

THE SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER IN 21ST CENTURY NEWBERY
AWARD BOOKS

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The Six Pillars of Character in 21st Century Newbery Award Books

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Abstract

Gail Nelson Bones. THE SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER IN 21ST CENTURY NEWBERY AWARD BOOKS (Under the direction of Dr. Kathie C. Morgan) School of Education, June, 2010.

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis was to determine how the The Six Pillars of Character as defined by the Character Counts! Curriculum are exemplified in 21st century Newbery Award books (2000- 2010). A team of 5 reader/coders, all experienced educational professionals, examined each of the 11 titles in order to investigate opportunities to explore with students the Six Pillars values of *caring, citizenship, fairness, trustworthiness, respect, and responsibility*. Data collection consisted of frequency counts for positive and negative examples of the characteristics. Coders also responded with rich description in their evaluation of themes and the suitability of each book for use in character education. In the report of findings, for each novel a focused summary is provided that references character themes in the text. Interviews with the books' authors, as well as recommendations for classroom use by the team of expert readers supply additional practical resources for classroom teachers using literature to teach character education. The researcher sought to answer the overarching questions: Are 21st century Newbery Award books valuable resources for use in character education? Do these books provide opportunities to explore universal values defined as the Six Pillars of Character in the Character Counts! Curriculum?

Keywords: Newbery Award, character education, moral education, Six Pillars of Character, Character Counts!, literature and character education.

Dedication

To my Family

It has been thirty years since I first heard my Father God call me out of darkness and into his marvelous light. My life was radically transformed when I entered into a personal relationship with Jesus, my Savior and Lord. I know now that His Holy Spirit had been working in my life long before that one day in my history when I first recognized His love and presence. God had set me in just the family he wanted me to have, and they have been His conduit of blessing in my life.

From my Swedish heritage I gained a strong work ethic and academic focus. My loving parents, Mel and Anna Marie Nelson, taught me diligence and determination. They also taught me to be kind to animals, to never be without a book, and to keep my dancing shoes tied on so as to not miss a beat once the music starts. They gave me my brother Ed whom I love and admire more than words can say. He and my precious sister-in-law Janis gave me the C.S. Lewis book, *Mere Christianity*, that would change my life. I had been a prodigal until my grandmother's funeral, after which I went home, found the Bible she had given me for my 7th birthday, and began to read it with understanding for the first time. My love affair with the Word of God has not abated.

God has also given me a loving, faithful, godly, and supportive husband Jeff. He is a teacher who inspires me daily as he models good character year after year in the public school system. Together we share two extraordinary children and their wonderful spouses. Emily and Caleb Weeks, Karen and Jon Bones have provided prayer, encouragement, laughter, and music all along the way as I have pursued this lifelong educational goal. I am grateful! All glory be to God, now and forever.

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Chapter One: Introduction

American society is reeling from the effects of widespread immorality, escalating youth violence, and family dissolution. Research on ethical behavior in today's youth reveals a tremendous divide between what they say they believe and their behavior. The Josephson Institute (2009) anonymously surveyed teens and found 64% admitted to cheating on tests, 42% to lying to save money, and 30% to stealing from stores. Yet what is perhaps the most shocking statistic of all is that 93% say they are satisfied with their personal behavior (Crary, 2008). An ethical crisis is clearly signaled by these data, and among teachers, parents, and members of the community there is "widespread concern that valuable character traits are not being instilled in today's youth" (Leal, Glascock, Mitchell & Wasserman, 2000, p. 50). Kagan (2001) asserted, "The need for character education is clear. The support for character education is almost universal. The question then becomes, how can schools best foster the acquisition of character?" (p. 52).

Background of the Study

Research shows that character education is the greatest reform concern of Americans and the fastest growing school movement (Davis, 2003; Edgington, 2002; Jones, Ryan & Bohlin, 1999; Lickona, 1991). The law requires it and the community demands it, but the question remains: how is character education most effectively taught? Teachers are concerned with fitting yet another curricular element into their already crowded daily schedule, and so an approach that combines both language arts and character has much to recommend it. One of the current trends is a renewed interest in the centuries-old practice of using literature to teach character education (Leal, 1999; O'Sullivan, 2004; Parker & Ackerman, 2007).

Although a consensus is emerging concerning the efficacy of using literature to teach values, an equally vital consideration is the selection of literary works to be used in this fashion. Some proponents of character education have recommended the study of classic literature as a superior source for moral instruction (Bennett, 1995; Lickona, 1991; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Other classroom teachers would support the use of a more contemporary literary alternative, preferring to use those works of children's fiction that have been awarded the Newbery Medal for excellence. It is because of their high visibility and universal acceptance by classroom teachers and librarians that the winners of this prestigious prize have been considered potentially useful sources for character education (Bryant, 2008; Houdyshell & Kirkland, 1998; Leal & Chamberlain- Solecki, 1998; Parsons & Colabucci, 2008; Powell, Gillespie, Swearingen & Clements, 1998).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) mandates the inclusion of character education in all American schools, but does not prescribe the precise method or curriculum that must be implemented. Institutes such as the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character (Noddings, 2007), the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Lickona, 2003), The Josephson Institute of Ethics (Chase, 2001), and the Character Education Partnership (Peterson, 2002) are just some of the many organizations that provide curricular support for schools seeking to adopt programs for moral education.

Character Counts!, established in 1993 by the Josephson Institute, is the most extensively used program in the United States. Evidence- based and successful nationwide, the Character Counts! Curriculum teaches six universal values: *trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship* (Martinez, 2008). The selection of these six particular pillars of character originated at the Aspen conference in 1992, where a summit meeting of experts in ethics and education convened

and distilled this list of universal values which they contend transcend religion and culture (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009). The Josephson Institute provides guidance and training for character educators, including lists of suggested children's literature that may be used to supplement instruction.

Rationale and Purposes for the Study

Children have a need to hear heroic tales about people who exemplify the core values of society (Brendtro, L, Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S, 1990; Peterson, 2002). The use of literature to teach values is recommended by many sources, including the United States Department of Education (2005):

Literature can be a very powerful teaching tool. In fact, people in stories, poems, and plays can influence children almost as much as the real people who read with them. Therefore, reading to and with children, encouraging older children to read on their own, and talking with children about the books they read are important ways to help children learn about and develop the values of strong character and good citizenship (p.3).

Teachers often turn to literature as a source for moral education, but not all texts are of equal value in presenting the core values. Also, there is some debate about which traits to teach, and even teachers who say they support character education are uncertain about how to put it into practice (Brynildssen, 2002; Edgington, 2002). It is hoped that this researcher's findings will be of practical help to classroom teachers by providing information on specific texts that correlate with the virtues of *responsibility, respect, fairness, caring, citizenship, and trustworthiness*. Even if a teacher is not specifically using the Character Counts! Curriculum, knowing how these universal character traits are exemplified in popular children's literature would be helpful in any classroom character

education program.

Flannery O'Connor (1990) said, "...a story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way...you tell a story because a statement would be inadequate" (p. 96). Mere statements about the importance of the inculcation of character have proved inadequate. At present there is a dearth of empirical evidence demonstrating that character education programs work in changing behavior (Leming, 1997). Local evaluations have been conducted, with positive reports, but there have been no major national studies of these programs (Peterson, 2002; U.S.Department of Education, 2007). However, research has indicated that the following methods were *not* effective in fostering character growth in young people: "lecturing and moralizing, authoritative teaching styles, externally derived codes of conduct, and setting the ethics agenda without involving students in the process" (Mathews & Riley, 1995). Literature has traditionally been a favored means for one generation to pass its wisdom on to the next generation in the form of stories about the mighty battle of good over evil and the importance of personal choices. Guroian (1996) said, "The great stories avoid didacticism and supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the shape of our world and appropriate responses to its inhabitants" (para. 6).

Rather than concluding that character education does not have value, it would seem that more work needs to be done in finding the precise method which will work. It is true that academic benefits do accrue to schools that implement character education programs; research shows that schools with character education also have higher achievement scores (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). A burgeoning interest in the topic of character education has been seen in the last decade, and every recent United States president has made a point of calling for the teaching of character in American schools

(U.S. Department of Education, 2007). As of this writing, character education is now federally mandated, but not prescribed as to specific method. Various types of programs have proliferated, their particular emphases driven by one of three underlying theories of moral education, a topic that will be addressed in Chapter Two of this document.

Davis (2003) defined one of these three perspectives as simple character education, or “attempting to build character both in and outside of the classroom one trait at a time by emphasizing good behavior” (p. 32). The most popular program of its type is Character Counts! created by the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2009). Because this program is so widely used, this researcher elected to use the set of universal values the Josephson Institute called The Six Pillars of Character to create a kind of rubric or taxonomy for evaluating the applicability of a work of children’s literature for use in character education. The result of this evaluation could prove useful to classroom teachers because many schools have followed the advice of Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis (2007) and have adopted a literature- based method of values inculcation. In a handbook on effective practices for character education published by the Character Education Partnership, Lickona et al. (2007) recommended the implementation of a meaningful and challenging curriculum. They suggested that teachers who make “character connections by discussing character traits and ethical dilemmas in literature” (p. 2) would see increases in student engagement, achievement, and behavior. Classroom teachers will be able to use the data obtained in the present study to inform their decisions about use of contemporary Newbery Award novels in the classroom. The data identify overall themes for each novel as well as the extent to which the novel allows for exploration of The Six Pillars of Character, which are *caring, citizenship, trustworthiness, fairness, respect and responsibility* (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009).

Another potential positive influence of this study might be to encourage writers of children's books to view their work as having a purpose in the lives of young children that transcends simple entertainment. Books have always been considered to be effective vehicles for transmitting the values of a culture; it is important that teachers and writers of children's fiction not take this responsibility lightly (Bohlin, 2005; Lowry & Chambers, 1986). Parsons and Colabucci (2008) affirmed that "life influences literature as much as literature influences life" and that characters in books serve as role models and "help shape personal identity" (p. 44). By means of personal interviews, email communication, and research on each writer, the researcher has also provided material conveying each writer's philosophy concerning the use of their work for character education. This information should prove to be thought-provoking and inspiring for both teachers and future writers.

Finally, it is believed that undertaking this research project has been one small step in the direction of further supporting and exploring the important connection between literature and character education. Bryant's (2008) work in linking character traits and Newbery Award books is being extended in this study through the direct connection made with a specific widely used character education program. The *Character Education Manifesto* (1996), signed by governors of eight states, set forth seven guiding principles they believed to be central to this vital educational reform. The following statement confirms the importance of research into the link between character education and literature: "Principle Six: The human community has a reservoir of moral wisdom, much of which exists in our great stories, works of art, literature, history and biography. Teachers and students must together draw from this reservoir both within and beyond the academic curriculum" (Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character,

1966).

Research Problem

This qualitative research examined the problem of whether or not 21st Newbery fiction offers sufficient opportunity for exploration of important values and virtues to render it useful in a school character education program. Researchers have documented that children's literature changes to reflect the times (Egoff, 1979; Lathey, 2005; Nilsen & Donelson, 1988). As social dissolution, moral relativism, and societal hostility to traditional Judeo- Christian values grow, how are these changes being reflected in the books children are being given to read? Lathey (2005) pointed out that, whereas in the first half of the 20th century children's literature presented an idealized view of the child who was well- behaved and socially well- adjusted, the New Realism of the 1960's "no longer promoted models of middle- class behavior" (p. 7). If this collective body of highly acclaimed prize- winning children's literature can no longer be counted upon to present and support moral values traditionally taught in our schools, its usefulness for a literature- based program of character education might be limited. If, however, the most current Newbery books do provide excellent opportunities to discuss values, they may indeed be considered to be a valuable source for character education. Schools are mandated by law to implement character education programs and are seeking the most effective methods. Teachers may be unsure of how to proceed and would benefit from knowing how the Six Pillars of Character correlate with widely-read works of contemporary children's literature often chosen for use in the classroom. The following set of guiding questions provided a specific focus for the researcher in creating the codebook for this qualitative study.

Research Questions

Research question #1: Do the 21st century Newbery Award novels provide opportunities for students to explore the universal values set forth as the Six Pillars of Character in the Character Counts! Curriculum?

Research question #2: What are the frequencies of negative vs. positive character traits being modeled in the characters in these novels?

Research question #3: How would each of these novels be ranked in terms of most opportunities to explore each of the Six Pillars of Character?

Research question #4: Which of these Newbery Medal books would be best suited for use in a school program of character education?

Professional Significance

As teachers move away from reliance on classic texts to teach and clarify moral values, substituting modern literature that may seem more palatable to their students, the question arises: what character messages are being conveyed in these books? With regard to the highly acclaimed and widely used Newbery Medal books, which of these books are most appropriate for use in character education? Has there been a change in the themes and tone of these texts over time, reflecting a society that is growing more relativistic? Although previous research (Leal, 1999), has found that Newbery novels in general possess inspiring themes and characters who exemplify positive character traits, a question has arisen about the changing nature of the Newbery Award winners (Barbieri, 2000; Strauss, 2008). Is the decline in moral standards and behavior that is causing a public outcry for moral education in the public schools reflected in the Newbery books? Are their themes and characters such that they no longer represent the high ideals for which they once stood? This research will provide helpful information for teachers,

librarians, and parents who need to be made aware of any negative trends because of the trusted place this set of books has always held. The information contained herein will also be useful in that it will help teachers to select and to correlate Newbery books with particular values and virtues they may wish to discuss.

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to examine the content of 21st century Newbery Award winning novels in order to determine their usefulness for literature-based character education. A team of five reader/coders participated in a qualitative content analysis; what Babbie (2005) termed, “the nonnumerical examination and examination of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (pp. 394-395). The five readers who made up the study team recorded frequency counts and page numbers for occurrences of both positive and negative character traits within each book. These data informed their assignment on a rating scale of the extent to which each novel offered opportunities to discuss the Six Pillars of Character. A codebook for content analysis was created that corresponds with the Six Pillars of Character (see Appendix A). In Part 2 of the codebook, readers also supplied rich narrative description of their impressions regarding turning points, central conflicts, and themes. Finally, the readers recorded their evaluation of the usefulness of each of the titles for teaching values in a classroom setting, based on their experience of having been teachers or school librarians.

The Six Pillars of Character are: *trustworthiness*, *respect*, *responsibility*, *fairness*, *caring*, and *citizenship* (Josephson Institute, 2009). The team of readers assisting with this research recorded each instance where opportunities to explore these 6 values were found, in either the themes or character depictions in the 11 novels that have been

awarded the Newbery Medal for distinguished children's literature in the 21st century.

