bags. She creates suspense from page one and weaves cultural accommodation dynamics into her tale. The timeline of events in *Big Red Lollipop* is somewhat forced and unnatural. The cold shoulder Rubina gets from her peers after bringing her little sister along is unlikely. Still, Khan has instilled in young readers that we can learn from our experiences and do unto others as we wish had been done for us.

-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (192 words)

WOODSON, Jacqueline. *Each Kindness*. 30 p. Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 2012. RTE \$16.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-399-24652-4.

**Gr 3-6** In this intense text concerning the difference a simple gesture of kindness can make in someone's life, Woodson teaches readers to be kind, even in the face of challenges. When Chloe is faced with the challenge of a new and obviously impoverished girl, Maya, joining her class, she fails to live up to the hopes readers would have for her. Instead, she and her friends fall into the trap of mocking and ignoring Maya. After a somewhat heavy-handed lesson is taught to the class about the ripple effect kindness can have, Chloe changes her tune and wishes to have the chance to display that kindness to Maya. Maya, however, has moved

away with her family. With poetic prose that instills the lesson of respect for one another, Woodson turns the setting of a cold winter into the warming of a young girl's growing heart. For young readers, the lack of a redemptive ending for Chloe may be disappointing. Still, it is a hard reality that may help to change the lives of many readers to come.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (176 words)**

**PERKINS**, Lynne Rae. *Pictures from our Vacation*. 29 p. Harper Collins Publishers. 2007. RTE \$16.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-06-085097-5.

**Gr 2-4** Perkins captures the beauty of a family summer vacation day by day in her first person narration "Pictures from Our Vacation," told from the point of view of the daughter of the family. Before the nuclear family travels to an old farm that is important to the family, the mother gives her children a notebook and camera to document their vacation. From the long drive there during which imagination has to overcome boredom to the day they meet some travelers from another country at the lake, the girl documents what was noticeable to her about the trip. Perkins' stream of consciousness style pairs well with the chronological unfolding. She pairs some staccato phrases with longer sentences that provide explanation to keep varied and yet palatable pacing or flow in the writing. Perkins would do well to include some more relevant details in characterization and setting, however, as the state they vacation in and the children's names are not included in the tale. This makes placing oneself in the details of the story more difficult. Still, provides opportunities for children to learn and cement advanced vocabulary

through Perkins' use of sporadic multisyllabic and sophisticated words, such as "ornery". More importantly, they will gather that the narrator finds significance in even the small moments of a family trip, which may help to communicate the message of learning to soak up the memories as they are happening rather than worry about trying to document life experiences for future reference. This relevant moral in a world wrought with modern technology, paired with Perkins' relatable style, make *Pictures from our Vacation* a wonderful text for young readers today.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (273 words)**

**RODMAN**, Mary Ann. *My Best Friend*. 29 p. Penguin Group. RTE \$15.99. ISBN-13: 0-670-05989-7.

**PK-2nd:** In this story about the meaning of true friendship, Lily attempts to earn favor with an older girl, Tamika, at the pool. She tries many tactics, but soon discovers that a girl her own age, who has been there all along, is the true friend. Tamika's mindset, as a six year old concerned about friendships, is well portrayed in this story, with dialogue and actions focused on Tamika. Language is short and sentences come in quick succession. Some figurative language enlivens the story and bears depth to Lily's feelings. For example, Lily describes, "I am so happy I think I will pop." Symbolism helps to add to Lily's interest in friends, from her need to wear a similar bathing suit as the older girls, to her willingness to share her popsicle, to her wish to have a gap in her teeth like Shanice. Rodman mindfully depicts a young girl's thoughts and actions as she focuses on the mission of being

friends with the proverbial cool older girls, a lesson that is sure to ring true throughout many stages of a child's social development.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (183 words)**

**OFFILL, Jenny & APPELHANS, Chris. *Sparky!* 32 p. Random House Inc. 2014. RTE \$16.99. ISBN-13: 978-0-375-87023-1.**

**PK-3:** This heartwarming tale of a young girl anxious to get a new pet succeeds in sparking the imagination. The authors work wonders in telling a tale that communicates the lesson that connection with the ones we love surmounts any need to obtain the approval of others and that being persistent and unique is admirable. With quiet humor, Offill and Appelhans spin the tale of a clever young girl who won't take no for an answer, capturing a playful, curious, and spirited child's thought process perfectly. Characterization of Sparky and the first person main character are clear through their contrasting thoughts and actions; hers, persistent and energetic and his, slow and lazy. Language about the main character's thoughts tend to playful and presented in clipped sentences. Examples include terms like "mediumish" and incomplete phrases like "No, no, no to the trained seal." However, language is dynamic in that naivety about adults in the story is presented with a syntax that is more complex. When introducing the librarian, for example, Offill and Appelhans pen "Mrs. Kinklebaum (who knows everything in the world) pointed me to Volume S of the Animal Encyclopedia." The story paces well with a few major conflicts to continue its movement and non-narrative writing for readers to enjoy, such as signs and encyclopedia entries. The creative story overall has the strengths

of clearly creating distinct character, evoking language fitting for said characters, and maintaining an enjoyable pace.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (237 words)**

MORA, Pat. *Water Rolls, Water Rises*. 27 p. Lee and Low Books Inc. 2014. RTE \$18.95. ISBN-13: 978-089239-325-1.

**Gr 2-5.** This lyrical text lists out artistically the many ways water infiltrates our world. It showcases the playfulness of language in alliterative lines such as “glistening silence shimmers like stars,” with its insistent “s” sounds. Length of description is short for each use of water, but Mora skillfully packs density of information into each sentence she employs. The earth and nature are paid respect by the purposeful personification of water in various lines of the writing, like “water slithers and snakes.” Throughout the book, Mora teaches us that water is a powerful entity; she utilizes language to enliven a non-living thing. Though the writing is beautiful and compact, there are instances in the overarching flow of the text where pacing feels disjointed. Some sentences contain multiple parts that serve to modify other non-central sentence components, throwing off the overall pattern of the reading when listened to out loud. Detail and specificity help to overcome this one shortcoming of an otherwise wonderfully crafted text that combines the scientific coverage of water on earth with a more spiritual appreciation of its role in our world.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (182 words)**

**STEWART, Melissa.** *Under the Snow.* 30p. Peachtree Publishers. 2009. RTE \$16.95.  
ISBN-13: 978-1-56145-493-8.

**GR 1-4** Stewart skillfully combines creative language with factual information about nature in this insightful text that pushes students to look beyond the surface. Thorough and diverse in her book's tackling of the embedded question "What goes on under the snow?," Stewart calls readers' attention to the smallest of lives, down to the ladybugs, spotted salamanders, and water striders. Description is specific and tangible, including lines like "cozy log lodge" and "old stone wall." Diction is strong also in verb choice, with animals that "tunnel," "snooze," and "nestle." Alliteration is strong in the text, with lines such as "dodge and dart, whiz and whirl." Stewart leaves no ecosystem untouched in her text either, so readers are able to consider the winter lives of animals in all relevant ecosystems. Her attempts to create human connection by ending the story with a quick mention of the preparation animals undergo for spring and the line "And so do you" fall a bit flat and feel unfinished and rushed. At times, her writing makes assumptions about animal behavior, including the notion that the carp "isn't even tempted by the water striders." She also reuses certain phrases; she says the spotted salamander "waits out winter" but then also says the frog and turtle "wait out the winter." In such a short text, these repetitions seem to suggest a lack of creativity. In all, the book does well to present a creative and factual representation of animals in winter.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (241 words)**

DANNEBERG, Julie. *Monet Paints a Day*. 24 p. Charlesbridge Publishing, Inc. 2012. RTE \$15.95. ISBN-13: 978-1-58089-240-7.

**GR 2-5** Danneberg tastefully transports readers into a historical fiction account of Monet's daily painting work so that they can experience his work as if seated alongside him on the beach. Captivating descriptions such as "Winter sunlight pours through the sparkling morning mist..." "The wind spatters sand against my neck..." and "I trudge away from the crescent-shaped beach..." enliven the setting and create a sense of immediacy to the writing. Snippets of historical fact also punctuate the more fictionalized writing, reminding readers that this is not exactly accurate, but still an accurate overarching portrayal of the life of this famous Impressionist. Through these and other facts presented in the writing, readers are sure to learn about Monet and wish to uncover more. If any elements of the writing style could be improved, it would be the need for a more dramatic and consistent storyline from start to finish. As is, the story consists only of a description of Monet moving art supplies to the beach, getting caught in the waves, and then going home. There is not a great sense of tension to help hook and interest readers into the plot of the story to wait to see what happens in the end, although some urgency is created with the pressure of the time needed for good lighting for his work. Harrington, overall, paints a picture of Monet that is both artistically removed from the average person and decidedly comfortable and personal, as is portrayed with the first person point of view.

–Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (250g words)

HARRINGTON, Janice N. *The Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County*. 30 p.

Melanie Kroupa Books. 2007. RTE \$16.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-374-31251-0.

**GR 1-4.** The voice and anticipation Harrington builds in this wonderfully amusing story are sure to hook elementary readers (and adults) in from page one. Harrington makes use of modified English to give Big Mama and the Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County distinctive “down on the farm” voices, shown through lines of dialogue like “Don’t you chase those chickens!” and “Then I sneaky-hide behind Big Mama’s wheelbarrow and make myself small, small, small.” The names the main character gives to the chickens, including “Mr. Rooster and the chicken ladies” and the infamously hard to catch “Miss Hen” bring life to the story. Fantastically unique and setting-specific similes, such as “I make myself as still as sunlight,” “Miss Hen is fast as a mosquito buzzing and quick as a fleabite” and cleverly exacting verbs, including “feather-flapping” and “frog-jump,” constitute the bulk of the story. The change of heart and motive for the main character from chasing Miss Hen to helping care for her and her baby chicks seems feasible and realistic and helps to create dynamism within character development. Anticipation is also built by the pacing of the words on the page. On the first few pages, for example, the words are cut off mid-sentence between pages, so that the reader wants to turn to hear the conclusion of the thought and plot. Repetition of certain phrases, including the distinctive “Pruck!” noise of the chickens and the “Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County” also help to make the story more predictable, making it appropriate for younger audiences, as they can anticipate coming story elements, an important

reading strategy. Overall, Harrington’s text impeccably creates a thrilling, humorous, and realistic story that will likely captivate readers.

–Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (282 words)

**BROWN, Monica.** *Chavela and the Magic Bubble.* Clarion Books. 2010. RTE \$16.00. ISBN-13: 978-0-547-24197-5.

GR 1-3 In this fantastic tale of a young girl, Chavela, going on adventures that connect her more closely to her family, Brown weaves beautiful writing with a strong sense of respect for family and culture. Readers learn about the historical significance of chicleros and chewing gum, giving a sense of the backstory behind products people often take for granted in their day to day lives. The infusion of Spanish words also strengthens this focus on world-building for this Hispanic group of people. Strong and specific descriptions come through in an adherence to sensory detail, which come across in lists such as “pink bubblegum, rainbow-colored gum, sugar-free peppermint gum, and sour cherry gumballs” and creative lines such as “It smelled wildly delicious.” The ending of the story, with Chavela going back home and never finding the magic gum again, seems a bit too quick and somewhat unsatisfying, as readers wonder what more might happen if Chavela continued to journey to the magic tree. She builds in fantasy elements of magic travel limited only to children subtly, too, which helps to draw readers in to the story that unfolds. This also allows for a survey of various geographic locations, such as California, Arizona, Texas, Mexico, Playa del Carmen, and the Yucatan jungles. Overall, Brown succeeds in providing a distinct character with a love for bubblegum, who

experiences an adventure that is meaningful and important to her and, ultimately, to the readers she engages.

**-Nicole Wittkopp, James Madison University (240 words)**

## Creative Writing for Audience of Children

Creative writing is a process of putting ideas, musings, experiences, and events (whether real or fictionalized) onto the page using words. Creative writing is a practice that can take on very individualized forms for each person who engages in it; one creative writer may stick to a precise writing schedule and others may scribble onto notepads when their muse strikes. Creative writing as a discipline does hold some guiding practices that have proven to produce results of quality; still, following any one method of creative writing too closely would defy the procedure and product of creative writing that are by their very natures creative.

The drafting phase of creative writing entails coming up with the story's topic and beginning to lay out the structure and beginning sentences of the story's main parts. This is where the overall topic, content, and flow of the story are envisioned.

The root of the inspiration for the selection of a story topic can come from almost any experience that the author has had personally or has witnessed, heard about, or imagined. With such an endless array of possibilities, it can be helpful to new children's literature authors to consider the sources of inspiration seasoned writers use. During Norris' (2009) interview with children's book author Deborah Wiles, Wiles gave a glimpse into her inspiration when she shared that "I've got myself surrounded with mementos and memories and some photographs...just to remind me of where I come from because everything I write comes from my childhood and my life" (p.1). It could even be said that, when writers look at the inspirational fountain of their own experiences, the stories find them. In The

Everything Guide to Writing Children's Books (2011), Wallin and Gordon suggest that the initial topic choice is less a tangible and more an affective experience: "you must have a feeling for a story" they say "though you may not know much of the story yet" (p. 67). As analysis by Peterson (2014) of various authors' points of view on writing would suggest, "the authors' stories seemed to find them and demand to be told" (p. 501).

However, if an obvious story is not begging to be written, there are generative exercises to create direction for a story. These include the following directions, taken from Wallin and Gordon's text. "Jot down everything that catches your interest [in] idea notebooks" (p. 68-69) they suggest, as well as "write what you know...experiences you have had...things you have researched...your own childhood..." (p. 69). Alongside this premise, they suggest attempting to recall settings, emotions, attachments, and imaginative play experienced as a child (p. 70-71). Sources outside of the self can also be inspirational, however, and suggestions to look for "story material...plot, character, or setting" in the media, classic stories, music, or environmental print is also suggested (p. 72-74).

When writing about one's personal life, some topics that are not glistening and upbeat are bound to surface. It is the author's decision whether or not to confront these less-than-perfect aspects of life in a children's literature format. For Wiles, as she stated in her interview with Norris (2009), "what matters to me and what mattered to me as a kid was justice, fairness, right from wrong, understanding, and belonging" (p.1) and those are the topics she continues to

address. Again, it is important to recognize the sophistication that children are capable of meeting when they experience life and literature and to acknowledge all aspects of child development in writing.

After selecting a topic area or theme for the writing, authors must fully immerse themselves in studying the basis of their books. They complete research, reading, and investigations to learn as much as they can in order to best portray the story. According to Peterson (2014), "...fictional narrative...writers spoke about building their background knowledge and experience as an essential part of their writing processes" (p.502-503). When there is a wealth of knowledge underlying the writing, the story is likely to come across as more genuine, thorough, and reliable.

Eventually, the writer will take pencil to paper or fingers to keyboard and draft the actual first manuscript of their stories. This first draft is rarely (read, never) the final version. This means that the initial draft will need to be revised. Any form of writing that the author wishes to have seriously considered requires that the author dedicate much time, editing, and revision to an initial manuscript. According to Waldrop (1992), "you will have written and rewritten many times until you are fairly satisfied with the format and words used" (p. 7). Revisions happen when the authors themselves or those trusted editors and second pairs of eyes around them see areas for improvement. Authors in the analysis done by Peterson (2014) noted they "need to get feedback from others and revise and edit" (p. 503). During the process of changing and revising, word choice (diction), syntax, and flow are all up for reconsideration. The authors' job at this point is additive and

subtractive in a seamlessly intertwined series of revisions. Bishop's writing process includes what he defines as "whittling...a consistent process of elimination" (p.4).

Once all phases of editing and revision are complete, the author begins the process of sending in the manuscript for publication. This, according to Wallin and Gordon (2011) requires knowing the publishers in the market for the book type, following the guidelines for presentation of the manuscript to these publishers, and then sending out the text (p. 115-122). For a picture book, the format of submission is typically to "present the text as if it were a continuous short story...place your name, address, and telephone number in the upper left-hand corner of the first page...in the upper right hand corner, type the approximate word count...[and] center your story's working title about one-third of the way down the page..." (p. 140-141). This presentation of the manuscript in a formal and organized way pays tribute to the work that is done in the preceding phases to create this finalized copy.

## Journal of Creative Process

The following journal entries represent the journey taken to complete this thesis project. They give insight into the inspirations, processes, doubts, and successes that came along the way to writing the manuscript for *A Mess in the Kitchen*, my picture book. The quoted section provides the directions from the James Madison University Honors Program on what a Journal of Creative Process should include:

“Students must keep a project journal throughout the creative process. It should document, in an informal way, many of the following items: how the project unfolded over time; how ideas were generated and decisions made; actions, meetings, significant roadblocks and progress; overall themes, plans, and outcomes; noteworthy moments from the project. Careful documentation of the work will make writing the Reflective Essay much easier, and the journal should be used for this purpose. Since it is a journal, it will not be assessed for content so much as for evidence that the student engaged with materials and mentors and regularly reflected on his or her progress in a thoughtful manner. Journal entries should begin whenever the creative process starts in earnest. This is usually after the project proposal is submitted, at the beginning of the 499B semester (or the previous summer, if the student begins work at that point)” (JMU Honors Program, 2015).

*January 25, 2015:*

Today, I am finally putting on paper (or, for accuracy's sake, a Word document) the rough ramblings of the start to a potential children's book. I have been thinking about ideas and what direction/subject I wanted this book to be about for awhile now. One idea that keeps returning to my mind is to write a story with a title like "A Mess in the Kitchen" about some sort of animal (I chose animal characters in the hopes of appealing to the target age range for picture books) working with her mom or dad in the kitchen, but continually making a mess and messing up the measurements. The main character (who I've begun to pen as "Little monkey Caroline") will go through a range of emotions in the story, from loving the idea of being a chef and giddily dreaming up herself in the full white chef's costume to seeing the actual thing turn out to be harder than it seems, leading her to frustration, to tentatively coming to accept consolation that not everything turns out perfect from her parent.

I am hesitant with my story's premise, only because in my fiction writing class we are learning not to write with the aim of having a message/moral but to instead write with the main content being the story. In Jerome Stern's book "Making Shapely Fiction," he calls this story "The-I-Cried-Because-I-Had-No-Shoes-Till-I-Met-A-Man-Who-Had-No-Feet Story" which "is primarily designed to teach a lesson" (Stern, p.73). Stern says in these stories, which "writers tell...to impart a moral," "the plot seems mechanical" (Stern, p.73). Since I'm getting at a "nobody's perfect/ everyone makes mistakes/ learning takes time / practice makes better" sort

of theme and writing with this in mind, I hope that I am still able to articulate a well formed and enticing story.

I'm also wondering if I will decide to continue forward with the rhyming format I am taking on now. I am beginning with it for more than one reason. First off, my background with writing is not mainly in children's books, but instead in poetry. I hope to be able to use my love of that format to help me become more enthralled with the book. Additionally, I am taking this spin as I am well aware that learning to rhyme and work with word sounds is critically important for the early readers who may be the eventual recipients of my story.

It is certainly scary and yet exciting to be taking these first steps. My fiction writing professor has been working on a novel for ten years and still hasn't had it published. I am torn between my idealized thoughts of publishing a children's book and seeing myself as a good writer and my actual humbling attitude at how hard it is to get past the main idea and the first two lines. I am unsure, today, if Little monkey Caroline is a potential home run or simply garbage anyone could write. I assume that throughout this process, with the assistance, advice, and research I will do, I will certainly find out!

*January 30, 2015:*

I have sent my bare-bones outline and proposal on to my committee and attempted to set up a meeting with the three of them together so that we could discuss the direction of my project. So far, it has been very strange to have such free reign on a project. I suppose school in general has always been something that

contained set parameters and expectations; this project, alternately, is essentially designed and implemented by me. There is both freedom and fear in that realization. I am excited to take the project and the learning in the directions I hope for them, but I also crave a meeting where someone tells me “here’s where you go from here.”

I believe my next steps are as follows. I have received some feedback from Dr. Canivell on my outline. She has made 5 suggestions and I will work off of those to further explain my plan for learning about children’s literature and then specifying more clearly my role as the author of a children’s picture book about learning to accept our imperfections and progress over time. After completing this task, I will move forward in beginning to compile and obtain children’s literature to read and review. Perhaps a part of my proposal can be something along the lines of reading the last 10 years’ picture books that have won awards and writing a brief (1 paragraph, i.e.) reflection on each. Dr. Kindig, my professor for Children’s Literature and my thesis advisor, spoke in class yesterday about the importance of getting to know children’s books, especially the award winners and Dr. Canivell suggested I include this in my proposal as well. After all, they say if you are to be a proficient writer, you have to be an eager and constant reader, too. I can see this is true as I begin to write short stories for my fiction writing course this semester; some of the characters, ideas, and motivations within my stories reflect those that bubble up in novels I have recently read. I am reminded of the essay that Jay Varner, my non-fiction creative writing professor, had suggested I read entitled

“The Ecstasy of Influence.” While I still haven’t read it, perhaps it could do some justice in helping me learn how to be inspired by the children’s literature I will read throughout this project.

I have begun my story in a word document in which I track the changes as I go. I hope that doing so will make later conversations with my advisors more accessible and compelling. I have already realized that, as *Making Shapely Fiction* by Stern suggests authors often fall into the trap of doing, I have begun with unrelated characterization in the hopes of diving in. As you write, Stern says, you will begin to find that the action projects itself forth and the unnecessary exposition is easier to later see and extract.