These books were evaluated in light of their exemplification of the universal core values contained in the popular Character Counts! Curriculum.

Definitions

The terms values education, moral education, character education, and education for virtue are used synonymously by most of the leading authors in the field (Bennett, 1993; Lickona, 1991). Some writers have drawn subtle distinctions, but in most of the literature the terms are used interchangeably (Davis, 2003). Berkowitz and Bier (2005), stated that, "Regardless of what one labels the enterprise: character education, social-emotional learning, school-based prevention, citizenship education, etc, the methods employed, the undergirding theoretical justifications, and the outcomes assessed are remarkably similar" (p. 3). For the purposes of this review, key terms and concepts will be defined as follows:

Character Education. Various well-known leaders in the field of character education have offered this catalog of definitions:

- "The goal of character education is to help children to develop good dispositions that will enable them to flourish intellectually, personally, and socially" (Bohlin, 2005, p. 1).
- "Moral education... the training of the heart and mind toward the good" (Bennett, 1993, p. 11).
- "Character education is the deliberate effort to develop good character based on core virtues that are good for the individual and good for society" (Lickona, 2004, p. 2).
- "The effort to help the young acquire a moral compass- that is, a sense of right

and wrong and the enduring habits necessary to live a good life” (Ryan & Cooper, 1998, p. 422).

Character. Aristotle defined good character as “the life of right conduct- right conduct in relations to other persons and in relation to oneself” (in Lickona, 1991, p. 50). The word *character*, from the Greek, means *to engrave*, or “those markings engraved upon us which lead us to behave in certain ways” (O’ Sullivan, 2004, p. 98). This definition evokes images of impressionable youth who inevitably bear the influence, for good or ill, of the significant adults in their lives and underscores the importance of carefully selecting the tools with which to indelibly make a mark upon their lives. Lickona (1991) also defined the concept in this way: “Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good” (p. 51).

Guiness (1999) differentiated between personality and character, pointing out that character is more than being in possession of what Kohlberg and others have famously termed simply a “bag of virtues” (Hamm, 1977, p. 218):

Distinct from such concepts as personality, image, reputation, or celebrity, it is the essential stuff a person is made of, the inner reality and quality from which thoughts, speech, decisions, behavior, and relations are rooted...it lies deeper than values and far deeper than philosophies, allegiances, memberships and accomplishments (p. 12).

Values and virtues. Moral education in the United States has been divided into two camps, the value- neutral position, and the value- inculcation position. Those who have adhered to the former have supported the erroneous belief that values are simply matters of preference rather than commitment to principles. The more traditional view has been the value- inculcation position, as exemplified by the practice of use of the

McGuffey reader that was unabashedly didactic in its approach to teaching children moral principles that originated in the Bible (Murphy, 2006).

Lickona (1991) explained that values might be either moral or non-moral. The latter might be also described as preferences, as in the case of an individual valuing sports over music. Moral values, like responsibility or honesty, refer what one ought to do and how one ought to behave. Bohlin (2002) drew the distinction between virtues and values when she pointed out that values do not necessarily drive behavior, whereas virtues do:

Virtues are dispositions cultivated within the individual that actually improve character and intelligence. Virtues, such as diligence, sincerity, personal accountability, courage, and perseverance- enable us to develop better relationships and to do our work better. It is our virtues, not our views or our values, that enable us to become better students, parent, spouses, teachers, friends, and citizens (p. 1).

William Bennett (1993), in his influential *Book of Virtues*, suggested that knowledge of good traits of character is the foundational first step that must be taken by children before they are ready, later in their adolescence, for the more nuanced study of ethical controversies. The virtues he illustrated in his book, by means of classic stories and poems, include self- discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith.

Newbery Award. The John Newbery Medal is the most prestigious children's literature award in America, having been awarded by the American Library Association (ALA) every year since 1922 to the most outstanding children's literature published in the United States. One Medal book is chosen, as well as several "runners- up" (before 1971) or "honor books" (since 1971). The purpose of the award is to "encourage original

creative work in the field of books for children” (Marks, 2006). The award was named for John Newbery, one of the first publishers of books for children, who sought to provide young readers with books that were both entertaining and educational (Silvey, 2008).

The Six Pillars of Character

Each of the six universal values used by the Character Counts! Curriculum will be defined here (Josephson Institute, 2009). The specific language used to define each pillar was very important for reader/coders to reference as they identified character exemplifications in their content analysis.

Trustworthiness: Be honest, don’t deceive, cheat, or steal, be reliable, do what you say you’ll do, have the courage to do the right thing, build a good reputation, be loyal, stand by your family, friends and country.

Respect: Treat others with respect, follow the Golden Rule, be tolerant of differences, use good manners, not bad language, be considerate of the feelings of others, don’t threaten, hit, or hurt anyone, deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

Responsibility: Do what you are supposed to do, persevere, keep on trying, always do your best, use self- control, be self- disciplined, think before you act, consider the consequences, be accountable for your choices.

Fairness: Play by the rules, take turns and share, be open- minded, listen to others, don’t take advantage of others, don’t blame others carelessly.

Caring: Be kind, be compassionate, and show you care, express gratitude, forgive others, help people in need (Josephson Institute, 2008).

Chapter Two of this proposal presents a literature review explaining the theoretical and research bases for this study, linking landmark studies and recent research

findings with this research. This background information will prepare the reader for Chapter Three, which details the rationale for the methodology used, and specific procedures and protocols followed. Chapter Four presents the results of this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Intelligence plus character – that is the true goal of education.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Inspirational quotations on the nature and meaning of character abound, particularly among our nation’s leaders, but this statement by Theodore Roosevelt sums it up most aptly: “Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike” (Josephson Institute, 2009, p. 1). Alexis deToqueville’s familiar comment about America’s greatness being contingent on her goodness speaks to the collective nature of a national character. America’s founders understood that only a virtuous nation could sustain a free democratic society, and this truth drives the national mandate to educate for character.

The purpose and background of this qualitative study, which is to examine the content of 21st century Newbery Award winning novels in order to determine their usefulness for literature- based character education, has been detailed in Chapter One. Chapter Three will explain the use of a codebook for content analysis which has been created by this researcher corresponding with the Six Pillars of Character, the list of the virtues taught by the most widely- used character education program in the United States, Character Counts! (Josephson Institute, 2009). In Chapter Two, a review of literature will focus on the following topics: the need for character education, the history of character education in the United States, theories of values transmission, the use of literature for character education, and foundational and current research on methods of using children’s literature for character education.

The Need for Character Education

As the moral foundation of our society appears to crumble, the clarion call for character education in America's schools continues (Bennett, 1995; Kilpatrick, 1994; Lickona, 1998; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999,). There is a growing sense in this culture that the many problems seen in young people, including violence, teen pregnancy, drug use, gang membership, cheating and stealing, constitute a crisis that can only be resolved by education. The results of a poll inquiring of parents what their most important goal was indicated that 48% desired that their children grow up to be moral people (McDaniel, 1998). Young people need both parental instruction and school- based programs that successfully inculcate students with core values and an understanding of right and wrong (Leming, 2000).

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) made a case for character education in schools by citing intellectual authorities, from thinkers such as Socrates who believed the mission of education was to help people become smart *and* good, to our nation's founders, all of whom insisted that strong morality was the foundation of our nation's character. They also pointed to both the voice of the public, which demands it, and the government, which requires it under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107- 110). An especially important and underserved population in need of training in virtue and ethics is comprised of gifted students because of their strong leadership potential. Dana and Lynch- Brown (1991) saw this need and focused attention on the critical nature of leadership development:

If we are to regain our national conscience, our sense of propriety, our hunger for excellence in every endeavor, we must begin with the design of a curriculum in moral education that will provide our future leaders with the appropriate models

and methodologies for re- establishing these values at the center of consciousness (p. 3).

According to Earley and Gibbs (1994), the problem stems from a society that is confused and divided about what it values and therefore lacks a clear set of moral standards to which children may aspire and adhere. Theologian and scholar Dallas Willard (1998) went so far as to claim that there is no longer a commonly agreed upon body of moral knowledge in our culture. As proof, he cited former Harvard University president Derek Bok on the subject of teaching values: “Today’s course in applied ethics does not seek to convey a set of moral truths but tries to encourage the student to think carefully about complex moral issues”(Willard, p. 2). If the greatest scholars in the nation do not believe they have moral truths to impart, it is no wonder that children are having trouble distinguishing between good and evil. Lickona (1998) addressed this point when he stated what should be obvious: we cannot teach children right from wrong if there is no difference between right and wrong. As American schools systematically remove all religious expressions and definitions of virtue, they are increasingly becoming places where students have no notion of how to behave morally or to make ethical choices (Kilpatrick, 1992; Wilhelm & Firmin, 2008).

The current controversy over transmission of values turns on two issues: which values are to be taught, and the best manner in which to teach them (Yandell, 1990). Thomas Lickona (1993) has set out a well- reasoned case for the teaching of values in schools. Pointing out that all great civilizations have transmitted their culture to their offspring, he asserted that currently, when children are receiving less and less moral teaching from their parents and the church, it is vital that schools fill the vacuum. Despite the competing points of view that do exist, there *is* a common ground of belief in

core values in America, virtues such as justice, honesty, respect, and responsibility. These virtues must be understood and incorporated into the character of the next generation if democracy is to endure.

Brief History of Character Education in the United States

Puritan theology deeply influenced the philosophy that drove educational policy in the early days of this nation. Students were taught to read primarily so that they could read the Bible, and their texts, such as *The New England Primer*, contained many references to scripture. The first schools in colonial America were established in light of the religious freedom the colonists had traveled far across the seas to gain; their foundational goal was to teach good character, which they understood to be biblically defined (Salls, 2007). Murphy (2006) acknowledged the strong Protestant influence on early education in this nation: “The public schools would be purely secular, but with a common set of values based on a core of Christian beliefs that could be taught to all. A nonsectarian reading of the Bible would be a part of every school” (p. 254). A biblically-based approach to morality continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in the United States. As the 19th century dawned, and with it the advent of the Common Schools movement, training for virtue expanded to include an emphasis on those values necessary for democracy to endure (Algera & Sink, 2002).

Education focused on morality is a foundational element in the American educational system. The teaching of civic virtue was admittedly a primary purpose for public education (Bassett, Houston, & Kidder, 2009). Democracy only functions when the people are committed to its moral foundations, and Jefferson argued that loyalty to democratic values must be inculcated from an early age (Lickona, 1991). In the 19th century, The *McGuffey Reader* celebrated virtue through tales that inspired children

morally as it helped them to learn to read.

The twentieth century saw the birth of progressivism in education, and the erosion of moral certainty under the teachings of Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein. Logical positivism emerged and introduced the notion that the only truths that could be stated unequivocally were those that could be scientifically proven. Lickona (1991) asserted that, “When much of society came to think of morality as being in flux, relative to the individual, situationally variable, and essentially private, public schools retreated from their once central role as moral educators” (p. 8). Later in that century, a major change in moral education occurred with the advent of the decision- making approach to values clarification movement. This relativistic method was initiated by Louis Rath and popularized in *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students* (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1972).

Theories of Character Education

The values clarification approach. The values clarification movement in the 1970’s argued that schools could not be value- neutral. The approach was to bring the discussion of social and personal values out into the open, and the concern was “not with the content of people’s values, but with the process of valuing” (Simon, et al., 1973, p. 19). In other words, people were free to believe anything they wanted as long as they believed it sincerely. Proponents of this decision- making approach to character education believed students would be more committed to values they had discovered on their own, rather than those with which they had been indoctrinated by adults (Kilpatrick, 1992). A major shortcoming of this movement was that it failed to provide students with the adult guidance they needed to reflect upon and analyze ethical complexities. It left students with the impression that any decision they made was the right one just because

they could explain their feelings about it. It failed in that “It did not teach students that often these conflicts are resolved by appealing to a third, higher, and unquestioned value” (Ellenwood, 2007, p. 29).

Another glaring flaw in the values clarification method of teaching character was that it left the teacher without a voice with which to direct students to conclusions about objective values. C. S. Lewis (1944) in *The Abolition of Man* spoke to the error inherent in the notion that all statements of value are mere statements of opinion when he noted that all cultures have a conception of the true. This he termed *the Tao*, or “the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false...” (p. 18). As Kilpatrick (1992) observed, the prevailing policy in American schools since their inception had been transmission of the culture, specifically, the practice of the older members of the society teaching the younger ones what they had learned about right and wrong. It was when that ground began to erode that the structure which stood upon it, an ethical society, began to crumble, and with it, the educational system.

The moral reasoning approach. In reaction to the values clarification movement, which was too heavily weighted toward feelings, schools began to embrace Kohlberg’s conceptualization of moral development because of its highly rational approach (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971). His model delineated six stages divided into two levels. At the first level, called preconventional thinking, children make their decisions based on fear of punishment or desire for reward. Kohlberg estimated that one- third of Americans do not move past the second of his levels, conventional thinking, in which decisions are based on expectations, conformity, or a sense of duty. The third level, post-conventional thinking, reaches its peak in “according one’s behavior with universal-ethical principles such as justice and respect for the dignity of individuals” (Ellenwood,

2007, p. 31). As a classroom method of character education, Kohlberg's model relied heavily upon a series of dramatic ethical dilemmas that students would reason their way through (Kilpatrick, 1992). His method was dependent on the notion that there is an overarching standard of right and wrong; contemporary character educators do view this as an improvement over the misguided theory that undergirded values clarification. The problem was that this technique centered on rather extreme ethical dilemmas and did not provide simple training in the kinds of everyday situations most children would face when making determinations of what is right and wrong.

Bulach and Butler (2002) asserted that although a primary emphasis on the teaching of values may have ceased to be explicitly included in the academic curriculum, it has always been a vital part of the hidden curriculum. They noted its three iterations: moral education, as advocated by Dewey, Kohlberg and Piaget; values education, as advocated by Rath, Harmin and Simon (1978); and what they term simple civic education. Davis (2003) made slightly different distinctions, calling the Kohlbergian method "simple moral education", the Deweyesque understanding "just- community education" and the third alternative as "simple character education" (p. 32). It is the third perspective that has held sway since the 1990's and it is this practice, identifying and exemplifying specific virtuous character traits, that informs most current character education curricula.

The core values approach. A problem with failed character education attempts in the past was that teaching children about values was no guarantee that they would adhere to them. Requiring students to memorize vocabulary lists of virtues without giving them concrete examples or teaching them how to apply these concepts proved to be fruitless. Bohlin (2005) argued that previous approaches to character education fell

short because they did not provide young people with an adequate vision of the life worth living, a reason they should endeavor to develop positive character qualities. She asserted, “A focus on virtue...provides the most coherent framework within which to understand the schooling of desire and how a person comes to *be* virtuous, rather than simply to *act* virtuously on occasion” (p. 3). The character education movement that began to gain traction in the 1990’s has not abated; it is merely in the process of being refined. Currently, the trend in character education is to name and explore the core values that constitute a moral life.