I recognize that this is a process and that the manuscript I end up with in the coming months may just be entirely rejected. I will hopefully be able to remind myself that criticism is a part of the process, that no perfect story comes on the first try, and that I am using this experience to learn about writing and children. By researching how to write children’s literature, the psychology of children themselves, the use of children’s literature in the classroom, the process of learning to read, and the creative writing process, I am sure to grow closer to that goal.

*February 16, 2015:*

Well, today I completed my first draft of the story I think I am going to be working with for this thesis. I found my inspiration after reading *Just Ducks!* by Nicola Davies and doing a critical review of it for my Children’s Literature course. Looking at other critical reviews reminded me that these stories can be challenging

to pen, but that the stories we have in us are begging to be told! I'm excited about what I have so far, because I feel I have the child's eye at the center; my main character/protagonist, Little Monkey Caroline, is confused about what mL's are on the measuring cups, for example. Another way the story follows a child's heart is by revolving around having big dreams to work with your parents, especially in the kitchen. How many little children do we all know who love to help bake? I know I did as a child, as do many of my younger cousins.

What can be successful with this draft is the themes: family, perseverance, and dreaming big. Again, I hope I'm communicating these themes in a genuine way, rather than squandering them in the midst of a more forced lesson learned.

Today as I was writing, I realized that Little Monkey Caroline is me! They say write what you know and as I was working on some of the dialogue of Caroline's frustration with the cake not turning out like she wants, I heard my own voice ringing out. A flashback to a recent experience trying to make icing for cupcakes with the help of my more experienced baking friend Katie came to mind. I was using a hand mixer (which I'm not used to at all!) and was frustrated and down on myself about how it didn't seem to be working perfectly right away. Katie reminded me that I'm not a bad baker at all and, with time and a bit of extra water added to the bowl, my frosting turned out just fine!

Finally, I'm wondering about the length of my manuscript. I know the typical picture book is 32 pages long and I'm wondering where my rhyming couplets fall (I've yet to count them). I also wonder if the story starts too slow and rushes to an

ending too fast. With more revisions and discussions with outside help (like my thesis advisers and my further research on children's picture books), I'm sure to improve this draft in ways that will bring it to its best form.

*August 5, 2015*

I am now in the stage of working on the critical reviews of books that have won the Charlotte Zolotow award, scouring local libraries and discounted book stores to try to locate them. Today I read "Pictures from our Vacation" by Perkins and found it does a good job of presenting a story that has a deeper meaning without being forceful about the lesson a reader is supposed to learn. I would do well to implement Perkins' style of keeping the text relevant to the details kids would notice as a story unfolds while also adding in a spattering of new vocabulary for their learning. Earlier in the summer, I read the start I have for a book about a young monkey learning to cook with her dad in the kitchen again. This time, I chose my younger sister (13 years old) as my reluctant audience; she seemed to think there was definitely work to be done, and hearing the book aloud, I agreed. One thing I think I need to recognize is that the book can have more than one or two sentences per page. Thus far, the 32 page limitation, along with my attempt to keep a rhyming manuscript, has kept my story sparse and a bit muddled. Clarity will be important and I need to work on that! I came up with the idea today to rewrite my manuscript each time I read a new book for a critical review, so that I might eventually have 10+ different versions to meld together to create the best aspects of what I've learned from each text. I will start on the rewrite for today's critical

review now. I am still excited about this project and curious to see in what direction I end up taking the story.

*August 15, 2015:*

Today I read *Big Red Lollipop* by Rukhsana Khan and began to work on my rewrite based on it. I'm currently pressed for time, so I won't be finishing it up today, but what I've learned from reading her book is to make sure the conflict in my story is tangible yet believable and to be specific with details to which young readers can anchor their understanding of the story. I've started to consider making my story have an actual recipe within it, perhaps included in the back, and have some cultural context as well, just as Khan's clearly did. Perhaps I could tie in my Italian culture? I also am wondering if I want to continue to have a zoomorphic story or if using human characters could make my manuscript come across as more sophisticated and worthy. I am excited to feel as though each rewrite brings new ideas and elements to improve my manuscript and after just 1 and a half rewrites, I can see big improvements and big weaknesses that still need some work.

*August 18, 2015:*

Today I finished up my rewrite of *A Mess in the Kitchen* based on my reading of *Big Red Lollipop*. I then performed a critical review of *Each Kindness*, which had received ample praise in the Children's Literature course I took last semester and which is, according to the laudable book cover, a highly awarded text. I found the story line to be one that is mostly believable, but Woodson's ability to teach the lesson of "Chloe, you should have been kind" didn't happen naturally. I was

disappointed that the (though beautiful and philosophical) lesson had to come from the teacher and be given with such direct force in the story. I was also upset to learn that Woodson did not create a space for Chloe to display what she had learned. Instead, the book ended with a melancholy tone that made me say aloud, “Wow! That was a sad book.” I think this sort of text would be better for older kids because the lesson is so deep. I would like to emulate Woodson’s sense of setting and characterization (what time of year the story takes place and who the character’s friends and family are were all clearly drawn out) in my own story. Having spent this summer (which is near closing!) at home with family in Pittsburgh, I searched for the ten books I had on my critical review list and was only able to come up with the three I have read and reviewed. I may need to adjust my list in the future, but am hoping to look for the texts I need at the Green Valley Book Fair and the downtown and JMU libraries in the coming semester. I am beginning to wonder if, when I do the manuscript rewrites, I need to start from the first one again or if I can begin to build the rewrites off of one another, as I really do believe they are improving with each new effort. While my timeline is a bit behind, I am hopeful for the beginning of my research paper portion of the thesis to provide me more scholastic backing and insight and am eager to continue working on the critical reviews and manuscript rewrites, as thus far they have been inspirational and helpful beyond what I’d anticipated.

*December 29, 2015:*

I am working today on looking at various textbooks on children's literature to inform my contextual essay about what makes a book quality children's literature. It is funny how the more that I read ideas (like using repetitive language or connector words or having students build their own stories based on yours) I consider new possibilities for the picture book manuscript. I also tabbed through a list of 100 of the best children's books of all time today, as defined by Time magazine. I can see the variety and the substantive quality that seems to be evident in most of the texts; they seem to be either heartfelt and meaningful or funny and actively engaging. I plan to go for the more heartfelt side with my manuscript; in learning more today about Rosenblatt's theory of reader response, I think more serious or moral lessons are more closely aligned with how I construct my story's "poem" (meaning pulled out of a book), though it will be in part up to my reader to decide what meaning the book holds! I have also discovered that many of the books I need from the Charlotte Zolotow awards are available at the downtown Harrisonburg library; I would not, quite honestly, have assumed that to be such a useful resource, but it is able to provide me with some of these texts. I intend to write two more critical reviews and edits this winter break, on *Sparky* and *My Best Friend*.

This semester I've also had a chance to work downtown in Harrisonburg at *Second Home*. I am writing today in the contextual essay about reader response theory, and thinking of how much my students there took to books like "*Flik's Invention*," which was a book based on characters from *A Bug's Life*! It may not

have been the most literarily engaging or have had the most quality, but for the 8 and 9 year old boys I read it to, there was plenty to fall in love with, from the pictures of the inventions to inquiry into what materials were being used. I am seeing firsthand how certain books will get a student's attention just by virtue of being about something they happen to be interested in. I also see my students fight one another for Diary of a Wimpy Kid books, and am thus able to recognize the role of humor in making a story magnetic for students. Perhaps I should try my hand at being a witty Wittkopp in my own manuscript...I have more work to come, but I am still excited for the road ahead and what will come of my finished product! I can see strong possibility for all of the learning I have done at JMU (about students, teaching, literacy, and creative writing) to come together to create something of which I can be really proud.

*January 10, 2016:*

Wow! Today's rewrite (the one after Sparky!) was taxing! I find that the more elements I am trying to draw in from really reputable children's books, the more challenging I find the actual writing. I think I've also come to realize with the critical reviews that some of the manuscripts, while only 32 pages, still have a significant amount of text on each page. I've started, because of this, to lengthen the manuscript of A Mess in the Kitchen. Today, I tried to particularly work on characterization of Caroline, the perfectionistic Monkey, and to liven up my dialogue and diction. I added in a scene where Caroline walks away from the kitchen and tried to make a few of her mistakes more evident and more dramatic by

her Dad's reaction. I also found there were ways to easily integrate setting into the manuscript, by adding images like the sun setting to alert readers that it is dinner time. I feel that over time, my drafts are getting increasingly more elaborate and that the more I allow myself to stray even slightly from the original manuscript, the more creativity I begin to breed. From here on out, I may not even reference the original with the rewrites...in creative writing in high school, my teacher Mr. Ketch used to tell us that if we forgot a draft at home, it was not an excuse not to be able to work on our writing. He said that if you can't see the original, you're more likely to only remember the best parts of it anyway in your rewrite. That is what I'm envisioning for my rewrites from here on out. I'm also still toying with the idea of making Caroline a human...having her as a monkey is nice in that it allows her to be less obviously a representation of our human concern with being good at everything, but it is also "random" in some way to choose her to be a monkey since there is no relationship between such sophisticated cooking and monkeying around. Perhaps even that colloquial understanding ("Monkeying around") is the opposite of the characterization of a somewhat uptight child like I'm trying to craft Caroline into being. A better fitting animal might be one people associate with sophistication and wisdom, like an owl. I will continue to toy with trying out different forms for Caroline to take as I continue revisions.

I'm also finding that the rhyming at the ends of lines is very difficult. There are times when the first line I write seems like it flows well, but then I realize I can't find much to rhyme with "dinner" or "table." Writing with couplets is nice in

that it pulls in the speech patterns and rhythms that will help young readers develop a sense of language (and since poetry is my preferred writing mode), but it also certainly presents its share of challenges.

Coming in to my last semester starting tomorrow, I'm still excited to see where the manuscripts and contextual essay end up going. With all of the aspects of learning I have done at JMU, the greatest lesson I believe I'm taking away is to know yourself and others and to be kind in light of the truths you find in doing those things. I believe that by crafting a story that gives kids permission to try and mess up and try again, I am writing to the younger versions of me, the future honors program types, if you will, and reminding them that the journey is just as much the reward as the final product. My aunt Julia once got me a necklace that read "The journey is the reward." Perhaps in writing, and in learning to cook in the kitchen, and in learning what you need to know and do to be an adult, you're really being rewarded all along. Because what a journey it all is becoming.

*January 19, 2016:*

Well, today I read *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Dawalt. One of my coworkers just happened to bring it into Second Home (the afterschool program where I work) and set it in front of me to read. I'd heard her raving about it earlier in the week; I read it today and can see why. I love the way that each page is from a new character's perspective and that there is attitude, sass, and distinct voice for each crayon who is upset with Duncan. Wonderful reminder, in my own writing, to

stick with topics kids can relate to (I'm still wondering if cooking is the right answer) and to keep my characters strong in personal voice.