Which Values to Teach?

An examination of recent research on character education programs reveals that there are a wide variety of specific character traits chosen for emphasis. Thomas Lickona, one of the foremost experts in the field, (2003) identified just two elements as central: respect and responsibility. He believes that all others flow from these two, but also set forth the following 10 virtues as universal: wisdom, justice, fortitude, self-control, love, positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude, and humility. Leming (1997) found next to no consensus among the ten character education programs he investigated. Among them was the Character Education Curriculum, which included a list of 12 universal values: honor, courage, convictions, honesty, truthfulness, generosity, kindness, helpfulness, justice, respect, freedom, and equality (Character Education Institute, 1996). Another group, the Heartwood Institute, proposed this list of attributes: courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love (Heartwood Institute, 1992). William Bennett (1993), a key figure in the character education movement, selected self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, and perseverance for his popular compilation of moral stories, *The Book of Virtues*. Although all of the

character qualities touted and taught by each group are clearly desirable, it is difficult to exhaustively define, limit, or even clearly differentiate between them.

Educational researchers have selected varying lists of traits as well in conducting their studies. Edgington, Brabham, and Frost (1999) used Earley and Gibb's (1994) list when they researched character traits in historical fiction. These traits were compassion, courage, courtesy, honesty, fairness, kindness, loyalty, perseverance, respect, and responsibility. Lowry and Chamber's (1969) foundational study of middle-class values in Newbery Award books used an instrument that measured the following values: civic and community responsibility, cleanliness and neatness, importance of education, freedom and liberty, good manners, honesty, initiative and achievement, justice and equality, loyalty, sacredness of marriage, responsibility to the church and religion, responsibility to family, self-reliance, sexual morality and thrift and hard work.

Cultural changes over the past 40 years are quite evident in just a casual glance at the aforementioned lists. Therefore, although widespread agreement exists that character training is essential, it is also true that there is little consensus as to which values should be taught. Brynildssen (2002) called for the teaching of "character traits known to promote success and happiness in life, and which will best enable young people to maximize their use of their education and knowledge" (p.1), but admitted there is some variation in opinion as to which specific traits to teach. Kinnier, Dannenbaum, Lee, Aasen and Kernes (2004) studied "Values Extolled in U.S. Presidential Inaugural Addresses" in order to ascertain which values in our increasingly diverse society can be considered core values. They found that liberty and belief in God were the two most valued. In a later study by the same researchers, "Values Most Extolled in Nobel Peace Prize Speeches", it was found that there were relatively few references to God in the

speeches they examined. Their explanation was that, “Perhaps many of the laureates did not mention God ...because too many wars have been fought over conflicting views of God and truth” (Kinnier, Kernes, Hayman, Simon & Kilian, 2007, p. 585). These researchers also asserted, “tolerance must trump personal beliefs about God and the truth” (p. 585) and argued “the values extolled by the laureates are likely to be universal because the laureates are among the most respected individuals in the world” (p. 585). While the difference between the two kinds of speeches studied may emphasize America’s unique religious foundations and freedoms, this evidence of the deliberate removal of references to God may portend difficulties ahead for those who wish to continue to teach traditional Judeo- Christian virtues in character education.

Theoretical Framework for this Study

Colson and Piercey (1999) stated that, “ Our choices are shaped by what we believe is real and true, right and wrong, good and beautiful. Our choices are shaped by worldview” (p.13). The researcher and reader/coders for this content analysis, all evangelical Christians, share the belief that traditional Judeo-Christian values should be maintained. This accords well with the core values theory of values inculcation. An essential belief of Christianity is that right and wrong are distinct and are delineated in the words of the Holy Scripture. Another important Judeo-Christian principle expressed in both the Old and New Testaments is that the older generation is instructed to pass on its faith and values to the next generation. While the core values approach, as exemplified by The Six Pillars of Character, attempts to synthesize a set of universal values that cuts across cultures, it does rest upon a foundation that insists that there are indeed behaviors and attitudes that are to be considered preferable to others.

In making their case for the teaching of character in the public schools, Colson

and Piercey asserted, “The decline in public education is not due to poor teaching or lack of funding; it is due to educational theories that deny the existence of transcendent truth and morality...” (p. 336). Holding firmly to biblical notions of transcendent truth and morality, the researcher and reader/coders rendered their judgments and findings about character traits in these novels based on a traditional biblical worldview. While the specific definitions for each of the six character traits provided by the Character Counts! initiative were employed (see Appendix A), the meanings ascribed were informed by a scriptural sense of the right and true. For example, the definition for the pillar *caring* includes “having the courage to do the right thing.” Those who hold to a more post-modern point of view might see a wife leaving home for the arms of a paramour, a so-called “true love”, as displaying the courage to do the right thing in that she was following her heart. An evangelical Christian, committed to a biblical interpretation of morality, would say rather that this kind of courage would necessitate the keeping a marital vow instead of yielding to a temptation to unfaithfulness.

A Sampling of Current Character Education Programs

The most used extensively implemented program, Character Counts!, provides anecdotal reports of great successes in terms of improved behavior in many states around the country, and their research is currently under peer review. Their website advertises, “This year we’ll change the lives of 7 million kids nationwide with character education”(Josephson Institute, 2009, para. 1), through their more than 850 member organizations and thousands of participating schools

The Character Counts! Program focuses on the Six Pillars of Character, which are *trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship*. Researchers Joseph and Efron (2005) have helpfully condensed these into the following short

definitions:

1. Be honest
2. Treat others with respect
3. Do what you are supposed to do
4. Play by the rules
5. Be kind
6. Do your share to make your school and community better (p. 2).

In the Character Counts! materials each characteristic is thoroughly defined and analyzed so that children will see that trustworthiness, for example, has numerous components. Support materials delineated trustworthiness as having the components of honesty, reliability, courage to do the right thing, building a good reputation, and loyalty. While it is this particular curriculum that is the focus of the present research, there are other literature- based character education programs that bear mentioning.

The Loving Well Project at Boston University's School of Education has developed a literature- based curriculum that integrates skill- building in reading, writing, listening, and speaking with exploring the complexities of human relationships as seen in literary characters (McLaren, 1997). Students are thus able to avoid some of life's more painful emotional experiences as they learn vicariously through the examples of fictional characters. The virtues of love, respect, trust, and sacrifice are elevated and bring inspiration to young people. Research demonstrates the efficacy of this approach. In the control group, 28% of the children became sexually active during their 8th grade year compared with 8 % in the Loving Well group (McLaren, 1997). The Character Education Project originating at the Boston University School of Education is noteworthy, as is its related Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character which

maintains a website providing access to a myriad of resources related to character education.

Literature and Character Education

The notion of using literature to teach character is centuries old: “It has been a common belief from early times that books which include moral or ethical teachings are a means of influencing the lives of their readers” (Lowry & Chambers, 1968, p. 20). The Old Testament powerfully exemplifies the impact a story can have in a dramatic narrative taken from the life of King David. Even as David attempted to ignore the guilt of the adultery and murder he had committed because of lust for Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet drew him in to his tale about a man who had cruelly taken the sole ewe lamb of another. Because of Nathan’s skill as a storyteller, David’s heart was stirred, his defenses were overcome, and he was stricken with the import of his sinful actions.

Eugene Peterson (2008), author of the contemporary Bible paraphrase *The Message*, has written a book called *Tell it Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in his Stories and Prayers*. His title is taken from a poem by Emily Dickinson in which she points out the prudence of speaking powerful truths subtly:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant-
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth’s superb surprise.

As lighting to the Children eased
 With Explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually

Or every man be blind (in Peterson, 2008, p. 3).

Her words here are a prescription for teachers and authors who wish to impart moral values to their students. Jesus was the master at “telling it slant,” using a story to illustrate a point so as to penetrate the defenses of his most hardened hearers. Most of the Gospels are comprised not of sermons or lists of rules, but of simple narratives Jesus told as he travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem with his disciples. Even today, whether through biblical or classic literature, or through the use of contemporary children’s fiction, literature- based character education retains its importance (Cates, 2008).

The use of literature for character education began as far back as the Greeks, when Plato, in *The Republic*, urged that young minds be protected from evil thoughts and careless tales because it was in childhood that one’s character was being indelibly formed. He recommended that “the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thought” (Bennett, 1993, p. 17). Centuries later, Eichler- Levine (2007), in a recent dissertation examining religious narratives in children’s literature, commented on the way cultures still use stories to transmit values: “Children’s books are distilled sites of cultural transmission. The stories a community chooses to pass down to its youth, and the way in which it frames them, indicates where its leaders....place their values most heavily” (p. 1).

Research has also demonstrated that one of the most effective means of character education is class discussion of moral issues, which can very easily be implemented in classroom through discussions of literature (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lamme, 1996; Stauffer, 2007). Karen Bohlin (2005) has made the claim that “a focused approach to ethical inquiry into literature can awaken and educate students’ moral imaginations” (p. 9). Auciello (2007) extended this even further when he asserted that not only is it nearly

impossible to find a work of literature that does not address moral issues, but that it is also impossible for a teacher to avoid teaching character because of the nature of his status as a role model for children.

Lickona (1991) also detailed ways in which teachers can utilize literature to promote both critical and ethical thinking. He said, "...Teachers have traditionally looked to literature as a way of instilling a felt sense of right and wrong. When children encounter villains and heroes in the pages of a good book, they feel repelled by the evil and drawn, irresistibly, to the good" (Lickona, p. 60). Gurion (1996), in "Awakening the Moral Imagination," pointed out that society fails to "provide children with the kinds of experience that nurture and build the moral imagination" and spoke of the "power of stories to humanize the young" (p. 3). As they attempt to mitigate the damaging effects of an increasingly amoral mass media, parents and teachers will find that some of their best resources for helping to shape their children's character can be found in quality children's literature.

At all levels of schooling, the literature class is gaining in stature as a vehicle for moral teaching. Most current programs of character education assign a prominent place to the role of narrative in the lives of children because it is most often through stories that culture is transmitted (Leming, 2000). Campbell and Wirttemberg (1998) reported on research that demonstrated that literature has a powerful effect on children, saying it had the ability to "indoctrinate them in socially prescribed behaviors" (p. 3).

By experiencing in- depth the thoughts and actions of the characters in works of fiction, children do more than just experience vicarious adventure, they learn that character is more than a simple laundry list of good behaviors. As Ellenwood (2007) declared, "Literature sharpens our insights about character and integrity by highlighting

the nuances of fundamental human virtues and by making each less abstract” (p. 41).

Ellenwood further pointed out that using literature to teach character avoids the problems of simply teaching laundry lists of desirable traits; character is something far greater than just the sum of its elements. As students spend time with their teachers discussing and analyzing the lives of the characters they encounter, they learn to recognize moral behavior and its absence as well

One of the problems this study seeks to address is how teachers who are mandated by federal law under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 to teach character can meet all of the curricular demands and still find time and space to effectively teach values. For many teachers the notion of having to add just one more element to an already overfull schedule is problematic (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). One highly effective means is to use the literature that is already part of the required curriculum, but to shift focus to the lessons about life that are already there. English teachers in particular can choose books that focus on values and virtue; in fact, “it is hard to select a text that does not take up moral issues” (Auciello, 2007, p. 65).

It is the responsibility of influential adults in the lives of children, their parents and teachers, to guide young people in the discovery of the power of stories to help them in their moral development. A rich and often untapped curricular resource, “Great literature for children communicates values that are more lasting than silver or gold. Such literature helps readers to know themselves, the world, and the great diversity of people populating their lives” (Leal, Glascock, Mitchell, & Wasserman, 2000, p. 49). Anderson (2000), in raising the question of who is responsible for teaching character, made the case for the centrality of the teacher’s role in training young people in the core values of respect, responsibility, fairness, and hard work. Some authors, like William

Bennett (1993), have touted the benefits of using classic works of literature for this purpose, while others have seen a rich source of material for discussion of ethical issues in the 20th century children's literature that has been awarded the Newbery Medal for excellence (Leal, 1999).

History and Significance of the Newbery Award

The Newbery Award has been given each year since 1922 to outstanding works of fiction for children through age 14. The American Library Association (ALA) selects books they deem to have made "the most distinguished contribution to literature for children published in the United States during the previous year" (Kidd, 2007, p. 167). Because of this acclaim, Newbery books are widely available in school libraries and are often used in classrooms (Leal et al., 2000). A book that wins this award can more than double in sales and will remain in print far longer than it otherwise might have. It can be said that the winning of the Newbery Medal renders a book an instant classic (Kidd, 2007). Parents and teachers trust Newbery books and often purchase or assign them without having read them in advance based on their reputation alone. Themes and characters of the Newbery titles have changed over the decades and much research has been aimed at discerning trends. Compared with the books written earlier in the 20th century, books written after 1960 have reflected more harsh realities, and the problems children encounter are much more difficult (Aaron, Hecker, & Hutchinson, 1993; Smagorinsky & Taxel, 2005). If, as some have suggested, the Newbery has declined in tone and theme, adults may unwittingly be giving their children material to read which will prove harmful rather than helpful in reinforcing values. This is a compelling reason to conduct a content analysis of 21st century Newbery Medal winners .

Research on Children's Literature and Values

There is a substantial body of research on numerous aspects of the Newbery Award books, including examinations of the character messages sent to students through literature (Edgington, Brabham, & Frost, 1999; Knafle, Wescott & Pascarella, 1988; Lautenback, 2004; Leal et al., 2000). While Lukenbill and Stewart (1988) found 27 dissertations from 1930 to 1985 in which Newbery award books were the focal point, this review of literature will be limited to those published studies pertinent to character education. Bekkedal's (1973) meta- analysis of content analyses of children's books revealed that a major focus of these studies had to do with the presence and portrayal of values in children's literature. The influence of literary characters on young readers' development as they learn from vicarious experiences was cited as a rationale for conducting a study of the history of gender roles in the Newbery Medal winners by Powell, Gillespie, Swearingen, and Clements (1998).

Lowry and Chambers (1968) examined Newbery books for evidence that they contained "American middle -class morality and ethical values" (p. 1). They quantitatively analyzed Newbery Medal Award winners from the inception of the prize in 1922 through 1965, using an instrument they designed which measured the extent to which of the books offered students an opportunity to explore 15 core values. They concluded that although there was some evidence of these values, there was an "interesting relationship ...between the current social problems, e.g. race relations, high divorce rate, sexual promiscuity, and prevalent examples of dishonesty, and the lack of strong value- dealing with these problems in the books of the current study" (p. 28).