*March 7, 2016*

It's crazy to see how my thesis is really coming along! I've only got about 5 more rewrites to do and four more critical reviews. When all is said and done, I plan to print out the 10 drafts and highlight the bits and pieces I find to be the best from each. Though the work on this manuscript has felt a bit disjointed, I think it will be the most meaningful to watch that final piece happen. Right now, I'm on spring break, so I hope to finish a new critical review and it's re-write each day this week so that by the week's end, I am done with all of the drafts of everything-the contextual essay included. I'm excited to think that I'll have had the chance to, in some way, study under each of these learned and expert picture book writers. In my advanced poetry writing class a few years ago, we had an "apprenticeship" project in which we were to select a poet and study their work thoroughly and then try to emulate their writing styles and subject matter in our own work. I found it near to impossible to select just one poet-so I didn't do the project as I'd been told. Instead, I convinced my professor to let my final chapbook be a conglomeration of various influences from poet's throughout the semester. I believe I've taken on a similar premise in my work on this thesis. There is no one children's book author I hope to embody most (except, perhaps, myself, my own pen, my own writing style.) But by reading the works of many others who are considered awarded and laudable in this field, I begin to process (consciously and on a sub-conscious level) what it is that

makes a certain picture book writing distinctive. I have even seen the world of creativity take on its always mystifying power lately when I wrote an essay for my advanced creative non-fiction class about water. I happened to have the *Water Rolls, Water Rises* picture book from the library and, instead of honing in on my thesis with it, used a line from the text that particularly inspired me as the first section to a lyrical essay on water and faith. It's incredible how I did not intend, necessarily, to see those two creative projects play into one another, but they wound their way together anyway. I'm excited to see how the project winds itself into a completed manuscript in these final weeks, especially considering how I hope to do a faster paced intensive on the creative side here toward the end. The idea has been there for a while and the importance of the message keeps re-surfacing in my life in various ways: my first days at a new job, my 101st days at that same job, my friendships, my schoolwork, etc: we have to be willing to see that we will not do everything perfectly the first time and that we can safeguard against messes and clean up after the ones we make and that sometimes, a beautiful (and yummy!) product is the result. I believe in the message of this picture book, and while my first rewrites always feel a bit stilted and stifled and strange, I know that when I am able to take the step back to see how all of the pieces have come together over the last few months, I will have something solid to at least work from and be proud of going forward.

*March 12, 2016*

I completed another re-write today, this one inspired by the specificity and alliteration evidenced by Melissa Stewart's *Under the Snow*. I think I was also influenced, in part, by the Reading for Virginia Educators exam I took this morning, which reminded me of the importance of students knowing the sequence of events in a story, which baking seems to lend itself to. A third inspiration came from my own cooking and baking experiences this week! In fact, as I was on spring break and home, I made banana bread and a chicken broccoli alfredo dish. I'm usually not very confident in my cooking abilities, but I found recipes and, with some quick calls home to check if I was doing things correctly, set to work. I was actually very pleased with how my food turned out (and others were, too!). It was a great reminder that the lesson of *A Mess in the Kitchen* could resonate with readers of all ages, not just elementary schoolers. Plus, having made a banana bread, I finally put the connection together that if Caroline, my main character, is going to be a monkey, it only makes sense for her bread to be a banana bread! It seems so obvious I can't believe I hadn't thought of it before now.

In today's rewrite, I did something radical compared to my previous rewrites: I wrote in prose. Perhaps the task of finding rhyming words for each line seemed daunting today or perhaps I was tired of writing in that same format and wanted to see if I could gain richer details in the prose format. I am refraining from reading all of the re-writes until I have completed them all so that I can see what turned out well and what could be reworked from their accumulated versions in the end of the process. I am getting ever more anxious to reach that step and see what I've really

been “cooking up” (no pun intended) throughout the course of this thesis. Just three more critical reviews and 5 more rewrites to go. I also began thinking as I was writing today about the elements of literature that tie in with child development that I have written about in the contextual essay. I am considering seeing if any of these are pertinent to my rewrites when I revise that final version. Maybe, as is also inspired by my recent studying of appropriate teaching techniques for literacy, it would also benefit me to create a revision checklist for myself ahead of time, so that I can verify that I’m including those elements that I researched to be quality aspects of literature in my own writing. This will help tie the various components of this project together more closely and verify that my creative work is not “all for not.” I’m disappointed that my change in thesis committee composition (in conjunction with the timeline with which things actually unfolded with this project) will likely mean I won’t be ready/supported in actually taking my manuscripts on to a publishing company, as had been an idea from Dr. Kindig at the outset. If nothing else, though, this process has humbled me into seeing that I still have a lot to learn before I’d be ready to publish! Perhaps I can use this thesis and the many manuscript revisions I will have at a later time down the line in my life and end up publishing *A Mess in the Kitchen* as more than just a children’s literature thesis in the stacks of Carrier Library! It’s exciting to dream of what could come...much like monkey Caroline does.

*March 28, 2016*

Making some real headway on my thesis now. I just finished another rewrite and now only have three rewrites and one critical review to go before I put the accumulated version together into my final manuscript! It's been exciting to see the feedback I have received from friends and loved ones, although I know not to get too biased by their perspectives. Still, when I do decide to share my work, it is good to know that there are people who seem genuinely impressed. Writing can sometimes feel challenging; you fumble through a story, seeking new and fresh ways to say something that you imagine has been said a million times before. You are trying to create something unique and original and are trying to tell a story that can capture a reader's heart and give them something to think on further as they learn and grow in life. It is a big task to carry! I am a bit concerned as to what the final manuscript process will entail. At this point, I know that there are certain lines or sections of certain versions that stand out as my best work, but I'm not sure how seamlessly those disjointed pieces of different versions will fit together in my final effort. I find that I am coming, though, in these more recent versions to know my characters and story well; I do not even reread my original manuscript anymore when I start a rewrite. I simply focus on the elements I had identified as quality in the book in my critical review that I am trying to replicate and begin to tell the story. In getting listless with writing it as a rhyming piece and a non-rhyming piece, I have begun varying to fit the different voices of the books and to keep myself from getting bored of the story or from repeating very similar versions multiple times. I find that I can hear echoes of the stories I have read in my writing and I am excited

to see how the final product pulls together. I remember having a professor fall semester for a science class who said it would be hard for us to see what overall learning we were doing during the semester because we were “in the weeds.” By this, he meant that we were bogged down in new learning, but hadn’t yet come up for air to see how the whole picture looked together. I think I am nearing the end of my time “in the weeds” on this thesis, but I have yet to see the entire project come together. I have a feeling, however, that when I see that there have been various influences in my writing from my life and these awarded books and my coursework over the past four years at JMU, I will wind up with a bulk of work I can look back on with pride, seeing the combination of various facets of my life presented in one final project. What a sweet day it will be when I can put forward a final manuscript that reflects all of these smaller steps toward the final project. I hope to spend my next chunk of time working on the more logistical aspects of the thesis, such as the poster and some edits on the contextual essay. That way, I can continue with my creative flow over the next few days and see the entirety of the project come together by Monday. I have called upon the talents of a SMAD major friend of mine to come help me with the poster design, and I will be attending a workshop session on this in the next few days as well. There is still much to be done, but I am confident that I am nearing the final steps of this overall thesis project and that I will be proud of my final manuscript, essay, poster, and journal.

## Implications for Creative Project

The writing of “A Mess in the Kitchen” came initially from a personal experience, as seems to be the case with many texts that are meaningful to their authors and readers. The story came when I was a 21 year old junior in college, right around the commencement of this thesis project. With little confidence in myself when it came to anything related to baking, but the dream of whipping up some red velvet cupcakes whirling around in my head, I scampered through my house to find my good friend Katie, who I knew was an experienced and skilled baker. Following the instructions on the box and watching her demonstrate how to use a handheld mixer, I eventually wound up with a delicious product. Along the way, though, I questioned and doubted my abilities. (Thoughts like “Should I be mixing this longer?” and “Is it supposed to look like that?” and “My frosting looks terrible, but that’s okay.” whirled through my mind.) Katie, being the encouraging person she is, continued to reassure me and remind me that since I was new to baking, I wasn’t supposed to know how to do everything quite yet. Those reassurances stuck with me and ended up translated into a story concept for a young girl learning to cook with her dad in A Mess in the Kitchen.

Now, as a 22 year old senior in college, I am still not 100% confident in my abilities with frosting and batter. I learned from Katie, however, that when we reflect on the messes made along the way, true learning occurs. I believe this message has gotten lost in the stir of high stakes standardized assessments and grades of “F” written atop the papers of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in my practicum classrooms. It

is my hope that *A Mess in the Kitchen* serves to support the theme that perfection is not to be expected on anyone's first attempt at anything. I believe children today need to learn to persevere through hardships and mistakes without losing faith in themselves. As Dad reminds Caroline in one draft of the manuscript, when we first try something new: "there are bound to be some slips."

The theme of *A Mess in the Kitchen* fits well with some of the aims of children's literature in furthering child development included in A.1: Aspects of Children's Literature that Support Child Development in the Appendix. Those aims met with any of the manuscript versions I have written are denoted with an asterisk\*. Perhaps most importantly to me, I believe my story accomplishes what Norton (2003) says when she writes "literature can help young children discover the capabilities they have and realize that acquiring some skills takes considerable time," (p. 22). Additionally, in comparing her real experience in cooking to that on a television screen in some versions of the manuscript, Caroline, the main character, learns to work with unmet expectations and sees that reality is not always as glamorous as what is projected in media.

The messages evident in *A Mess in the Kitchen*, then, reflect my personal experiences and topics that are important to me. Still, the overarching theme of perseverance through adjusted expectations of self and experience is one that I hope can strike a chord with many readers. In an introductory text to the art of screenplay writing, Field (1979) draws conclusions about what makes a good character. What he unveils rings true in all aspects of writing and story-telling;

“What makes a good character? What *is* character? To find the answer, I needed to figure out what qualities we all have in common” (p. 63). The story of a young girl learning to cook with a parent is relatable and realistic in that it comes packed with lessons common to all people: learning to do something new and to give ourselves time to go through the process of learning. Thus, the character can be considered to embody, in the least, Fields’ definition of a good character. It is my hope that, in Caroline the Monkey’s trials, readers find themselves. I know I did.

The appendices A.2-A.13 to this contextual essay include the original manuscript, the ten revisions or rewrites composed after the writing of the ten critical reviews, and a final manuscript that serves as an accumulated, revised, and polished version of the best of each revision to tell the story of A Mess in the Kitchen.

## Conclusions

The knowledge of quality children's literature and its creation is integral to a teacher's ability to use it in her classroom to further her elementary students' educations. By noting the role of children's literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the components of quality children's literature, the audience for children's literature, and recently awarded children's literature, I have gained a comprehensive education on children's literature needed to inform the writing of my own manuscript for a children's picture book. In addition to this education, I have made use of researched "best practices" in creative writing to compose a personally meaningful story, *A Mess in the Kitchen*. This piece of children's literature surrounds the lesson of accepting the natural imperfections and mistakes that are part of the learning process. In-depth studies of creative writing and children's literature disciplines have thus combined with a story naturally germinated from real-life experience to result in the manuscript that serves as the creative product for this thesis.

This creative product and the process that allowed for its creation serve to further my understanding of children's literature. Overall, deeply understanding children's literature allows educators to use this impactful aspect of literacy in their classrooms effectively. Now that I have created this product in conjunction with working toward a deep and wide education on the disciplines of children's literature and creative writing that informed it, I am well equipped to use quality children's literature in my work as an elementary school educator.

## Appendix

### A.1 Aspects of Children’s Literature that Support Child Development

Area of Child Development	Aspects of Children’s Literature that Support Child Development
Language (p. 8-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes use of varied word types (pronouns, verb tenses, connectors, subordinators)*</li> <li>• Makes use of dialogue*</li> <li>• Makes use of rich vocabulary*</li> <li>• Has good pacing*</li> <li>• Makes use of repetitive language</li> <li>• Makes use of unexpected elements</li> <li>• Makes use of figurative language*</li> <li>• Makes use of language that inspires story building in readers (p. 8-10)</li> </ul>
Cognitive (p.10-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asks readers to remember, anticipate, and hypothesize about setting, contents, subject, plot, and characters</li> <li>• Asks readers to integrate their perceptions and develop concepts</li> <li>• Is stimulating</li> <li>• Requires and creates space for reasoning, reflection, questions and insight from readers</li> <li>• Asks readers to observe and group objects</li> <li>• Sparks curiosity, observational skills, knowledge of rules, and fantasy*</li> <li>• Makes use of sound and pattern*</li> <li>• Is detailed*</li> <li>• Is comparative in nature, whether between viewpoints, character journeys, aspects of life, themes, values, concrete details, or positive/negative aspects of events*</li> <li>• Is traditional or adapted</li> <li>• Has an intriguing title*</li> <li>• Is presented in an orderly fashion,</li> </ul>

	<p>whether that be sequential or chronological, with a repetition of sequence, or with events that lead to a solution that raise questions*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Links to content areas of study</li> <li>• Is humorous</li> <li>• Provides concrete examples of concepts*</li> <li>• Provides instructions</li> <li>• Is appropriate, reliable, valuable, and authentic*</li> </ul>
<p>Personality (p. 19-23)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models how to trust, be flexible, interact, and overcome fears in school and other new environments and when making friends</li> <li>• Normalizes a range of emotions and provides companionship and models for dealing healthily with such emotions*</li> <li>• Recognizes concerns about appearances, feelings, relationships, and thoughts*</li> <li>• Overcomes insecurity over “small”-ness</li> <li>• Pushes readers to look at situations and people beyond themselves</li> <li>• Includes animal characters*</li> <li>• Explores theme of facing fears</li> <li>• Includes characters who seek identity</li> <li>• Addresses the need for love</li> <li>• Addresses the dynamics of individuality versus conformity</li> <li>• Creates realistic and positive self-concepts*</li> <li>• Provides value, self-worth, and pride to the child through accomplishments, capabilities, and culture*</li> <li>• Showcases an acceptance of difference</li> <li>• Addresses the situations of new</li> </ul>

	<p>siblings, loss, death, divorce, and adoption</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotes creative problem-solving</li> <li>• Encourages dream pursuit*</li> <li>• Notes that skill building takes time*</li> <li>• Shows overcoming obstacles*</li> <li>• Explores survival</li> <li>• Suggests value of independence and uniqueness</li> </ul>
Social (p. 26-32)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaches significant and appropriate beliefs, values, and behaviors*</li> <li>• Demonstrates behavior regulation*</li> <li>• Looks to socialize for personal growth and social order through reward and punishment and observing and identifying with others</li> <li>• Represents many cultures and races and cross cultural experiences</li> <li>• Accepts, celebrates, and recognizes diversions from cultural identity</li> <li>• Promotes social skills and responsibilities, such as empathy and self-control*</li> <li>• Shows and emphasizes relationships with family, friends, mentors, and neighbors*</li> <li>• Discusses being different or unique</li> <li>• Considers social roles and breaks down stereotypes, including gender stereotypes</li> <li>• Presents diverse world-views</li> <li>• Counters prejudice</li> </ul>
Moral (p. 32-34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers right and wrong, with a movement from rigidity to flexibility in situational analysis</li> <li>• Presents parental examples*</li> <li>• Discusses consequences, or rules</li> </ul>

	<p>and rewards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considers reasons for following expectations, such as need for approval and allegiance to maintenance of order</li> <li>• Presents developmentally appropriate crises and their complementary moral decisions and reasoning*</li> </ul>
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## A.2 Original Manuscript

Little (adj?) monkey Caroline had a lot of favorite things.

She liked to climb. She liked to paint. She even liked to sing!

But most Most of all, Caroline liked to imagine herself in the kitchen with her  
MamaDad. (the cadence/rhythm here already feels off)

So one day, she asked “Can we please cook together today?” with her toothy grin all  
glad.

She pictured herself dressed up like the chefs she had seen on tv screens.

They wore tall hats and coats as white as the clouds that held her cooking dreams.

So one day, she asked “Can we bake in the kitchen?”

But Dad only handed Caroline an apron and said “Wear this to protect your  
dress...”

He chuckled as he added “...because we might just make a mess!”

While Caroline wondered where her fancy chef coat was,

Dad was busy taking food out of the refridgeratorrefrigerator as it buzzed.

Then he reached in the cabinets for some plastic cups with lines.

“To help us do our measuring,” he said, “these will do just fine.”

Caroline investigated the cups and the numbers with their little m’s beside big L’s.

hat had numbers and “m-L’s.

“How many MULs will we need?” she asked, sounding it out, “how can a chef tell?”

Dad looked confused then started to chuckle and laugh.

“Milliliters” he corrected, “we need 100 and a half.”

Then Dad gave Caroline a mighty tricky job.

“Put these ingredients together. Make it soupy-not a blob!”

But Caroline stirred for a while and couldn’t get it right.

That wooden spoon spun in the bowl in circles with all her monkey might!

“I can’t do it!” Caroline called out, “It looks yucky and no good.”

“Don’t give up quite yet,” Dad said, “before you even see if you could.”

Then they worked together, Dad giving Caroline some tips.

He said, “It’s your first time baking, there are bound to be some slips!”

Then when the cake came out and they were done with all they had to pour,  
measure, taste, and mix,

Dad hugged little monkey Caroline and said “See, sweets are so fun to fix!”

Then Caroline agreed and took her first bite of the cake.

She became a chef that day, but a chef’s hat and coat were the next thing she hoped  
to make!

Mama, drama, comma, diorama, Obama, osama, llama, pajama,

Mom: tom, psalm, balm, calm,

Dad: bad, sad, lad, mad, tad, clad, fad, glad, had,

L: bell, sell, dell, fell, gel, tell, well”

Was: does, buzz,

### **A.3 Revision after Big Red Lollipop**

Young Caroline wanted to try so many things.

She hoped to paint and hoped to dance and hoped to learn to sing.

She had always been thrilled to think of cooking with her dad.

So one day she came home from school with her toothy grin all glad.

She imagined chopping and mixing in a chef's hat-white and clean.

She asked her Dad "Can we cook today like I've always dreamed?"

He agreed and handed her an apron to cover her dress.

"Wear this, Caroline," he said, "because we might make a mess!"

Caroline frowned as she wondered where her chef coat could be.

But Dad just pulled out ingredients and said, "Here's salt, pepper, and onions, see?"

Dad showed Caroline how to use the knife and measure in cups and spoons.

He said "We'll get to the cooking very soon!"

As they began, Caroline felt like she just couldn't get it right.

Still, she was giving the chopping and mixing all of her might.

"I can't do it!" she admitted, "It looks like it won't taste good!"

But Dad said "Don't give up before you even see if you could."

Dad and Caroline continued as he offered her some tips.

"Just remember, it's your first time cooking; there are bound to be some slips."

Still, Caroline was worried it wouldn't turn out right.

Dad popped their meal into the oven and turned on the light.

They waited as it cooked and began to clean the mess.

“See, aren’t you glad you wore that apron to cover up your dress?”

Soon the oven dinged to say the food was ready now.

They pulled it out with oven mitts and Caroline shrieked “Wow!”

Looking at the food they’d cooked she couldn’t help but beam.

She took a bite and smiled “I’m keeping my cooking dream!”

#### **A.4 Revision after Each Kindness**

Trying to emulate: poetic prose, instills an important lesson about respect,

impactful

Caroline was a monkey, the kindest you could find. She had a dreamer’s mind and wanted to be any and everything a monkey could be in Monkeytown: a doctor, a musician, and, most recently, a baker. She dreamed of whipping up cupcakes, brownies, and banana bread. These thoughts whirled through her monkey head as she woke from bed and dashed to her dad in the dining room. “Dad!” she called up to him at the table. “Yes?” he asked, from over the newspaper in his hand. He saw her eager smile. “What is it you’ve got planned for today?” “I want to be a baker, the best you’ve ever seen!” she said. “Okay,” said Dad, and put the newspaper down. He headed to the kitchen and looked through cabinets for a bowl and pan. “We have to gather ingredients, that’s how we start the plan!” They munched up browning bananas and mixed up sugar and flour. It took a little while, but nowhere near an hour and then they started to pour, but a problem came to be. As they poured, Caroline spilled batter right on the recipe! “Oh no, I’ve made a mess!” she cried, “I’m

horrible, no good.” “Now Caroline,” Dad said, “you know that isn’t true. You made a little mess. Now what do we do? Well, we clean it up and then carry on our way. Remember, you won’t be perfect the first time you ever try.” So they cleaned up the mess and Caroline dried up her tears. Then she poured the rest of the batter into the pan and placed it in the oven. Forty minutes went by, and a burning smell floated through the kitchen air like a bee buzzing in wide orbits. “Oh no!” Caroline whined. She opened the oven door in haste and found a black banana bread, burnt to a crisp. An oven mitt over her hand, she pulled it out. “Dad!” she called, and began to cry again. “I can’t do it! I can’t do it at all! I’m not a good baker. I mess it all up!” They tossed the burnt bread into the trash and Dad got the ingredients out again. “We just have to start again!” They went through the baking steps again, mashing bananas and mixing flour and sugar in the bowl. They added chocolate chips this time while Dad said “I think we need something that makes it a little sweeter!” When the oven dinged this time, about 20 minutes later, the kitchen smelled sweet and delectable. “It smells delicious Caroline!” Dad called out the window to Caroline, who was running around in the backyard. “It does?” she asked. She ran inside fast, and they cut a few slices. They took a bite or two, and smiled huge. “Wow! I’m impressed, Baker Caroline,” Dad said. “It’s not bad...I guess...” said Caroline. “Caroline! It’s wonderful! Think about how hard you worked and how well it turned out!” Caroline took another bite. “But I made so many messes on the way!” she said. “But you made this bread in the end,” Dad said. “Life is full of messes, but we can always clean them up and keep trying. You have to believe in

yourself, Caroline. You're a hardworking little monkey and you've done very well! A mess in the kitchen or two doesn't mean your dream didn't come true. Here, have another bite!" Caroline took another bite and said "Maybe you're right. It's not so bad. Thank you, Dad, for being there, for helping me, even when the first batch didn't work out. I'm sorry I made the mess in the kitchen, but I'm glad it turned out tasty." Dad smiled and hugged her as he said, "You're a baker, Caroline, but you're a dreamer, too. Just remember, even in the messes, there's nothing you can't do!"