Now, a generation later, one wonders how the 21st century Newbery Award winners present these core values. Bekkedal (1973) noted that the professional literature

had begun to document the significant changes in children's literature commencing in the 1960's, when a trend toward more stark realism started to be seen. This researcher's interest in the nature of 21st century Newbery Award books is aligned with this purpose. In her call for further research Bekkedal said,

If children do gain ideas and impressions about the world around them from the books they read, as is generally believed, it is surely important for adults to know what kind of world the books portray. Content analysis can help to provide a more comprehensive view of the contemporary world as it is pictured in children's books (p. 124).

Leal, Glascock, Mitchell, and Wasserman (2000) analyzed 77 Newbery winning books, from the inception of the prize in 1922 through 1998, seeking to discover the character traits being modeled in these works. They found it surprising that, despite the prominent role of character education in today's classroom, little research had been done on the character messages contained in these prestigious titles. Their conclusions were that the Newbery books did indeed contain positive character messages and could, therefore, be relied upon as sources that would aid in moral education. It is the intent of this researcher to seek to verify these findings with more current Newbery books, those that have been awarded the prize in the 21st century, from 2000- 2010.

Bryant (2008) carried this research further, examining the Newbery Medal winners from 1997- 2007 for evidence of positive character traits in these books. She created the acronym C.H.A.R.A.C.T.E.R and looked for the presence of the corresponding character traits: "caring, helpfulness, acceptance, respect, ambition, citizenship, trustworthiness, encouragement, and responsibility" (p. 3). Her research methodology incorporated elements of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Her team of

four readers each read all 10 books and coded them for frequencies of occurrence of both positive and negative character elements. Bryant's conclusions noted which of the books were most suitable for teaching individual character traits, such as *Crispin*, *Cross of Lead* for respect, and *Holes* for acceptance. In her call for further research, Bryant suggested that the study be updated annually to include the most current Newbery winners. She also recommended using this kind of content analysis to seek out evidence of other sets of character traits. This researcher extended Bryant's research by adapting her well-designed methodology, updating it to include the most recent Newbery winners. One significant change was that readers coded for virtues corresponding with the Six Pillars from Character Counts! in order that the results might be of practical classroom use in any of the many schools where this curriculum has been adopted.

Cates (2002) also conducted a qualitative inquiry into values portrayed in Caldecott- winning children's literature rendering them useful for character education. Cates' qualitative analysis work was a partial replication of a quantitative content analysis conducted by Edgington, Brabham & Frost (1999) that used winners of the Scott O'Dell Fiction Award before 1996 to assess values present in historical fiction for children. The values they selected to focus on were taken from the work of Earley and Gibbs' (1994), which isolated the following core values: compassion, courage, courtesy, fairness, honesty, kindness, loyalty, perseverance, respect, and responsibility. Their findings were that these values were present in award- winning historical fiction and these works would thus be useful for character education. Cates likewise confirmed the presence of values in works of children's literature, making them efficacious for character study.

Three studies looked at changes over time that had occurred in children's

literature. Knafle, Wescott, and Pascarella (1988) created a scale to assess values in children's literature. This quantitative study of Caldecott medal winners sought to discover whether values portrayal in children's books would change over time. As they created a scale, they found that providing examples of each value was essential in training the raters and ensuring a high degree of inter-rater agreement. Their expectation was that they would find significant differences across the decades with regard to depiction of values, but they did not find these to be major.

Houdyshell and Kirkland (1998) were also interested in changes in the Newbery books over the course of 75 years, comparing the portrayal of heroines from among the 1922- 1933 winners with those winners from 1985--1996. They found that the books did, in fact, reflect social change, with the incidence of heroines increasing with the passage of time.

Similarly, Powell, Gillespie, Swearingen, and Clements (1998) examined changing gender roles in the Newbery books decade by decade from the inception of the prize in the 1920's through the 1990's. They suggested that the depiction of female characters in the Newbery winners had grown more realistic, with the most contemporary books presenting stronger female heroines. They documented this change, about which they stated, "Gender roles in the Newbery winners are becoming increasingly balanced. The parity between male and female main characters has improved dramatically" (Gillespie, et al, 1998, p. 54). These findings informed the present study as it gave rise to this question: as societal values have changed, will a study of values portrayed in 21st century Newbery books reveal those changes as well?

Lathey (2005) compared protagonists in Newbery books in the 1950's and the 1990's. His work confirmed the changes that have taken place over time in these texts in

terms of theme and personal characteristics of the main characters. The theme of parental abandonment is a strong one in the later books, and correspondingly, resilience, flexibility, and independence are traits that characterize the heroes and heroines.

Newbery Books and Character Education

A meaningful trend in language arts classrooms over the past 20 has been the inclusion of contemporary young adult fiction, most often Newbery Award winners, in favor of worksheets, anthologies, or even old classics. Proponents have suggested that such changes have resulted in increased fluency and love of reading (Friedman & Cataldo, 2002). In considering which set of texts might be most useful to classroom teachers charged with the teaching of character, this researcher, a former English teacher, decided to examine the often-researched Newbery Award winning novels because of their popularity, critical acclaim, and widespread acceptance and availability (Powell, Gillespie, Swearingen & Clements, 1998). Studies undertaken decades earlier established that this body of work was indeed a valuable source of material for character education. Lowry and Chambers (1968) found that in the Newbery Medal Award winners from 1922 to 1965 there were “many opportunities to explore and cultivate understandings of moral and ethical values” (p. 31). Leal, Glascock, Mitchell, and Wasserman (2000) asserted that, “Newbery Medal books can be counted on as excellent examples of books that can help nurture virtue and morality” (p. 52).

Questions about Contemporary Newbery Books

However, in recent years, many are questioning the continued value of the Newbery award in light of the changes in content. Strauss (2008) suggested that many in the literary community feel that the Newbery committee may have lost its way in selecting books that are too difficult and dark for young readers: “Of the 25 winners and

runners- up chosen from 2000 to 2005, four of the books deal with death, six with the absence of one or both parents and four with such mental challenges as autism. Most of the rest deal with tough social issues” (p. 1). Lucy Calkins, a professor of children’s literature, made the following claim: “I can’t help but believe that thousands, even millions, more children would grow up reading if the Newbery committee aimed to spotlight books that are deep and beautiful and irresistible to kids” (Strauss, 2008, C01). Alarming, some in the educational community have begun to complain that forcing children to read these once highly motivating books has unfortunately created an antipathy toward reading.

Ironically, these highly acclaimed Newbery books are not currently as popular with children as their critical regard and prominence would suggest. Ujiie and Krashen (2006) obtained data on the sale of children’s books for 2003 and 2004 and found that very few Newbery award winners were on the bestseller lists. This lends credence to the claims by some that the Newbery judges have lost touch with the audience for these books. Silvey (2008) in the *School Library Journal* asked the question, “Has the Newbery Lost its Way?”, and claimed that “valuing uniqueness over universality” (p. 1) had led judges astray. She noted that the best- selling Newbery’s of the 1990’s like *The Giver*, *Holes*, *Number the Stars*, and *Maniac Magee* were still on the best- seller lists in 2008, while the recent winners, those from 2000 on, have failed to achieve that kind of distinction or widespread popularity.

What is it about the 21st century Newbery’s that makes them less appealing and inspiring to young people? Have the themes become too dark? Barbieri (2000) discovered the focus on the sorrowful and tragic side of life, learning that of the previous 14 winners, seven of them dealt with children whose mothers had died. As these

disturbing trends are beginning to emerge, further research needs to be done on the themes and values presented in 21st century Newbery Award winning novels.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry has been to examine the content of 21st century Newbery Award books in order to determine their suitability for use in character education. This chapter will describe the research perspective, the use of content analysis, the participants and context, the procedures followed for the data collection, and the data analysis procedures used in this study.

Introduction

Personal classroom teaching experience, observation of growing societal ills, and inquiry into educational research on character education have led this researcher to agree with those experts who assert that literature is a highly effective and engaging method of values inculcation. As educators continue to replace classics from the Western canon of literature with contemporary novels they deem more relevant, the question of the continued suitability of children's literature for character education emerges. The Newbery Medal, awarded annually for excellence in American children's literature confers prestige on each winner, and these books are accordingly given a high level of trust by librarians, teachers, and parents. However, as societal values change, and some would say decline, how is children's literature reflecting that change? Are the Newbery Award winning novels from the 21st century still a reliable resource for character education?

The most widely-used character education curriculum, Character Counts! (Chase, 2001; Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009) designates and defines six universal character values called the Six Pillars. In order to evaluate whether or not Newbery Award literature is useful for character education, the researcher conducted a content

analysis wherein the eleven 21st century Newbery Award novels (2000-2010) were examined for evidence of opportunities for teachers and students to explore these character values. This chapter will detail the means by which the researcher conducted a qualitative inquiry into the nature of values portrayal in these children's novels.

Qualitative Research Perspective

Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006) explained an important difference between quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry:

Quantitative methods use well- planned empirical approaches, experimental designs, and often statistical testing as compared to the more naturalistic, emergent, and field- based methods typical of qualitative research. The primary instrument used for data collection in qualitative research is the researcher himself, often collecting data through direct observation or interviews (p. 450).

This researcher chose the qualitative method of inquiry precisely because it depends on human insight and understanding. It is possible to conduct a quantitative content analysis by using a computer- based program that counts key words. However, merely knowing the number of times a character word such as “caring” appears in the pages of a book does not indicate that the character trait of caring is a theme in the text. It takes an informed reader to make meaning of the text, to understand and interpret dialogue, symbolism, and nuance. Ary, et al. (2006), in discussing qualitative methods of data collection, stated that “...researchers need an instrument flexible enough to capture the complexity of the human experience...” (p. 453) and it is, indeed, the complexity of human experience that is depicted in award- winning children's literature. For this reason the researcher chose to employ the services of a team of volunteer educational professionals as readers to assist in providing descriptive data. Ary, et al. (2006) noted

that “qualitative investigators also typically keep a personal or reflexive log” (p. 445).

An important aspect to the data collected from each reader- coder was the rich description they provided in the form of narrative answers to questions posed in part 2 of codebook (See Appendix A).

Additionally, Ary, et al. (2006) in the passage quoted above presented the concept of *emergent design* as a key distinctive in qualitative inquiry. They also noted that data is often obtained by means of interviews. One unexpected and felicitous aspect of this research project was the participation by many of the authors of the Newbery works by means of personal and email interviews. It emerged during the course of this research that not only were some authors willing to provide detailed answers to questions about their intent regarding character education, but two of the authors granted extensive personal interviews to this researcher. Qualitative studies grant the researcher freedom to adapt their methods because “the design continues to emerge as the study unfolds...” (Ary et al , p. 454). In this case, input from the authors supplied an additional valuable source of data.

Content Analysis

Ary et al. (2006) identified content analysis as a qualitative research method used to “discover the relative importance of, or interest in, certain topics” (p. 464). One of the intents of this study was to identify the relative importance of, or interest in, the topic of values in children’s literature, specifically, Newbery Award winning books from the 21st century. Holsti (1969) broadened the parameters of this research method when he stated, “content analysis should use qualitative and quantitative methods to supplement each other” (p. 11). Both frequency counts and narrative descriptions of observations have been recorded by coders in the codebook designed for this study. Data presented in

Chapter Four include both ranking and frequency of character elements, as well as rich description of themes and content of the novels studied.

Krippendorff (1980) pointed to the usefulness of content analysis for identifying trends, patterns, and differences. The intention of this study was to identify trends and patterns in the treatment of specific universal values in contemporary children's literature. These six values: *caring*, *citizenship*, *fairness*, *responsibility*, *respect*, and *trustworthiness* have been designated as the Six Pillars of Character in the Josephson Institute's Character Counts! Curriculum, the most widely used character education program in the nation (Josephson, 2009). By examining the 21st century Newbery Award winning novels and seeking to identify the presence or absence of examples of these character traits, the researcher has been able to document the presence of certain trends and patterns in the books comprising the study set.

Altheide (1987) stated that qualitative content analysis "is used to verify or confirm hypothesized relationships" (p. 68). Children's literature has historically been used to teach moral lessons; this study examined the question of whether or not prize-winning contemporary works of children's literature remain an effective source of material for the teaching of character in the classroom. An important question is whether or not a relationship exists between the six universal moral values set forth in a widely used character education program, and works of fiction deemed worthy of the most coveted prize in children's literature.

Development of the Coding System

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) further clarified qualitative content analysis by describing the directed approach as one in which analysis begins with coding categories derived from theory or research findings. For the present study, this researcher has

created a codebook synthesized from elements found in studies by Lowry and Chambers (1968), Edgington, Brabham and Frost (1999), and Bryant (2008). Lowry and Chambers used a data- gathering instrument that asked the question: “To what extent does the book afford the opportunity to explore the value...” (p. 23). This question is comprehensive and therefore useful because it acknowledges that discussions of values are nuanced; it is not always the protagonist who serves as an example of high moral character. Framing the question in this fashion allowed coders to identify an opportunity to discuss a value based on its presence, or notable absence, in the lives of any of the characters in a work of fiction.

Edgington, Brabham, and Frost (1999) introduced another subtle and important question: Is there “... a point where the main character changed behavior as a result of having learned the importance of a particular value?” (p. 38). Similarly, the codebook required participants in this study to supply rich description in narrative form, asking them to identify and write reflections on turning points in the lives of any characters. This again speaks to the purpose of the research, which is to identify the books within this sample of children’s literature that might prove valuable for character education.

Bryant’s (2008) codebook served as a model for this research in that she recorded frequency counts and page numbers within the text for each of the character elements she explored. Other aspects that will also be adapted will be Bryant’s methods of displaying data in terms of frequency and rank of character traits, as a whole and within each book.

How Content Analysis was Used

Cook and Cook (2008) noted that qualitative research is considered descriptive in that it exists to provide narrative rather than mere numbers concerning a phenomenon and involves “a relatively small number of individuals who express their views in

considerable depth using spoken or written words” (p. 99). In this study, four additional readers assisted this researcher in collecting data by analyzing and coding the content of 11 Newbery Award- winning novels for children, an example of purposive sampling. Ary et al. (2006) stated that, “because of the depth and extent of the information sought in qualitative studies, purposive samples are typically small” (p. 472). Sampling was homogeneous in that the works of literature analyzed and compared were all the novels that have been awarded the Newbery Award for excellence in children’s literature during the 21st century.