#### **A.5 Revision after Pictures from Our Vacation**

Young and curious monkey Caroline wanted to try out many things. She wanted to rock climb. She wanted to paint. She wanted to fly a kite's string. (Oof...needs work on pacing)

But this particular winter day she yearned to try to cook. She found herself scouring her dad's set of recipe books.

She knew she'd need a little help with cooking from her dad. So she asked him, "Can we cook today?" with her toothy grin all glad.

Dad was thrilled his little girl wanted to try his greatest passion. He said her very own chef's apron would be her newest fashion.

As she put the apron on, she imagined chefs she'd seen on tv screens.

They wore hats tall enough to reach the clouds that held her many dreams.

Dad explained to Caroline, "Every good chef wears an apron to protect their favorite dresses."

He added, "That's because they know all cooks sometimes make big messes!"

Dad took some ingredients out of the refrigerator that always hummed and buzzed.

He asked Caroline to find where the big wooden spatula was.

So they scoured the kitchen for everything they'd need.

Caroline had a feeling as a cook she would succeed.

They portioned out the dry ingredients in little cups with lines.

Some spilled onto the counters, but Dad said, "Don't worry, Chef, it's fine!"

Then he delegated to Caroline a mighty tricky job.

"Mix these all together. Make it soupy-not a blob!"

Caroline stirred until she felt her arm muscles quake.

"Dad! It's getting clumpy!" she said, knowing she'd made a mistake.

She felt so upset with herself because she couldn't get it right.

She'd given it her best-tryed with all her monkey might.

She cried out "This is such a mess that I can't even pour it in the pan!"

But Dad just smiled and said "You can do it, Chef, you can!"

Dad lent her his strength, stirring while he shared some cooking tips.

"You know," he said, "on your first time cooking there are bound to be some slips."

With the food in the oven, they washed the tools they'd used to mix.

Dad nudged "See, cooking can be tough but home cooked meals are so fun to fix!"

When they pulled the food out of the oven, it was steaming and hot.

Caroline cooled it, tried it, smiled, and then had a wonderful thought.

"I became a cook today!" she beamed up at Dad.

But then she saw the mess they'd made and felt a little sad.

"You sure did!" Dad said, and added, "Don't worry! We'll clean this mess up in no time at all..."

...and if I ever need a cook around here, I now know who to call."

### **A.6 Revision after My Best Friend**

Attempting to replicate: Child's mindset portrayed through actions and dialogue, short and quick sentence structure, figurative language, symbolism

Caroline was a monkey. She was a dreamer, too.

She dreamed of everything in the world that she could try to do.

She wished to be an astronaut, circling the moon.

She wished to be a singer, to carry to a pretty tune.

She wished to be the president, to carry out the laws.

She wished to be a nurse, patching up wounds with gauze.

But today was a new day and Caroline had a new dream.

She looked up at her Dad and a smile beamed.

"Let's bake!" she said and pulled his sleeve.

"Oh pretty pretty please?"

Dad agreed and got the ingredients ready.

"When you bake, you have to keep your hands steady."

So he handed her a spoon, a beautiful wooden tool.

"Do your best," Dad said, "That is the only rule."

Then he told her to mix and stir as he leveled out the batter.

She spilled a bit and looked up frowning, but he said “It doesn’t matter.”

So Caroline kept on working and stirred faster and faster, too.

Then batter flew up onto the ceiling-a yellow, sticky goo.

“Oh no!” Caroline cried, “I’m no good at this.”

Dad handed her a towel and gave her cheek a kiss.

“Relax,” he said and helped her clean, “it’s not a big deal.”

Caroline started to sob and thought “That’s not how it *feels*.”

She wanted to be perfect, to be a baking star.

She wanted her famous banana bread to make it very far.

Caroline imagined giving her pals a taste of her bread.

“Amazing!” “Delicious!” “Wonderful!” She figured they would have said.

But now she couldn’t have her dream because the batter had flung all around.

There was batter on the counter, on the ceiling, on the ground.

“I hate this!” Caroline proclaimed and started to leave the kitchen.

“You can’t give up just yet!” Dad said “This is your dream-don’t ditch it.”

He smiled and said to try again, so Caroline gave it a try.

She sniffed back her tears and hoped she wouldn’t start to cry.

Then they finished all the mixing and poured the batter in the pan.

It baked until it came out a pretty golden tan.

“Now we try it,” Dad said, when the timer went ding!

It was so delicious that Caroline began to sing.

She sang “Sometimes I make a mess, but that is okay

I can bake banana bread that tastes great anyway!”

They ate their slices and cleaned the kitchen and then took the bread outside.

Caroline served it to the passing neighbors with a smile full of pride.

“This bread is perfect” Miss Suzy said as she took a big bite.

“Making it wasn’t perfect,” Caroline mumbled. “But in the end, it turned out right!”

So Caroline kept on baking and looked toward her other dreams with a smile.

And if she makes a mess, she says “Messses happen once in a while.”

Because a mess in the kitchen sometimes happens when she bakes

but a dream (and some banana bread) is what she really makes.

### **A.7 Revision after Sparky**

Little monkey Caroline had a slew of favorite things. (brings, dings, clings, fling, king, ping,...)

She loved to climb, enjoyed a swim, and even ponged some pings.

Caroline’s many dreams? Well, they never seemed to stop.

She always wanted to be the greatest: the monkey at the top!

Caroline was “awfully talented” (or so most teachers said). (read, red, led, instead, bread, fed, ahead)

“She’s lovely!” “She’s a gem!” they praised: “She’s always far ahead!”

But one day, a new big dream took hold of Caroline’s heart.

“I want to be a chef,” she said. “Today’s the day I’ll start.”

She pictured herself like the chefs who cooked on her TV. (be, fee, free, gee, glee, he, me)

They mixed and sliced and sautéed and she said “That will be me!”

Caroline knew chefs wore tall hats as white as clouds.

They cooked in front of audiences. Their food drew massive crowds.

But cooking in her kitchen was in no way the same deal.

Dad only gave Caroline an apron as they started to make their meal.

“You have to wear an apron,” he said, “It’s to protect your dress.”

He chuckled as he added, “...because we just might make a mess!”

Then he reached into their cabinets for some plastic cups with lines.

“To help with measuring the oil, these will do just fine!”

Caroline investigated the numbers and the m’s and l’s.

“How much do we need?” she asked, because she surely couldn’t tell.

“It’s on the recipe,” Dad said, and placed it on the countertop.

Caroline dumped the oil, but it spilled, and Dad yelled “STOP!”

“You don’t need that much,” he said, wiping up the spill.

“Just look at the lines and then slowly pour to fill.”

Caroline tried again and this time poured too little.

Dad said “Look at the 100 mL line; it’s right there in the middle.”

The time had come for seasoning with salts and spices galore.

With messy hands and still no food, cooking began to feel like a chore.

Caroline tried to help by putting the vegetables in the pan.

“Never touch the food,” Dad said, “unless you’ve washed your hands!”

Then he asked her to check if the oven’s timer was set.

But the buttons were too high for her to reach just yet.

“I can’t do it!” Caroline exclaimed and started to sigh.

She began to think she’d never be a chef. She almost cried.

Then she looked at the mess of dishes waiting in the silver sink. (blink, clink, dink, rink, mink, think)

She sighed. She frowned. She started to think.

“This isn’t any fun,” she said. “I’m no good anyway.”

“That’s not true!” Dad said. “As a chef, it’s just your first day.”

He said he’d finish up her creation and that she should go play outside. (bride, cried, died, fried, hide)

Her neighbors said if she would seek, they’d be the ones to hide.

But Caroline could not forget how bad she’d been at cooking.

She wiped away a few quick tears when the hidiers weren’t looking.

As the sun was setting, Dad called Caroline inside because it was time to eat. (meet, greet, pete, feet,

She thought My food will be so gross. I bet it’ll smell like feet!

But as she neared the kitchen door she caught a whiff of the meal she’d made.

(braid, frayed, glade, laid, made, paid, prayed, raid, stayed)

Then she saw the food and wished she had stayed.

“I’m sorry I gave up so soon on our amazing meal!”

“It’s hard to learn something new,” Dad said, “I know how you feel.”

Caroline bit with a smile into the food they’d worked hard to create.

“You may not be a TV chef,” Dad said, “but this is pretty great!”

When dinner finished, Dad cleared the plates from the table top.

“I know you wanted to give up, but when you have a dream, never stop!

You’re my little monkey Caroline, so just always try your best.

Remember, sometimes half the fun in the kitchen is making the mess.”

### **A.8 Revision after Water Rolls, Water Rises**

Components I am trying to emulate in this draft: a lyrical quality, dense semantics,  
but elongated syntax

She was a monkey who loved many things with all her heart, all her soul.

Climbing, painting, acting out every role.

Bigger and more powerful than any dream that Monkey Caroline had  
was the one that replayed always: cooking with her dad.

So she finally requested that time to perfect her culinary skill

“I’ll make dinner tonight,” she promised, “I will.”

Her father’s mind: careful, preoccupied.

He handed her an apron, he sighed.

“Wear this apron to protect your dress”

but a smile spread on his face like jam when he added “we might make a mess”

So they set to work, measuring like chemists, precise,

but Caroline knocked over the flour-twice.

A mess rained onto the kitchen floor like drops from the skies

and Caroline held back tears in her dimly lit eyes,

for the hope she had held in her heart at the start  
was withering away like a rusting shopping cart.  
Caroline whimpered, cried, and looked up.  
But her father just kept filling measuring cups.  
She scooted her chair and swung herself to the counter to see  
and her father bent down to help on one knee.  
“See, we just have to pay close attention to the amounts”  
“because when it comes to cooking-every drop counts!”  
They mixed in quick circles-a merry go-round  
they pounded and rolled the dough flat as the ground  
they stretched and pulled and kneaded it too  
until finally, her dad said “Caroline, we are through”  
and the oven was hot as flame from a fire  
they set the temperature, then rose it up higher.  
Setting the oven onto the top rack  
Dad said “The air in here is fiery-please step back”  
While the dough rose and lowered like a sleeping old man  
Dad said to “clean up the kitchen however you can!”  
So they set to work wiping, sudsing, and spraying  
Cooking felt a lot more like work than like playing  
but when the oven timer finally sang out to tell them their dish was ready to be  
munched

Monkey Caroline could barely wait for the air to cool it-so she crunched.

“ow!” she shrieked as her tongue bumped and bit back with a sting

she said “That hot pizza is a mean old thing!”

The dirty dishes screamed from the sink that they needed to get clean

Caroline uttered “A mess in the kitchen, huh Dad? I see what you mean!”

But the dishes sat quiet and clean and content

and the pizza had chilled out with cold air from the vent

so they finally ate-that pizza juicy and sweet

they finally ate-dough, cheese, and pepperoni meat.

As they threw out the crumbs and cleaned up their plates

Caroline said “I’m glad we made dinner, I’m glad we could wait

because cooking in the kitchen was a bit of a mess

and yes I needed that apron to keep clean my dress

but what I loved best? well it’s easy to say

I made some mistakes along the way,

but when the oven dinged and my meal was complete

I was the proudest chef-who also couldn’t wait to eat!”

### **A.9 Revision after Under the Snow**

Attempting to emulate: Focus on detailed specificity, strong diction, description, and creative language choices (ex: alliteration)

There was once a young dark haired monkey named Caroline, who lived with her charming mother and skilled father in a lovely little home.

Every summer, Caroline dreamed of becoming some new and amazing thing: a darling dancer, a powerful president, a thrilling theater director.

On this day in particular, Caroline's dreams stretched her to wishing to becoming the Best Baker in Bellersville, her hometown. She gathered all the information she could. First, she scoured the kitchen cabinets for cookbooks and pans. Next, she flipped through networks on the television to find Yum!, the channel dedicated to teaching viewers how to make scrumptious treats. She sat in front of the screen, mesmerized by the fondant cupcakes, with their soft yellow cakes and pure white icing tops, their gooey and sticky chocolate cookies, and their steaming hot golden apple pies. Finally, she decided she needed the help of her father, who was as good at baking as pilots were at flying planes.

Caroline's father pushed a wooden chair up to their kitchen counter. "Are you ready to bake?" He asked. Caroline nodded eagerly, swinging her stringy tail behind her in anticipation. "I am!" she shouted. "Not quite yet," her father said. He chuckled as he handed her an adorable auburn apron, with her name across the front. "Why do I need this?" she asked as she messed with the string and tried to put it on. "Just you wait," her father said, "We just might make a mess!"

They started compiling their ingredients: flour, sugar, salt, baking soda, sweet chocolate morsels. Caroline could barely contain herself! "First, measure out the flour." Caroline's dad gave her a cup with a handle that looked like a diving board over a pool. She dunked her hand into the flour bag and came up with too much! It

flew around the kitchen and stained everything powdery and white. “Oh no!” she cried.

“It’s okay,” her dad reassured her. “It’s your first time baking. You are sure to make a few mistakes.”

But as the baking carried on, Caroline’s mistakes kept coming. She dumped in pieces of the egg shell when all she wanted was the yellowy squishy yolk. Her monkey muscles didn’t mix the ingredients together fast enough. And on top of it all, she set the oven at the wrong temperature!

After her dad fixed the issues and got the banana bread baking, Caroline began to cry.

“I’m no good at baking,” she said. She surveyed the room and saw cracked egg shells, spilled over batter, and flour flat against the floor.

“Now, Caroline!” her father said, “Remember what I’ve told you. A little mess is to be expected.”

Caroline felt disappointed in herself. She wiped up the counter with a washcloth and her tears trickled to the tile floor. Suddenly, she heard a loud beeping noise. Err! Err! Err! the oven screamed. Caroline’s tail curled in tight to her. “What’s that?” she asked, her voice quivering.

“It’s just the oven!” her dad smiled. Her opened the door and a delectable smell filled the room, now clean. With an oven mitt over his left hand, he pulled out the bread they’d made together.

“Let it cool!” he bellowed, just as Caroline touched the tip and retracted her hand in pain.

They waited for the bread to cool and then cut the top with a butter knife. Caroline’s father found two plates and served their food. “Ready for our first bite?” he asked.

“I’ll bet it’s not very good. I couldn’t mix or crack the eggs or even set the oven right!” Caroline whined. “We cleaned up those messes! Let’s just try it and see,” her father said. At the same time, as the sun set outside in the town of Bellersville, they lifted their forks to their mouths and tasted delicious banana bread.

“Wow!” her father said.

“Wow!” her mother said.

“Wow!” Caroline said.

They ate the rest of the banana bread that evening; they even spoiled their dinner.

“That was so delicious!” Caroline’s mother said, as she licked her fork clean after the last bite.

“You see, Caroline,” her father said, “when we try something new, we sometimes make a mess. But look! You made a delicious banana bread anyway! You just have to make sure you never give up.”

“You’re right,” Caroline said, swallowing the last of her piece. Together, the family washed and dried the dishes.

“You know,” Caroline said, as she reached up and returned her plate to the cabinet, “if I keep up this baking, I just might be the best baker in Bellersville soon.”

Caroline’s father hugged her close. “I bet you will!”

## A.10 Revision after Monet Paints a Day

Attempting to replicate: deep sense of setting/world painting, active description of scene, building of warmth and familiarity with characters

Warm yellow stripes covered the walls of monkey Caroline's kitchen. The light from the sun shone in the square window over the sterling silver sink, casting the room in an inviting glow. Caroline bounded in and called for her mother, who sat in the living room knitting. "Mom!" Caroline called out, "I think today I want to be a baker." Caroline's Mom laughed, for she was always dancing around one dream or another. Caroline had a keen eye for the world and always wanted to be and do something new. Last week, it had been pottery; Caroline had sat in the living room at a desk with newspaper down, meshing warm and rusty clay between her fingers, shaping a vase for flowers. The week before that, she had taken to fashion, clipping up sheets of fabric in the bedroom and placing them over her baby dolls to see how they might look as t-shirts and dresses. The week before that, she had taken bright orange safety cones in the yard and shaped a rectangle on which to practice soccer, shooting goals again and again until the sun had faded out of the sky and she had needed to come in for dinner. "Oh, I see!" her Mom said. "Baking is this week's passion!" She reached into the wooden pantry and found all of the ingredients for banana bread, then pulled out a worn down recipe with font almost disappearing off of the page. Caroline began to pounce about in the kitchen, jumping her feet on to the tiles of the ceramic floor in a rhythmic pattern. "I can't wait to bake! I can't wait to bake!" she sang, a little melody accompanying her chant. "First, we need to dress

you in an apron,” Mom suggested. She pulled on the wooden drawer’s circular knob and out fluttered a long red apron, with white trim. Mom put the apron around Caroline, tying the strings tight about her waist. “This will help us from making a mess,” she said. Caroline smiled and asked, eagerness dripping from the high pitch in her voice, “What’s first, Mom?” They read the directions together and took a wooden spoon and bowl to begin their mixing. From soft powders and sticky butter came a beautiful slop of banana bread batter. But just as they were about to pour the batter into the bread pan, Caroline sneezed. Her sneeze roared out loud, and she threw her hand up to her nose to catch it in the air. Slam! Her hand knocked the bowl onto the tile floor. Yellow batter shot out in all directions, splattering over the ground. Caroline looked at the mess and began to cry. “I always mess up!” she sobbed. “Now, now, Caroline,” Mom said, “it will be okay. We just have to clean up our mess.” She gathered dishtowels that had been hanging over the stove and handed them to Caroline. Caroline began wiping, noticing her apron was also covered in the gunk. “I’m sorry I made such a big mess,” she whimpered, as they cleared the last of it. “It will all turn out okay!” Mom said, and they began to stir again. This time, Caroline was anxious to finish her bread. After all, they’d been working for a long time and now they were starting over. Her monkey might whipped around the bowl and powder began flying up into the sky like smoke out of a volcano. “Relax!” Mom scolded. Caroline tried to slow down, but the powder had already flooded into the air. “Let’s clean this up before we keep baking” Mom said, and began to sweep the floor. Caroline frowned. It seemed like she just could not do

it. “I give up. I’m not any good at this,” she said. “You can’t give up just yet!” Mom said as she put the spoon back in Caroline’s hand. Let’s see what happens if we keep trying.” Caroline spun her spoon around in the bowl and came up with batter that looked delicious, speckled with chocolate chips and just smooth enough to pour easily into the pan. She set the oven timer and began to wash the dishes they had used, tossing out the egg yolks and wiping the counter in wide circles with a dishtowel. Soon, as the sun began to set, the timer dinged. The bread looked delicious, but some of the edges had burned a dark brown color. “Did I burn it?” Caroline asked. “Did I mess it all up?” Mom helped Caroline cut the bread into rectangular slices with rounded tops. “Before you second guess your baking skill, give you bread a try!” she suggested. Caroline bit in to the sweet bread and felt the chocolate chips and soft texture melt on her tongue. “This is delicious!” she said. “So I’m not bad at baking after all?” Mom shook her head. “Well of course not, my dear. You had some hiccups, but everyone does! Making a mess is part of baking. You have to make a few messes before you can get really good at something. Imagine how much better at baking you’ll be next time. And this time, I have to say, you did really well!” She reached for a second slice of bread. Caroline smiled to herself. Maybe messes in the kitchen were okay after all.

#### **A.11 Revision after *The Chicken Chasing Queen of Lamar County***

Attempting to replicate: Unique voice for characters based on culture/dialect, unique and fitting metaphors, realistic character development

Common monkey phrases/words/associations: monkey business, monkey wrench,  
monkey see/monkey do, more fun than a barrel of monkeys (found via  
[blog.oxforddictionaries.com](http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com)), monkey around ([idioms.thefreedictionary.com](http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com))

Many monkeys from around Monkeytown

Get into many monkey businesses while bounding around

Monkeys dance and monkeys play

monkeys work and climb all day

Monkeytown monkeys run shops and stores

They install televisions and hardwood floors

Of all of the places Monkey Caroline could have followed her heart

From fishing to hiking to creating art

She followed her heart to a ripe banana-gooey and green

And decided to become a baker, the best Monkeytown had ever seen

But Caroline was only a child

With dreams in her heart that were awesome and wild

She imagined herself whipping up delicacies

Selling cupcakes by the dozens and others, she'd freeze

"I'm too young," she'd whine, when her dreams knocked at her brain

She did not think she could conduct her own dream train

Luckily, Caroline's Dad was her biggest fan

He said "I'll help you carry out your stupendous plan!"

"I won't be any good at baking," Caroline replied

Dad just smiled. Dad just sighed.

Then he gave her an apron and tied it around her furry back

Next he pulled out ingredients and a baker's rack

Caroline asked "What is this thing you've put over my fur?"

"It's an apron," Dad said, "for a mess may just occur!"

Then he smiled and tabbed through the recipe book

"C'mere" he called "have a look"

They reviewed the ingredients, the oven setting, the time

Then they mixed the ingredients until it all looked like slime

"Give it a hearty stir," Dad encouraged Caroline.

But this is where things turned out not to be fine.

Caroline stirred with all her monkey might.