An important part of the study was the readers’ dialogue concerning their assessment of themes and opportunities to explore values through classroom discussion of these novels. Descriptive data was collected each week from the readers who recorded their “thoughts, feelings...and rationale for decisions made” (Ary, et al, 2006, p. 454) in a codebook containing questions that guided and informed the group discussions. An important aspect of qualitative research, according to Schwandt (1997), is the process of comparing, contrasting, and categorizing data. The team of readers engaged in this process, both in written form via the codebook, and orally during the weekly team meetings. At the end of each session, readers ranked the book on category rating scale, identifying both the strength and frequency of treatment of each specific character element.

Moderating these meetings proved to be a work in progress. Spending the time on the practice text was very useful and, if time and resources had been in unlimited supply, it might have been beneficial to have read several more books together prior to undertaking the study in order to develop a more streamlined method of coming to consensus. This aspect of the study improved each week. Because of the variety of

experience, age, and individual viewpoints within the team, the findings each week were not unanimous, which strengthened the findings. Lively discussions ensued because each of the readers was passionate about the subject; an element of the study which was both challenging and exhilarating. It must be said at least one reader was moved to tears by the discussion of these books each week.

One point of difficulty was that readers found the definitions provided by Character Counts! to be both limiting and, at the same time, overly broad. The former because so many important character traits were omitted, such as humility or integrity, and the latter because each trait was comprised of so many sub-traits. The categories were not mutually exclusive, therefore one reader might call a situation an exemplification of *caring*, while another might see the same situation and identify it as *respect*. This researcher, as moderator, had to make a concerted effort to keep the discussions on target, to overtly value and sometimes clarify the individual contributions of each reader, to continually point back to the operational definitions of each of these pillars, and to remind the readers to avoid focusing on minutiae and to maintain a more global perspective. The codebook instructions (see Appendix A) were modified after the initial practice book to reflect the importance of these practices.

Selection of Books

The books chosen for study were all of the 21st century Newbery Award winning books to date, one from each year from 2000-2010. The most prestigious prize in children's literature, the Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), to the "most distinguished contribution to American Literature for children" (Strauss, 2008,p. CO1). Because a key research area of interest is whether these texts

would be suitable for use in character education, their selection was determined by their popularity and universality in school libraries and classrooms (Silvey, 2008; Marks, 2006).

Selection of Reader/Coders

In addition to this researcher, a team of four volunteer readers and one alternate participated in reading and coding 12 Newbery Award books. The readers each have many years of experience in classroom teaching and as well as expertise pertinent to the study of children and literature. This researcher began her career at a public junior high school as a compensatory reading teacher. Later, she taught junior and senior high school and then college English for a total of 16 years. Additionally, this researcher conducted action research for her master's thesis on literature circles for 9th grade students and thereby gained extensive experience in reading and recommending children's literature. A writer as well, she has written two biblically based musicals for children emphasizing character themes. Classroom teaching experience in both the classics and Newbery fiction spurred her interest in researching the effective inculcation of values by means of story. As a classroom teacher, among her most satisfying moments were when students grasped important and transcendent truths about how to live with valor, purpose, joy, and integrity based on the lives they saw depicted in their literature study.

Reader #1 is a former elementary school teacher who taught reading for 6 years in public schools in Tennessee. She has also written three faith-based novels for children. The mother of grown children, she read aloud to them from early infancy and made weekly trips to the library to encourage their love of reading. Her own love of literature is evidenced in her having read over 1500 books, approximately 70% of which were juvenile fiction. As a coder, Reader #1 was particularly astute and articulate. Her

analyses often led other readers to see subtleties and nuances previously undetected. Her background as an author herself may have predisposed her to sensitivity to all aspects of the novel: plot, characterization, setting, and theme.

Reader #2 is a recently retired professor with bachelor's and master's degrees in the humanities, a major in music, and a strong baccalaureate interest in literature. She has taught writing at San Diego Christian College and the University of New Mexico. She spent 45 years teaching in junior high, high school, and college classrooms, and has experience in creating study guides for literary works. Her classroom curriculum included emphasis on character education. The parent of two grown daughters, she shared her love of the classics with her children by filling their home with books and reading aloud with them. She brought both a love of literature and analytical expertise to the team. She developed an extensive assessment program for San Diego Christian College, requiring the collection and analysis of data that constituted a culture of evidence of student learning and development. Reader #2's insights were quite different in quantity, but not quality, from Reader #1's. She tended to adhere more closely to the researcher's instructions to view episodes and chapters more holistically and so, numerically, her frequency coding was not as extensive as that of Reader #1.

Reader #3 is a former junior high teacher who is currently a librarian. Her many years of experience as a librarian include her current employment with the San Diego Public Library, the Southern California Seminary, and San Diego Christian College. She has studied children's literature as an undergraduate and has had a lifelong passion for reading. This reader was several decades younger than the two older members of the team, and she therefore brought a refreshing "Generation X" perspective to the analysis that served as an important contrast to the those of the two Baby Boomers and two

members of the Silent Generation who participated.

Reader #4 is a credentialed special education teacher who has used Newbery books extensively in the classroom. She has a special interest in Newbery books and has nearly completed her goal of reading all of them, from 1922 to the present. Reader #4, as the eldest member of the team and a grandmother many times over, had perhaps the most experience in using literature to teach character to her own family members. She brought a significant degree of wisdom borne of long years experience to this study of character.

Reader # 5, who functioned as an alternate, has a California multi- subject teaching credential and experience teaching at the junior high level. She was also the director of education at her church and is currently the owner/manager of a software company. She is the mother of three children, grandmother of one, and an avid participant in several book clubs. Reader # 5 was filled with enthusiasm for this work and, while unable to commit to reading all 12 books due to her other professional responsibilities, was eager to participate. Utilizing her as an alternate proved helpful on those few occasions where readers were unable to make a weekly meeting. Since she attended most of the meetings and had undertaken the practice study, she was quite conversant with the extant procedures and her contributions were smoothly integrated.

Rigor in Qualitative Research

This researcher relied upon the four standards of rigor for qualitative research as sent forth in Ary, et al. (2006): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Two of these categories, credibility and dependability, will be explained in detail in subsequent paragraphs. Adherence to the principles regarding the other two categories, confirmability and transferability, are discussed in this paragraph.

Confirmability is best enhanced when the researcher “provides a complete audit trail, which enables another researcher to arrive or not arrive at the same conclusions given the same data and context” (Ary et al., p. 511). Transferability is strengthened when the qualitative researcher provides “thick, rich description” (p. 509) of the context. Both of these elements are addressed by means of the codebook completed by each of the participants (see Appendix A), which provided both an audit trail and rich description.

Credibility. Two of the methods suggested by Ary, et al. (2006) for establishing credibility, or truth- value, in qualitative research are structural corroboration and consensus, both of which make use of triangulation. For the former, multiple sources of data support the interpretations of the findings. In the present study, data triangulation is seen in the use of both coding by a team of researchers and relevant personal or published interviews with the authors of the books in this study set. The second test of rigor, or validity based on consensus, is evidenced by “agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation and thematics are right” (Eisner, 1998, p. 112). Thus, a different type of triangulation is also employed in this study, that of investigator triangulation in which “multiple researchers collect data independently and compare the collected data” (Ary, et al, 2008, p. 505). This data comparison took place during the weekly meetings when participants met to debrief the results of their coding.

Dependability. In order to demonstrate that these results are reproducible and consistent, the two approaches used by this researcher, audit trail and interrater reliability, are detailed below.

Audit trail. Ary, et al. (2006) recommended the careful documentation of all aspects of the study, including when, where, and how. In this case, the researcher has assembled a written record of the process in the form of the codebooks that were

completed each week by the participants, a total of 60 six- page codebooks, representing 12 weeks of study by five coders. These codebooks (see Appendix A) contained frequency counts, rich description, memos, and reader reflections.

Interrater agreement. Knafle, Wescott & Pascarella (1988) studied values in children's books and noted the potential problem of rater agreement because "nuances of meaning may be perceived by one rater and not by another" (p. 71). They recommended that the groups discuss their differences with one another, and thus the proposed study is structured to provide weekly discussion time among the volunteer readers. As per Ary et al. (2006), the important step of training the coders, practicing on a novel together, and debriefing the results was undertaken to increase inter- rater reliability. As the readers and researcher met initially for training they became familiar with the content of the codebook. Engaging in dialogue, attempting to perceive broad themes, and recording affective responses all helped with gaining consensus. Knafle, Wescott & Pascarella (1988) also offered a practical suggestion for securing a high degree of inter- rater agreement, which was to provide specific examples for each category when using an objective scale measuring frequencies of character trait examples. The coding sheets have been designed with this feature in mind (see Appendix A).

An additional tool to bolster dependability is investigator triangulation, which occurs when multiple researchers collect data independently (Johnson & Christiansen, 2000). During each week of the study, independent evaluations were made by coders who read and record page numbers and brief quotations that indicated the presence of a value or its opposite.

Content validity. The codebook was created and then modified after consultation with colleagues of this researcher who were asked to give their expert

opinion as to whether or not the codebook would yield accurate and reliable results. The panel consisted of four individuals with doctorates in related fields, a technical writer, and a former junior high teacher. Ary, et al. (2006) stated that, “there is no numerical index to indicate content validity evidence...evidence based on content is mainly the result of a logical examination or analysis... (p. 245). After a discussion of the research questions, each individual examined and analyzed the codebook. When asked to comment on the clarity with which the instrument expressed the information to be sought, each individual agreed that the codebook was clear in its instructions and questions, citing its direct correlation with the Character Counts! definitions as particularly important. One of the panel members requested a clearer operational definition for one of the terms and the document was revised to reflect that change. Another member of the panel asked about the phrase in question 1 of the code sheet: “...an opportunity to explore this value.” Further discussion clarified the point: this language accords well with the purpose of this research, which is to ascertain whether or not these novels will prove useful to teachers using the Character Counts! Curriculum. As a preliminary step undertaken in order to test the codebook in actual practice, one of the panelists read a Newbery novel from the study set and employed the coding system in order to determine if it was clear and easy to use. She noted some cumbersome aspects, and modifications were then made to simplify the recording system for the team of coders.

Procedures

This researcher followed many of the protocols established by Bryant (2008) in her study of Newbery literature and character elements. Her design and use of a codebook, a team of qualified readers, and weekly briefing meetings were adopted and adapted. The collection of data took place over a period of 12 weeks, from January 19

through April 6, 2010.

Training the coders. The researcher's first meeting with the members of the study team included a presentation and handout (see Appendix A) introducing the Character Counts! Six Pillars of Character (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009). The contents and requirements of the research codebook were also discussed, including definitions and examples of each of the Six Pillars: *trustworthiness*, *respect*, *responsibility*, *caring*, *fairness*, and *citizenship*. Training materials supplied operational definitions of each of the character traits from Character Counts! Curriculum and were used by the researcher to guide a discussion including character examples from classic literature, familiar Bible stories, myths, and fables. Each individual was provided with a codebook and copy of *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech as a preliminary training tool. This 1995 Newbery Award winner was selected as the training text because Leal (1998) reported that it contained plentiful examples of both positive and negative character traits. During the following week, after reading and coding *Walk Two Moons*, all members of the study team met again to discuss and clarify the process.

As a result of this preliminary exercise, a number of changes were made that streamlined the system. One problem the group encountered was that some members were screening too extensively for character examples. Calibration included asking members to view situations holistically, and to consider whether or not one would really use a particular incident in a classroom to discuss character. For example, to code for respect each time a character in a full-length novel says please or thank you might yield hundreds of entries, leading to the erroneous conclusion that politeness, an element of respect, was a major theme. An important part of the group's collective assessment was to determine whether examples were significant or so minor as to be insignificant. To

simply count the number of times a key word related to a character trait appears in the novel would produce misleading data, as a term may be used ironically, idiomatically, or even in an entirely different sense of the word. This aspect of the group's research was a work in progress and the team developed this skill over the course of the months of study. After the week of coding and discussing the practice text, the codebook (see Appendix A) was revised to include detailed new instructions for the readers.

Another problem that was solved as the group practiced using the codebook had to do with identifying the units to be evaluated. Some books included chapters involving many scenes. It was decided to view each episode within the book as a distinct unit, regardless of a particular book's organization. Evaluating a scene from beginning to end helped readers to see themes, turning points, and opportunities to discuss values. Finally, it was established that readers would continually refer back to the specific language developed by the Character Counts! Curriculum to identify the different character traits as they coded. This step helped the group to come to consensus more readily.

Reading Schedule. Each member of the team read one book per week and completed parts one and two of the codebook prior to the weekly meeting. Discussions and the reporting of findings occurred weekly for 11 weeks. The team consisted of five members in addition to this researcher. A substitute coder came to the training meetings, as well as many other meetings, as an observer. If a member of the team of five was unable to code and meet during a particular week, in order to maintain numeric consistency, this individual acted as a substitute, which happened on two occasions. Appendix B indicates the titles and dates when each book was discussed.

Weekly meetings. The research team met each Tuesday evening from 7-9pm, from January 19 through April 6, 2010, for a total of 12 weeks. The first step at each

meeting was to come to consensus on the frequency charts for negative and positive examples. As the leader, this researcher would identify page numbers, episode by episode, for each of the Six Pillars in turn. If two or more members had selected a particular incident, discussion would ensue, and if the group agreed as a whole after discussion to count the example, it was recorded on the leader's tally sheet. The next step was for each reader to share his or her rich narrative descriptions as recorded in Part 2 of the codebook. Topics included in the codebooks involved connecting the Six Pillars with main themes, turning points, and central conflicts. Each reader was also asked to make recommendations or express concerns about using this particular book for character education. When the discussion was finished, each member then completed Part 3 of the codebook, the Character Pillar Ranking Form, a rating scale. This scale attempted to evaluate the readers' holistic responses after a discussion of each member's close reading and recording of specific page numbers. Readers rated each book on two measures having to do with the opportunity to explore values it provided, both frequency and intensity.

After the 12 weeks of study were completed, readers answered a set of questions asking them to reflect on what they had learned from the process. These results will be reported in Chapter Five.

Author contacts. Serendipitously, during the course of the study, the researcher discovered that two of the eleven authors would be presenters at a writer's conference at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. Each graciously agreed to meet for an extensive interview with the researcher. After the interviews with these two authors proved to be so enlightening and thought-provoking, a new line of inquiry emerged, in which the interviewer emailed the same questions to the other Newbery award writers in this group

whose addresses were made public. Four of the authors responded, and this data is included in Chapter Four. The writers' answers to questions about their intent with regard to character education were supplemented by additional research taken from their Newbery Acceptance awards and other print interviews.