But a monkey wrench was thrown in: a mess spilled! (but the mess was just slight).

Still, Caroline often worried herself over these things.

She worried about her voice cracking when she tried to sing.

She worried about her feet flapping when she tried to dance.

She worried about how cute she looked in her new t-shirt and red pants.

She worried about if she would be smart enough in school.

She worried about if her friends would think she was cool.

So when the slight slime spill slipped out of the bowl

Caroline whined, her usual role.

"I'm messing it all up!" she whimpered, she cried.

“You’ve done fine,” her Dad said, “I know how hard you’ve tried.”

Then he searched for a dish towel, hung over the oven door.

“Wipe it up with this one,” he said, “I doubt you’ll need more.”

So through teary eyed vision Caroline wiped up the spill.

She sighed: “I’m not sure baking is my best skill.”

Her dad swooped back in with a sweet grin.

Then he popped open the oven and stuck the banana bread in.

“Remember what I told you,” he said and set the timer to 25.

“Making messes is part of just being alive!”

He continued “Many monkeys make messes much of the time!”

“Remember Monkey Manny when he took that big climb?”

“Or Aunt Susan when she tried to speak to that crowd?”

“Or my tummy before dinner when it growls so loud?”

“No one is perfect, my dear Caroline.

We all make our messes and it all turns out fine.

You just have to keep trying and believe in your dreams!”

And just as he said it, the oven timer screamed.

The room had started smelling like banana bread bliss

“This smell?” Dad said, “I could get used to this!”

Then they took out a butter knife and cut slices down

Tried some themselves and handed the rest out to Monkeytown

Monkeys who tried the bread raved over its taste

“This is the best!” “A talent you shouldn’t waste!”

So Caroline ran home and made more in a haste (fix rhyme pattern)

and even when some of the batter spilled over the edge of the bowl

Caroline didn’t let the monkey wrench take it’s toll.

Instead she smiled and wiped it up really fast

and said “My banana bread messes aren’t made to last!”

She smiled as she served more batches to her family and friends

“and my dreams and perseverance won’t ever end!”

### **A.12 Revision after Chavela and the Magic Bubble**

Trying to emulate: strong sense of place, specific and sensory details

Caroline was a brown furred monkey who always leapt and bounded toward what she could someday be. She had many, many dreams. She wanted to be a smart doctor, a graceful ballerina, a caring teacher, a skilled soccer star, and, most recently, a tasteful baker. Caroline had always eaten up her Mom’s banana bread so quickly and begged for more. “Your banana bread tastes so good!” Caroline said, one afternoon in their home in Monkeytown. “Won’t you teach me to be an amazing baker like you?” Caroline’s mom spread her wrinkled lips wide. “Well of course!” she said. They moved together into the kitchen, where mellow yellow sun gave a calm sense of warmth. “Let’s start by picking out the recipe!” Mom said, and reached up to the tan wooden shelf that held all of the recipe books. “What would you like to make?” she asked Caroline. “Your banana bread!” Caroline replied. “With chocolate chips, too? Sweet, like you?” she asked. Caroline nodded and jumped up and down

in excitement. "Let's get started!" Mom said. They took out dark brown liquid called vanilla, tiny tiny white rocks called sugar, and some bananas, gaining spots with age. "Mush those bananas first!" Mom said. Caroline went to peel and started to mush, but Mom stopped her. "Not without washing your hands, Caroline!" she said. It sounded to Caroline like Mom had yelled, so she must have been very angry. "I'm sorry!" Caroline said and went to the silver sink, where the cool water calmed her down. "That's okay. Try again," said Caroline's Mom. This time, Caroline mushed the bananas just right. "Now, stir in the other ingredients in this bowl," Mom said. She tried, but even with all her monkey might, she couldn't get the batter to look like it did in the pictures. "I can't do it," Caroline said, "I'm not strong enough." "Well, that's just not true! You just need to try again, and be patient this time," Mom said, and demonstrated how to stir so that the batter started to thicken. Just as Caroline was getting the hang of it, she got an itch on her arm. As she reached down to scratch it, she flipped the mixing spoon out of the bowl and some of the sticky yellow batter flung to the floor. "Oh no!" Caroline whined. Mom's comforting hand nuzzled Caroline's head. "It's okay," she said, her voice soft and gentle, "You just need a paper towel to clean it up." Caroline used the white paper towel with the tiny flower designs to clean the floor. Luckily, enough batter had stayed in the bowl for them to continue to bake. "Now, set the oven to preheat at 325 degrees," Mom said. Caroline went to the oven. There were many, many buttons, all with numbers and fancy symbols. "I don't know how! I'm not good at baking," Caroline said. She turned to her mom and began to cry. "What's wrong?" Mom asked. "First, I touched

the bananas before washing my hands. Then, I couldn't stir the batter and then I spilled some of it! Now, I don't know how to set the oven!" Caroline yelled. Her voice was loud and sounded sad. "You can't give up. Sometimes, you make a bit of a mess in the kitchen, but you just have to believe in yourself as a baker and keep on trying. Right?" Mom said. Caroline looked up at Mom's face. Mom was smiling and nodding toward the pan. Caroline greased the pan with a special spritzing cooking spray that was fun to use and then poured the sticky batter into the pan. "Do you think it will turn out well?" she asked her mom as she put the bread into the oven to bake. "You will have to wait and see. Believe in yourself," Mom said. She left to go to their Monkeytown shopping center, promising to be back when the bread would be about done. When Caroline's mom returned, the timer on the oven yelled "Ding!" "It's ready!" Caroline proclaimed, and took a blue oven mitt to open the oven. A wall of hot air slammed Caroline as she flew open the door. "Be careful!" Mom said, "Step back!" The bread smelled delectable overall, but a little on the edges had burned to the pan. "Is it all wrong?" Caroline asked. "What do you think? Take a look at these slices," Mom said, as they cut the loaf into many tinier pieces. Caroline inspected the yellow color of the bread and the tiny banana fibers that showed through. She looked closely at how the brown chocolate chips had melted and swirled into the soft texture. "It looks delicious," she said and popped a warm bite into her mouth, that tasted as sweet as she could imagine "and it tastes good too!" She finished off her slice and said, "Mom? Sometimes, I make a mess in the kitchen. But I think I'm a pretty good baker, too." Caroline's Mom ate another slice, swallowed, and smiled

big, some melted chocolate chips clinging to her teeth. “I think you’re a tasteful baker” she said, “and you’re learning to be better at your dreams every day.” They laughed and cleaned the kitchen before going to sleep. “Mom?” Caroline called out from her bed that evening. “Yes Caroline?” her Mom returned. “Tomorrow, can we make a cake?” “Good night Caroline,” Caroline’s mom laughed. “Goodnight, Mom,” Caroline said, and she dreamed of baking banana bread all night long.

### **A.13 Final Manuscript**

Caroline was a monkey, and a dreamer too.

She had so many things she wished she could do.

She wished to be an astronaut, circling the moon.

She wished to be a singer, to carry a pretty tune.

She wished to be president, to execute the laws.

She wished to be a nurse, patching up wounds with gauze.

Grown-up monkeys told Caroline “Dear, you’re only a child!

These dreams in your heart are crazy and wild!”

Still, today she had a new dream cooking up

involving chef coats white as snow and measuring cups

she thought about delicious and warm banana bread

for today, a dream of baking filled her little monkey head.

She found a ripe banana all gooey and green,

and decided to become the best baker Monkeytown had ever seen.

Caroline had watched monkeys bake on the TV channel Yum!

fondant cupcakes and golden apple pies-she always wanted some.  
So Caroline knew real bakers wore chef hats as tall as clouds.  
They baked in front of audiences. Their treats drew massive crowds.  
But Mom said baking in their kitchen was not exactly the same.  
She handed Caroline an apron, which Caroline thought was pretty lame.  
“You have to wear an apron,” she said, “it’s to protect your dress.”  
She chuckled as she added, “because we just might make a mess.”  
Out from a wooden drawer fluttered a long red apron with trim that was white  
She tied it around her waist with its string-just like a kite’s.  
Warm yellow striped wallpaper covered the kitchen walls  
and the sun shining through the corner of the window resembled a distant ball.  
They began collecting what they’d need-sugar, salt, and butter, too  
Mom said, “When you start baking, this is what you have to do.”  
They portioned out their dry ingredients into little cups with lines  
Mom said “You put flour in yours. I’ll put sugar in mine.”  
They measured like chemists, always precise,  
except when Caroline spilled flour on the counter...twice.  
Then they got a mixing bowl and poured everything inside  
Caroline gave mixing all her monkey might- that’s how hard she tried.  
She stirred until she felt her monkey muscles quake.  
“Mom! It’s getting clumpy!” she said, and knew she’d made a mistake.  
Mom taught her to stir, giving her some tips

“It’s your first time baking,” she said, “there are bound to be some slips!”

Then Caroline kept working and stirred faster and faster, too.

Batter flew up onto the ceiling-a yellow, sticky goo.

“Oh no! Caroline cried, “I’m not good at this.”

Mom handed her a towel and gave her cheek a kiss.

“It’s okay.” Mom said. “It’s not a big deal.”

Caroline started sobbing and whispered, “That’s not how it feels.”

She wished to be perfect, a famous baking star.

She wanted her banana bread to make it very far!

Wiping away her tears, she started to pour the batter in the pan.

Mom instructed “Use the blue oven mitt and set the timer-I know you can!”

So the oven began changing their batter into banana bread bliss

Mom smiled and said “I knew you could do this!”

Yet, Caroline only saw cracked egg shells and flour flat against the tile floor.

Grumbling, she told her Mom “I don’t like baking anymore.”

Mom just smiled and said “Look in the oven door!”

They turned on the oven light and watched the bread begin to rise.

Mom said “You’ll see in baking, your final product is the sweetest prize!”

Then, the mellow yellow sun gave a calm sense of warmth in the room

and Caroline set to sweeping up with the closet’s wooden broom.

Soon, the oven dinged to say the bread was ready now.

They pulled it from the oven and Caroline shrieked “Wow!”

Each took a fork and scooped up a bite.

“It’s delicious!” Caroline said, “I can’t believe it turned out alright!”

Caroline whipped up another loaf and when the oven went DING!,

She suddenly launched into a tune. She began to sing:

*Sometimes I make a mess, but that is okay.*

*I can bake banana bread that tastes great anyway!*

*Baking in the kitchen was a bit of a mess*

*and yes I needed that apron to cover my dress,*

*but what I loved best? Well, that’s easy to say.*

*Sure, I made some mistakes along the way,*

*but when the bread was warm, gold, and complete*

*I was the proudest baker-and couldn’t wait to eat!”*

She danced around as she sang on the kitchen’s tile floor,

Mom chimed in and said “You should also know something more.

No one’s perfect, my dear Caroline.

We all make our messes and it all turns out fine.

A mess in the kitchen will sometimes happens when you bake,

but your dreams (and some banana bread) are what you really make!”

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