Data Analysis

Two types of data were collected, both quantitative and qualitative. Several forms of quantitative data were collected, reduced, and displayed in tables in Chapter Four. Frequency counts for occurrences of both positive and negative character traits were compiled. Overall rankings of opportunities to explore values were computed for each of the 21st century Newbery books. At the end of the study, an overall ranking of all 11 books indicating which books offer the most frequent opportunities to discuss values was computed. For each separate character trait, a frequency chart and ranking of occurrence in each of the 11 novels has been provided. Specifics will be found under separate headings that follow.

The non-numeric component of the research consisting of narrative accounts of the findings of the researchers with regard to the assessment of thematic material, opportunities to explore values, and suitability for use in a character education program are displayed for each of the books considered. Comments from the coding team have been recorded and synthesized. Rich description documents the most important findings and impressions of the researcher and team.

Frequency counts. Each week after the meeting, the researcher processed the data by creating tables displaying the numeric findings. The tables are placed in Chapter Four at the end of each of the individual section devoted to each book. Positive and negative depictions of character traits are enumerated and listed by page number. The

Six Pillars are presented in rank order, indicating which pillar is most prominent in each book. These tables can be used by interested educators to link specific book titles and character pillars. The page numbers provide starting points for class discussions.

Another table displaying ranking indicates which character pillars in each novel contain positive and negative examples, as well as a combined value for number of occurrences. At the end of the study, the researcher combined data from each of these tables to produce a table displaying the ranking for number of opportunities to discuss values provided by each of the novels. Data were also organized to demonstrate by character pillar which books would be most connected thematically to each pillar.

Character pillar ranking form. This holistic rating scale was completed after both the initial coding reading and the group discussion. Readers were asked to give their impressions of opportunities to discuss values in a particular book in terms of strength of theme and frequency. At the end of each meeting, the researcher computed the mean for each of these elements in order to rank the Six Pillars' relevance in each novel. This data served to buttress the findings of the other two elements of the coding, both the frequency charts and the rich narrative description. At times it would emerge that a value such as responsibility would appear infrequently in the novel, but its intensity in certain key scenes would be such that it would rank highest in that category.

Rich narrative description. The codebook gave opportunity for reflective narrative in both the cover sheet and in the questions in Part 2. In Chapter Four, this data is presented for each novel in a template that includes the following: a focused plot summary told with deliberate emphasis on character, character themes found to be present, the Newbery author's comments, and character education recommendations. Quotations from each reader's codebook are used copiously and anonymously.

Summary of the Methodology

This chapter has described the way in which qualitative content analysis was used to conduct a study in which the researcher has sought to discover the extent to which the 21st century Newbery Award novels offer students opportunities to explore the following universal values designated as The Six Pillars of Character: *caring, citizenship, respect, responsibility, fairness, and trustworthiness*. The researcher's findings will be presented in Chapter Four. Recommendations as to which books contain the most positive and negative character examples, and which would be best suited for use in character education will also be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The goal of this study was to answer four guiding questions addressing the suitability of eleven 21st century Newbery Award winning novels for use in character education in schools. Character Counts! is the most widely used curriculum for character education nationally, and therefore the specific character traits that comprise their Six Pillars of Character were used in the coding. Chapter Three detailed the specific methodology employed for this qualitative content analysis supported by quasi- statistical data. The previous chapter also described the process used for selecting the books to analyze, as well as the qualifications and perspectives of the readers who participated in the volunteer study team.

In order to answer the first two guiding questions, “ Do the 21st century Newbery Award novels provide opportunities for students to explore the universal values set forth as the Six Pillars of Character? ” and “What are the frequencies of negative versus positive character traits being modeled by the characters in these novels?” the team of five readers coded each of these books for the following Six Pillars of Character expressed in the novels: *trustworthiness*, *caring*, *citizenship*, *fairness*, *respect*, and *responsibility*. This chapter will present the findings of the team in terms of numerical data concerning specific incidences in the texts where both positive and negative character examples were found. Guiding question # 3, “How would each of these novels be ranked in terms of most opportunities to explore values?” was answered by means of the numeric data collected and aggregated at the end of the study.

An important element of this qualitative study was the rich narrative description

provided by the readers in their Part 2 of their codebooks (See Appendix A). In exploring guiding questions one, three and four, readers expressed their informed opinions gained both by close analysis and holistic evaluation. Tables expressing their impressions as to strength and frequency of the treatment of the Six Pillars, rated on a ranking scale, are provided for each novel. Answers to guiding questions one and four were also presented in summary narrative form in the following sequential discussion of each book. A focused summary of each book provides perspective and insight on character themes. An additional feature of each novel's description and analysis will include the perspective of each Newbery author, synthesized from both personal and print interviews.

Data Analysis

The study team of seasoned educational professionals, 5 members and one alternate, met once a week for 12 weeks, from January 19, 2010 through April 6, 2010. After the initial training session and practice coding of 1995 Newbery Award book *Walk Two Moons* the actual study began. Readers read one novel each week and used the codebook (see Appendix A) to record occurrences of positive and negative examples of each of the Six Pillars of Character found in the novel. The codebook also allowed them to provide rich narrative description as they answered six questions about elements such as theme and turning points, followed by their recommendations about suitability of use for character education of the book in question. The team met for discussion each Tuesday evening from 7 to 9 pm in order to share their findings and come to consensus, the precise methodology for which is detailed in Chapter Three.

Each section following includes tables indicating the findings of the team with regard to both frequency and strength of treatment of each character theme. Character

pillars were also ranked as to identification as a main theme. Additional tables supply data as to both positive and negative character depictions, and finally, rankings as to opportunities to explore negative, positive, and overall values. Results will also be reported regarding the team's discussion of character themes and recommendations for use in character education. Quotations from Codebook Part Two: Rich Narrative Description(Appendix A) were included, with members of the study team being anonymously designated as "readers."

In order to obtain and incorporate the Newbery authors' perspective on use of literature for character education, the researcher contacted many of these individuals personally. Two of the authors, Kate DiCamillo and Avi, were presenters at the Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI April 15-17, 2010. Each of these two authors granted the researcher a lengthy personal interview. Four of the authors: Neil Gaiman, Laura Amy Schlitz, Rebecca Stead, and Susan Patron answered the researcher's questions via email. Inasmuch as the remaining five authors were unavailable, the researcher gathered data from their Newbery acceptance speeches and other interviews in print.

Results

2000 Newbery Award: *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis.

Plot summary. *Bud, Not Buddy* is the story of an orphaned African- American boy who escaped from the torments of abusive foster care during the Depression and began a dangerous journey in order to find the father whose identify he had never known. When his mother died suddenly, Bud was left with only a flimsy suitcase in which he carried the few possessions he had that reminded him of her. In addition to a small bag of rocks on which were written some mysterious numbers and letters, he had a

photograph of her as a child and some concert flyers for a band. Bud set out in search of Herman E. Calloway and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression, believing that if he could find them he could find his father. During the course of his perilous quest, he met a kindly, fatherly man, Lefty Lewis, a Pullman porter, who aided him in finding Herman E. Calloway. Despite some initial disappointments regarding the man he had hoped was his father, Bud found acceptance, caring, affirmation, and love in the members of the band who functioned like family to each other and to him. Some family mysteries were solved and, in the process, Bud came to a deeper understanding of his grandfather, his mother, and ultimately himself.

Character themes. The theme of *respect* was identified unanimously by members of the reading team as paramount in this novel. The harsh treatment Bud received by the foster family from which he fled, as well as the police who burned the Shantytown in which he sought shelter, provided vivid examples of disrespect. The adults Bud met who helped him in his quest: the librarian, Miss Hill; the driver, Mr. Lewis; and the singer in the band, Miss Thomas all showed him the respect he needed, fertile soil in which to grow in confidence. One member of the study team of readers said, “Bud was lucky to be picked up by a man who listened to him, Mr. Lewis, and respected him. That respect gave Bud the courage to continue his quest for his father and thus to walk into the presence of a foreboding man.” This reader also noted the disrespect the grandfather, Mr. Calloway, had for both his family and band members. Because he treated his daughter harshly, never accepting her efforts as good enough, she was desperate when she knew what his response would be to her unwed pregnancy, and she ran away from home. As a result, Mr. Calloway never saw her again, and never knew he had a grandson. Ultimately though, as one reader observed, “The strength of

Bud's courage, coming out of respect from others, allowed Bud to respect the grouchy old coot and ultimately to love and care for his grandfather." Racial intolerance, a theme related to the character pillar of respect, could also be profitably explored in this novel set in the pre- Civil Rights era.

Caring was another strong theme in this novel, closely tied with *respect*. One of the readers saw a change in Bud as a major turning point in the novel: "The biggest change to Bud was when he learned to cry again. He began to care again." This came about as a result of the kind actions of Mr. Lewis and Miss Thomas who were both instrumental to him in finding his father. An additional turning point involving caring was delineated by another reader, "Herman Calloway's turning point came after the flow of copious tears of sorrow and regret. Bud's turning point with copious tears of joy and peace while in the arms of Miss Thomas." A third reader stated, regarding the main theme of the book, "We do not live alone. Every word and action impacts others, with long- term effect."

While the group as a whole did not rate the character trait *fairness* as especially strong either in intensity or frequency, one reader's remark bears inclusion because it illuminated this point for the members of the group during the discussion. She said, "Although I rarely included *fairness* in the character assessment, it was the most apparent trait throughout the book. The abuse, the strange rules that made no sense, the lack of respect, the lack of trust were everywhere... these were blatant examples of unfair action." Abuses within the foster care system, the ill treatment of the poor and oppressed, and the theme of racial inequity would all provide rich opportunities to discuss the virtue of fairness.

Trustworthiness is also a character trait that could be explored profitably in this

novel. Bud had learned to lie to protect himself in the harsh environment into which economic hard times and his mother's death had thrust him. As one reader said, "While preferring honesty, he learned to play the lying game that sometimes was necessary for protection from the harsh realities of the Great Depression for a young African-American orphan. One reader noted, "His *Rules and Things to have a Funner Life and Make a Better Liar Out of Yourself* are all about how to soften the harsh treatment he had come to expect from life." The character pillar of *trustworthiness* can also be found in the theme of loyalty to family. Although Bud's grandfather had initially provided a negative example of this characteristic, Bud's longing and desperate quest to find his family, his love for his mother, and the eventual reconciliation of grandfather and grandson illustrated this virtue admirably.

Author Christopher Paul Curtis's comments. Christopher Paul Curtis has been the recipient of numerous awards for children's fiction, among them the Newbery Honor and Medal, and the Coretta Scott King Award. His novels involve characters and settings unique to the African American experience, but his themes are universal. Like many other children's writers, he maintains that his "mission is just to tell the story" (Schneider, 2008, p. 14). In his telling of stories with characteristic depth, humor, and candor, he does, however, communicate to young people that "...even though they can't save the world, they can do one little thing at a time to make a difference" (p16). Perhaps one of the reasons young readers can relate to the characters he creates is that they are multi-dimensional, displaying both character strengths and weaknesses. As Curtis himself put it, "I'm very conscious of not having a young person be super heroic" (p. 15). However, in his Newbery Acceptance award speech for *Bud, not Buddy* he also asserted this truth from the mouth of one of his characters, Bud's mom, "...with the right love and

care and hope, miraculous things can happen” (Curtis, 2000, p. 394).

When interviewed about his previous Newbery Honor book, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham- 1963*, Curtis gave some insights into how he views the use of his novels in the classroom. His reply to the question of whether or not saw his book as “a teaching tool, as a way of promoting personal growth for young people who read it,” he answered, “Yes I do. That it is supplemented for classroom use is so amazing and gratifying to me- that teachers can use the book in that way” (Morgan, 2002, p. 197).

Character education recommendations. Members of the reading team were unanimous in recommending this novel for use in character education. One reader expressed the opinion that *Bud, Not Buddy* was especially appealing because examples of the virtues were embedded in creative situations that also provided fuel for discussion about both history and culture. Another reader said, “There will be interesting discussions about Bud’s Rules - both about lying and about the respect that adults should show to children.” Caring for orphans and the poor are also rich topics that would emerge in a study of this novel. As a third reader said, “I would absolutely recommend this novel. All relationships require *respect*.” Finally, this statement by a reader illustrates the importance of telling the truth in children’s literature rather than writing thinly- veiled sermons for children: “*Bud, Not Buddy* does not sugar- coat Bud, but we see his conscience matured and strengthened through the kindly interactions of good people.”

Numerical data. Table 1.1 shows that caring and respect were judged by the team of readers to have appeared with equal frequency. Table 1.2 shows that *caring* and *respect* were also seen as having been treated with about approximately equal intensity. A comparison of the tables shows that strength and frequency of treatment of these

virtues were comparable.

Table 1.1

Bud, Not Buddy: Character Pillar Ranking – Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1= infrequent 2= a moderate amount 3=abundant

Pillar ranking	Mean
Caring	2.4
Respect	2.4
Trustworthiness	1.4
Responsibility	1.4
Fairness	1.0
Citizenship	0.4

Table 1.2

Bud, Not Buddy: Character Pillar Ranking – Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present, a weak theme 1= a weak or minor theme 2=a secondary theme

3=a strong or main theme

Pillar ranking	Mean
Respect	2.4
Caring	2.2

Responsibility	1.6
Trustworthiness	1.4
Fairness	0.2
Citizenship	0.0

Table 1.3 indicates that readers were unanimous in their assessment of respect as a main theme in this novel, and four of the five saw caring as a main theme. This conclusion is consistent with data presented in Tables 1.1 and 1.2

Table 1.3

Bud, Not Buddy: Pillars Identified as Main Theme

Character pillar	Identified as main theme
Respect	5
Caring	4
Fairness	2
Responsibility	2
Fairness	2
Citizenship	0

Data in Tables 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 were created by consensus. Readers individually coded the texts for opportunities they observed for students to explore the Six Pillars values. Both positive or negative examples of the trait displayed by characters in the novels were recorded because both would provide appropriate avenues for discussion of these virtues. During discussions, readers would share their individual findings and come to consensus about which trait was exemplified in each scene. Page numbers participants agreed on were recorded as examples. Table 1.6 indicates the total number of

opportunities to discuss values and serves as an indicator of whether or not this particular book would be useful in character education. In this case, the pillars of *fairness* and *citizenship* are the only ones not well- represented in the text.

Table 1.4

Bud, Not Buddy: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total frequency
Caring	3,8,42,47,49,51,58,68,73,74,76,78,81,84,85,86,89, 91,94,98,100,111,118,121,123,143,152,154,156,159, 161,165,170,173,174,177,183,185,186,192,194,196, 210,203,215,219,226,227,228,229,143,238	52
Responsibility	6,23,27,29,33,42,44,64,69,71,83,91,98,115,131,138, 140,153,164,172,175,190,194,199,201,204,206,208,216, 223, 228, 230,236	33
Trustworthiness	41,50,58,62,70,77,108,110,113,120,126,129,135,139,143, 152,153,159,189,194,196, 199,207,208,213,216,223,230	28
Respect	38,55,62,70,72,73,92,98,103,112,122,144,150,163, 168,181,188,206,211,212,216,222,232	23
Citizenship	132	1
Fairness	32	1

Table 1.5

Bud, Not Buddy: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total frequency

Respect	9,12,13,14,20,28,30,34,38,40,46,47,48,52,77,83,85,86,93, 116,120,125,139,148,149,179,212,213,214,222	30
Trustworthiness	4,10,11,16,31,35,82,86,104,106,112,141,144,151,166, 181,205,206,212	19
Caring	5,18,32,41,59,92,181,210,212	9
Responsibility	19,25,29,30	4
Fairness	14,23,30	3
Citizenship	35,51,83	3

Table 1.6

Bud, Not Buddy: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (52)	Respect (30)	Caring (61)
Responsibility (33)	Trustworthiness (19)	Respect (53)
Trustworthiness (28)	Caring (9)	Trustworthiness (47)
Respect (23)	Responsibility (4)	Responsibility (37)
Citizenship (1)	Fairness (3)	Citizenship (4)
Fairness (1)	Citizenship (3)	Fairness (4)
Total positive (138)	Total negative (68)	Total overall (206)

2001 Newbery Award: *A Year Down Yonder* by Richard Peck.

Plot summary. Author Richard Peck's novel, *A Year Down Yonder*, is a coming-of-age story set during the Roosevelt recession of 1937. The protagonist and narrator was a 15 year-year-old girl named Mary Alice. Her struggles began when, due to her parents' inability to provide for her, she was sent away from her home in Chicago to a

tiny rural community to be cared for by her gruff and intimidating grandmother. The story was told with great humor and warmth, and included an inspirational happy ending as Mary Alice discovered who she really was meant to be through the care of her unusual Grandmother Dowdel. Richard Peck himself provided this insight into his novel:

It's about a girl who, in her eccentric, almost terrifying, and oversized, outrageous grandmother, finds a role model for the rest of her life. She decides that is the woman she wants to be. I think we need a lot of those stories now because our readers are finding their role models in peer group leaders rather than in adults who have paid their dues (Meyer, 2000, p. 7).

Grandmother Dowdel's unconventional methods of achieving justice demonstrated to Mary Alice a concern for the weak and unprotected and a strong sense of fairness and community. She taught her granddaughter the value of hard work, resourcefulness, and responsibility, all the while doing so with creativity and humor.

Character themes. The team of readers saw *respect* and *responsibility* as key character elements in this novel. Epiphanies, or instances of sudden insight, turning points when a character comes to a recognition of an important truth, are important plot devices in fiction. Peck emphasized their importance: "All fiction is based on epiphanies" (Bush, 2009, p.71). He offered this explanation of an epiphany that led to his protagonist recognizing her responsibility, one of the character pillars, in *A Year Down Yonder*:

A girl in one of my stories had an epiphany with her grandmother...she looks at her grandmother for the first time, and, instead of seeing an overwhelming force and a grandmother figure, she sees an old lady, vulnerable, who should not be out in the cold. The girl begins to take responsibility for her own elder: she

begins to find her role model in that way. It's an epiphany she acts on in the story as she accepts the fact that for all her grandmother's eccentricities and old-fashioned ways, she's the woman the girl wants to be (Peck, 2009, p. 71).

Responsibility was most clearly displayed in the life of Grandma Dowdel, who first of all, took responsibility to care for grandchild Mary Alice during a time of nationwide economic crisis. Her concern for her neighbors who were ailing, disabled, or elderly gave rise to some hilarious instances in the book where she acted like a modern American Robin Hood as she found ways to separate the rich from some of their money in order to give to the poor and forgotten. The virtue of *caring* was also seen in these actions.

Caring is a value that might easily be explored in the classroom through the elements of this novel. Mary Alice's view and understanding of her grandmother grew, from her initial perception of her as someone who didn't "have a hug in her" (Peck, 2000, p.5), to someone who had "eyes in the back of her heart" (p. 128). Grandma's gift to her of shoes and her use of all her trapping money to fund tickets for Mary Alice and her brother to see one another are just two other examples. Grandma Dowdel found ways to meet the material and emotional needs of the downtrodden and forgotten, modeling generosity and compassion for her granddaughter.

Respect was a value often portrayed by characters in a negative way. Opportunities to discuss this value with students might occur through an examination of the words and actions of the characters in the novel that treat one another disrespectfully, such as the vandals who incur Grandma Dowdel's wrath and unorthodox means of exacting vengeance. In a positive light, mutual respect between Mary Alice and her grandmother continued to grow until Mary Alice began to love and care deeply for the

grandmother whom she had once only feared.

Author Richard Peck's comments. It is clear from his interviews that Richard Peck retains the heart of the teacher he once was. In an interview, he explained, "In a way, my writing is an extension of teaching. Everything is. Teaching is a job you never quit. You just go on and on trying to turn a life into lesson plans" (Johnson & Giorgis, 2001, p. 398). For the classroom teacher seeking to use children's literature to support character education, the work of Richard Peck is a treasure trove. As an Army chaplain's assistant who was responsible for writing sermons and as a secondary school teacher who learned first-hand about the kinds of problems adolescents face in their journey to adulthood, Peck developed a strong sense of the responsibility adults bear for the moral education of the next generation (Meyer, 2001). Reviewers have noted that a common thread in Peck's novels is the kind of mentoring relationship between a young person and a wise elder that is so vital (Brown, 2003; Johnson & Giorgis, 2001; Schneider, 2006). Peck himself acknowledged, "there is an elderly character in every one of my books" (Peck, 2001, p.400).

Addressing the need children have for guidance from their elders, Peck (2001) explained that he is attempting to bring balance to the current cultural setting in which the peer group has supplanted those who are truly older and wiser in a community as a source of guidance. He explained the routine inclusion in his novels of an older character who serves as a worthy role model:

These ambulatory ancient monuments are there to offer wisdom and balance to a self-referential youth culture. They are extended family for young suburban readers and for young readers in cities where the elderly fear the streets. Most of all, the old survivors in my stories embody the underlying message in all fiction:

that in the long run you will be held responsible for the consequences of your actions (Peck, p. 400).

While Peck's novels for young people are supremely entertaining, they offer far more than simple amusement. He knows that children are looking for answers to the difficult problems they face.

Peck writes for an audience he sees as increasingly detached from the moorings of his own grounded Midwestern rural upbringing. He observed, "Millions of kids are searching for homes because they are children of an aimless and failed generation" (Johnson & Giorgis, 2001, p. 397) and, "Young readers need the wisdom, and wit, of elders" (p.398). In his Newbery Award acceptance speech, he spoke passionately of the need he sees in America's youth for a moral compass:

Powerful forces divorce the young from their roots and traditions: the relentlessness of the video game that is the pornography of the pre- pubescent, a violent virtual reality that eliminates the parent who paid for it. And the peer group that rushed in to fill the vacuum of the teacher's vanished authority and an awesome parental power failure (Peck, 2001, p. 401).

The teacher who wishes to use literature to teach character understands the impact stories have on the heart and minds of children. Peck expressed this idea as well: "We want everything to be a story. We don't want a list of rules. In fact, the successful sermon is told in terms of novels" (Bush, 2009, p. 71).

Peck was asked directly by one of his interviewers, "What do you want children to learn from your books?" he answered, "If you do not find yourself on the page, you'll go looking for yourself in all the wrong places" (Mitchell- Brown, 2009, p. 73). He further amplified this thought in one of his speeches: "Fiction is a mirror held up to the

reader's world...it is Atticus Finch defining heroism as no history book can...a necessity because until you have found yourself on the page, you'll never know who you are" (Peck, 2008, pp. 74- 75).

Character education recommendations. The team recommended this novel for use in character education with some caveats. Because Grandma Dowdel's methods of exacting justice were unorthodox, perhaps at times bordering on underhanded or dishonest, teachers might it necessary to conduct highly nuanced discussions about right, wrong, and whether it is ethical or moral to break a lesser law or rule in order to achieve a higher end. As one reader observed:

While Grandma Dowdel's methods might be open to question, her heart is bigger and more generous than any of the 'law- abiding' citizens in town. The line between right and wrong might be grayer in this novel than in some others, but that would make class discussion more interesting. Grandma Dowdel is not placed before us as a perfect example of character, but as a person of strength who is compassionate and generous.

Another of the readers saw this novel as "a perfect story for teaching not to judge one another by first impressions", which could be included under the character pillars of respect and fairness. She also noted, "When individuals show respect for one another, both are enriched by the developing relationship."

Author Peck's own remarks about his novel confirm that this excellent book for children is ideal for use in character education. Peck deliberately includes older people in his novels as mentors and role models who serve as wise guides to the young people they encounter. This novel would be very useful in classroom discussions of the character pillars of *respect, responsibility, and caring*.

Numerical data. Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 confirm that *respect*, *responsibility*, and *caring* were major character themes in this novel. Readers were unanimous in selecting *responsibility* as primary. This accords well with the Peck's previously quoted view that at the heart of all fiction lays the truth that people are ultimately responsible for the consequences of their actions.

Table 2.1

A Year Down Yonder: Character Pillar Ranking – Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3=abundant

Pillar ranking	Mean
Responsibility	2.8
Respect	2.8
Caring	2.6
Trustworthiness	1.2
Citizenship	1.0
Fairness	0.8

A comparison of Tables 2.1 and 2.2 shows that readers' overall impressions were that the themes of *responsibility* and *respect* were explored with equal frequency, appearing slightly more often than the theme of *caring*. However, when assessing for intensity of treatment of the subject, readers responded that *caring* and *respect* were highest and equal, while responsibility was seen slightly less frequently. These are subjective impressions, as befits the reading and interpreting of literature. *Caring* most likely

appears more often throughout this analysis, across all books, because scenes that arouse a reader's compassion are more vivid and emotionally moving than others.

Table 2.2

A Year Down Yonder: Character Pillar – Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present 1= a weak or minor theme 2 = a secondary theme 3 = a strong or main theme

Pillar	Mean
Caring	2.6
Respect	2.6
Responsibility	2.4
Trustworthiness	1.8
Citizenship	1.4
Fairness	1.2

Table 2.3

A Year Down Yonder: Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Pillar	Identified as Main Theme
Responsibility	5
Respect	4
Caring	3
Trustworthiness	2

Citizenship	1
Fairness	0

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 indicate the frequencies of negative and positive character depictions. *Respect* is featured most heavily as a negative trait because of the high degree of disrespect that was shown to the main characters.

Table 2.4

A Year Down Yonder: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total frequency
Caring	1,6,7,15,18,19,20,23,35,36,44,50,51,53,64,65,67,71,73,84, 87,88,92,100,113,118,119,120,123,125,127,128,129,130	34
Responsibility	5,6,8,9,18,35,37,44,47,49,58,63,65,67,72,89,93,110,118, 120,123,124	22
Respect	10,14,15,18,21,40,46,49,72,85,87,88,113,121	14
Trustworthiness	10,13,18,30,32,46,47,64,72,83,86,105,120	13
Fairness	11,27,46,49,	4
Citizenship	41,51,82,119	4

Table 2.5

A Year Down Yonder: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total frequency
Respect	2,13,10,12,13,17,24,27,28,35,56,57,76,85,88,90,92, 93,116	19

Citizenship	6,16,18,21,23,31,38,45,49,111,116	11
Responsibility	45,46,55,61,72,73	6
Trustworthiness	16,17,47,49,83,	5
Fairness	13,47,49,63,100	5
Caring	5,9,24,28,116	5

Table 2.6

A Year Down Yonder: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (34)	Respect (19)	Caring (39)
Responsibility (22)	Citizenship (11)	Respect (33)
Respect (14)	Responsibility (6)	Responsibility (28)
Trustworthiness (13)	Trustworthiness (5)	Trustworthiness (18)
Citizenship (4)	Fairness (5)	Citizenship (15)
Fairness (4)	Citizenship (5)	Fairness (9)
Total positive (91)	Total negative (51)	Total overall (142)

2002 Newbery Award: *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park.

Plot summary. *A Single Shard* is set in 12th century Korea in a region famous for its celadon-ware pottery. The main character, Tree- Ear, was a 12-year-old orphan living under a bridge, cared for by Crane- Man, his lame and elderly guardian. Tree- Ear began to dream of becoming a potter as he watched the men in the town work on their famous pottery. The most skillful of them was the perfectionist Min, a gruff man whose heart had been broken and embittered by the death of his only son. After accidentally breaking

one of Min's pots, Tree- Ear was forced into virtual servitude under him in order to repay the debt. Min was a difficult and demanding taskmaster whose meanness was balanced by the kindness of his caring and generous wife Ajima, who showed Tree- Ear the compassion and tenderness he so desperately needed.

Tree- Ear more than anything longed to become a potter, but had to face disappointment on that score because this was a trade passed down only from father to son. Tree-Ear's hard work and responsibility went unnoticed by Min, but not by Min's wife. She began to care for Min and to give him extra food, which she suspected he was taking home to his guardian Crane- Man. The turning point occurred after Tree-Ear voluntarily undertook a dangerous journey in order to present Min's work to the King's representatives. As a result of Tree- Ear's courage, trustworthiness, and responsibility, Min received the commission he truly deserved. When Min realized what Tree-Ear had done for him, he finally began to care for him the way his wife had and agreed to take Tree- Ear in as both a son and an apprentice.

Character themes. *Responsibility* and *caring* were the strongest themes in the novel, judged by the team of readers to have been treated with the same frequency and strength. Readers found incidences of caring to be somewhat more numerous than those of *responsibility* (See Tables 3.1-3.6), while the theme of *responsibility* was identified as the main theme by four of the five readers. *Respect* and *trustworthiness* were exemplified most often negatively, but this too could lead to profitable class discussions.

It is notable that Crane- man, Tree-Ear's guardian and mentor, continually discussed ethical matters with his protégé and was deliberate in his effort to teach him right from wrong. Tree-Ear was a young man with a very sensitive conscience who wrestled with the moral implications of his actions, such as taking half of his lunch home

for Crane-Man to eat. *Trustworthiness* is the pillar that includes honesty and integrity and so it would be considered an important character theme in the text also.

Trustworthiness was an issue addressed in the first scene in the book, where Tree-Ear had to make a decision about whether or not to tell the farmer there was a hole in his rice bucket. He discussed the issue with Crane-Man, who sagely told him, “Scholars read the great words of the world. But you and I must learn to read the world itself” (Park, 2001, p. 7). In another notable example, Tree-Ear quoted Crane-Man when accused by Min of theft. He responded, “Please, honorable sir, I was not stealing your work- I came only to admire it...I would not steal. Stealing and begging make a man no better than a dog” (Park, p. 17).

One of the readers commented, “This story is all about *responsibility*. Tree-Ear did the mundane tasks asked for by the potter and eventually was given a monumental responsibility. Likewise, Crane-Man and Tree-Ear took *responsibility* for one another, resulting in a deeply personal caring for each other.” Another dominant theme in the novel was the perseverance showed by Tree-Ear as he worked so diligently for Min and endured the hardships of the journey. This topic would be incorporated into the pillar of *responsibility*.

Examples of *caring* abound in *A Silver Shard*. The beautiful relationship between the disabled and aging homeless man and the young orphan showed a mutual concern. They cared for and provided for one another, each doing for the other what the other could not. Min’s wife Ajima also displayed true compassion for the orphan as she repeatedly found ways to feed and clothe him without causing him to lose face. It was a triangulation of *caring* that brought about the final positive result: Tree Ear undertook the journey for Ajima, whose love for her husband caused her to desire his success. She

invited Crane-Man to work because she understood Tree-Ear's concern and loving responsibility for him. Finally, Tree-Ear's sacrifice and caring for Min caused his heart to mend enough to take in Tree-Ear as his apprentice and adopted son.

Another pillar of character that can be seen on display in this book is the trait of *respectfulness*. As one reader said, "The Korean culture seems to be based on respect, and Crane-Man taught Tree-Ear to be respectful even when he felt at odds with others." It is notable that no matter how rudely Min treated Tree-Ear, he always responded most respectfully, in word and deed. Another reader summed up the main theme of this novel as follows: "Regardless of what others think of you or how they may treat you, honesty, hard work, courtesy, and kindness result in a good reputation, skill, and self-respect."

Author Linda Sue Park's comments. On the *Scholastic Teachers'* website, Ms. Park specifically addressed the question of whether or not she had a moral of the story in mind for her novel: "Although *A Single Shard* contains a number of ethical questions and lessons, I don't hope for any specific lesson to be learned. What I hope is that each reader will take something different from the book — something that fits their own unique personalities and circumstances" (Park, 2008, para. 6).

Character education through literature is based on the notion that children learn by example; there is an old saying that values are better caught than taught. Sometimes these examples are found in real- life via the parents, grand- parents, teachers and neighbors who take time to talk with children about the important questions in life, much as Crane-Man did for Tree-Ear. Sometimes these role models are the characters children meet in the pages of a book. Children's literature abounds with examples of caring individuals who are older and wiser taking young people under their wing. Ms. Park's appreciation for the importance of the connections between the older and younger

generation can be seen in this comment she made in an interview:

Mentors are the most wonderful things anyone can have or do for someone else. Giving some kind of guidance in some way - what could be better than that? My own mentors? All the authors I loved when I was little... (Johnson & Giorgis, 2002, p. 398).

The former is a clear acknowledgement of the important role of children's literature in providing young people with role models.

Character education recommendations. Members of the reading team were unanimous in their enthusiastic support of *A Single Shard* for character education. In this story one reader saw the following lessons that relate to the Six Pillars of Character: "To reach out to others. To follow and be loyal to a dream. To respectfully accept your place and be tolerant of others. To respect the talents and artistry of others without jealousy."

One reader supported her assertion that this book would be very useful for character education by outlining the way that many of the Six Pillars could be incorporated into classroom discussion:

Crane-Man was in every way unselfish, caring, and honest. His life was an illustration of caring for Tree-Ear and others. He weighed his actions very carefully to make certain that they were honorable. He taught Tree-Ear the dignity of hard work and honesty. Min had kindness, too, although it was often cased in gruffness. Min worked very hard and was only satisfied with his best. Ajima was very kind and generous. Tree-Ear worked through many of the character pillars and tried to do what was honorable and kind. This was especially admirable considering he grew up as an orphan; treated without the respect he gave others.

While *fairness* and *citizenship* did not appear significantly in this book, the other pillars of *caring*, *responsibility*, *respect*, and *trustworthiness* are all exemplified beautifully in *A Silver Shard*.

Numerical data. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that the team perceived the values of caring and responsibility to have been depicted with great strength and frequency. These findings are consistent with the frequency counts depicted in Tables 3.4 and 3.5.

Table 3.1

A Single Shard: Character Pillar Ranking - Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3 = abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	3
Responsibility	3
Respect	2.5
Trustworthiness	1.5
Fairness	0.5
Citizenship	0

Table 3.2

A Single Shard: Character Pillar Ranking – Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present 1 = a weak or minor theme 2 = a secondary theme 3 = a strong or main

theme

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Responsibility	3
Caring	3
Trustworthiness	2.5
Respect	2.5
Fairness	1.5
Citizenship	0

Table 3.3

A Single Shard: Narrative Responses: Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Pillar	Identified as main theme
Responsibility	4
Respect	3
Caring	3
Trustworthiness	2
Fairness	0
Citizenship	0

Table 3.4

Single Shard: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total
Caring	3,5,8,9,17,22,23,27,28,34,37,38,41,47,53,55,69	36

	79,78,84,90,91,93,100,101,102,105,108,109,132, 138,139,141,143,145,146,	
Responsibility	6,10,12,18,19,20,26,28,29,51,53,63,68,73,93,98, 104,119,127,129,130,133,134,137,139	25
Trustworthiness	6,16,17,20,27,29,31,33,34,38,47,62,64,89,98,104, 108,115,117,122,126,134,136,139	24
Respect	16,18,27,30,34,41,57,71,74,76,77,100,117,131,133 139,141,142,143,146	20
Fairness	4,5	1
Citizenship	N/a	0

Table 3.5

A Single Shard: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total
Respect	16,19,25,26,30,42,44,58,60,66,74,74,85,102,122,125,135	17
Trustworthiness	4,58,59,87,122	5
Caring	36,44,73,95	4
Responsibility	28,42,126	3
Citizenship	98	1
Fairness	4	1

Table 3.6

A Single Shard: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (36)	Respect (17)	Caring (40)

Responsibility (25)	Trustworthiness (5)	Respect (37)
Trustworthiness (24)	Caring (4)	Trustworthiness (29)
Respect (20)	Responsibility (3)	Responsibility (28)
Fairness (1)	Citizenship (1)	Fairness (2)
Citizenship (0)	Fairness (1)	Citizenship (1)
Total positive (106)	Total negative (31)	Total overall (137)

2003 Newbery Award: *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* by Avi.

Plot summary. *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* is a novel about a young man's quest for identity, set in 14th century feudal England. The main character, Crispin, was a recently orphaned peasant boy who faced tragedy upon tragedy after the death of his mother. They had lived as serfs and outcasts in their community and Crispin had never known his father nor his even his own name. Referred to merely as Asta's son, he was driven from his home and framed for the murder of his only friend, the priest Father Quinel. After Crispin overheard a mysterious midnight interchange between the evil steward of the village, John Aycliffe and an unknown knight, Aycliffe attempted to kill him. With a death sentence upon his head, Crispin escaped and ran into the woods with no possessions save the cross of lead that had been given to him by his mother. As he fled, he encountered a frightening giant of a man, Bear, a juggler who forced him to become his servant. It turned out that despite his initially intimidating manner and appearance, Bear treated the boy in a kindly manner and began to protect and father him. Because Bear, unlike Crispin, could read, he was able to learn important details about Crispin's true identity inscribed on the cross of lead. It was due to Bear's nurturing care that Crispin began to develop a sense of his own identity and to learn important lessons about spiritual and physical freedom.

Character themes. The reading team found that *trustworthiness*, *respect*, and *caring* were major themes. One reader observed that the novel was about “the path from servitude to freedom with the help of a good friend, perseverance, and bravery of the protagonist.” A positive example of numerous virtues was found in the character of Bear, who encouraged Crispin to better himself, change his situation, and think of ways to improve. In fact, a crucial turning point in the novel came about when Crispin, because of the *trustworthiness* of Bear, was able to experience for the first time the qualities of *responsibility*, *respect*, and *caring*. As one reader summed up the novel, “A young boy is transformed by the nurturing, teaching relationship with a father figure; as a result he becomes a confident, independent adult.”

One of the readers identified the main theme as follows: “If you have the courage to fight for the right, you may suffer for doing so, but in doing so, you may find freedom, joy that you never dreamed possible. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Regarding the numerous character examples, which were both positive and negative, one reader wrote,

In this novel of feudal England, we find corrupt nobles who treat others with ruthless, heartless cruelty and utter disregard, the very opposite of caring, respect, responsibility and fairness. However in the persons of Crispin, Bear, Father Quinel, and Widow Daventry, we find individuals who are willing to do the right thing regardless of the personal cost. They work hard, are loyal to family and friends, and they are kind and generous.

Evidence of growth of character in the protagonist came at the climax of the novel when it became apparent that Bear’s rough caring had given Crispin the courage to save Bear. Crispin had blossomed under Bear’s loving tutelage and was therefore strong

enough to be able to stand up to John Aycliffe and to bargain for Bear's life. Having the courage to do the right thing is a key element of the character pillar *trustworthiness*; Crispin rose to the occasion because he had been treated with *respect* and *caring* by his benefactor Bear.

Author Avi's comments. The author of more than 70 books, Avi views himself as simply a storyteller and denies having a didactic purpose for his children's novels. Avi was a guest lecturer at the Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI in April 2010, where he spoke on how an atheist, as he describes himself, could write books dealing with religion. His wry answer was that he is writing historical novels: if his characters want to pray because that is what they would have done back then, he lets them. He just doesn't pray himself. In addition to presenting at the conference, he also granted a personal interview to this researcher for the purpose of discussing character education elements and implications in his work.

When asked by this researcher if he viewed his books as having a purpose that transcended mere entertainment, he quoted S. J. Perlman's famous quip: "If you want to send a message, use Western Union." No, he said, "I simply write a good story, a story that is going to entertain kids" (Avi, personal communication, April 16, 2010).

However, in his Newbery Award acceptance speech, he made an important addition: "That's all we who write hope to do: create stories that will enable our young readers to find the stirrings of their souls ...we provide stories for kids that will entertain, move, engage, and teach, stories that say again and again that yes, life may be hard, or funny, perplexing, always risky, but in the end—worth the living" (Avi, 2003, p. 414). This remark indicates that he does, in fact, wish to impact his readers on a deeper level, to influence the way they live, to encourage them to self- discovery. In his Newbery Award

acceptance speech to fellow writers and readers of children's literature he said:

My friends, we live in a world where there is much that is bad. Plain and simple- bad. Harm is being done. People – young and old – are being ignored, kept ignorant, hurt, abused, and killed. This enterprise- this writing, this reading, this world of children's books in which we are all engaged - is good. Plain and simple, good. We do good (Avi, 2003, p. 414).

In so saying, the author pointed out that there is a value to children's literature that goes beyond just providing momentary diversion. Children's literature is a source of light and hope in a world that is dark.

Although he does believe his work does good for mankind, Avi shares the view of many of the 21st century Newbery writers: he does not want to be seen as one who is attempting to preach to his readers. As he said to this researcher,

I just don't like to write thematically. If I feel like I'm preaching or being moralistic, I try to take it out of the book. I have no objections whatever to people taking something from the books if they so choose, but I don't want to define the story from the point of view of this teaches that. I just don't want to do that. I like to think of myself as a moral person and I'm not going to write stuff that violates that (Avi, personal communication, April 16, 2010).

When asked if he could identify any of the Six Pillars of Character as elements that might be explored by classroom teachers in a character education program using *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, he said he would guess that caring and responsibility were central. In fact, he stated, all of these would come into it, with the exception of citizenship. About citizenship he said, "I denigrate it- it holds no valor for me. Samuel Johnson said, 'The last refuge of a scoundrel is patriotism' and I agree with him" (Avi, personal

communication, April 16, 2010).

Character education recommendations. Members of the reading team were unanimous in their recommendation of *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* for character education. One reader said, “Absolutely. Whether in the underlying conflict of persecuted men and women rising up to challenge their oppressors, or in the individual boy trying to find life, acceptance, and freedom, there is much to discuss concerning right and wrong.” Another reader delineated specific themes: “Bear’s rough caring gave Crispin the courage to save Bear when he was a prisoner.” It was noted that *trustworthiness* was seen in the way Crispin and Bear showed loyalty to one another.

Responsibility and *respect* were found in numerous instances, both in negative and positive examples. The cruelty of the feudal lords stood out in marked contrast to the goodness of Crispin, Father Quinel, the Widow Daventry, and Bear. Another reader summed up the manifold possibilities for exploring values found in this novel: “The traits of *respect* and *fairness* are central in the theme of the intrinsic worth of human life, and the basic rights of life and liberty. *Trustworthiness* and *caring* are motivating factors for human growth in the life of a young boy who has been the innocent target of cruelty and oppression.”

Numerical data. Table 4.3 indicates that the readers were unanimous in choosing *trustworthiness* as a main theme. When they rated the novel holistically, as depicted in Tables 4.1 and 4.2, they also ranked *trustworthiness* as highest in terms of frequency of occurrence of examples. When noting the actual frequency counts of occurrences the group agreed upon, as illustrated in Tables 4.3-4.6, *caring* emerged as the predominant character trait.

Table 4.1

Crispin: The Cross of Lead: Character Pillar Ranking – Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3 = abundant

Pillar ranking	Mean
Trustworthiness	3
Respect	2.8
Caring	2.5
Responsibility	1.7
Fairness	1.5
Citizenship	1.2

Table 4.2

Crispin: The Cross of Lead: Character Pillar Ranking – Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0=not present, a weak theme 1=a weak or minor theme 2=a secondary theme 3=a strong or main theme.

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Trustworthiness	2.6
Respect	2.5
Caring	1.7

Responsibility	1.5
Fairness	1.2
Citizenship	1.0

Table 4.3

Crispin: The Cross of Lead: Narrative Response- : Pillar Identified as a Main Theme

Pillar	Readers Identifying as a Main Theme
Trustworthiness	5
Respect	5
Caring	4
Responsibility	1
Fairness	1
Citizenship	0

Table 4.4

Crispin: The Cross of Lead: Positive Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total frequency
Caring	3,4,32,35,36,38,48,58,103,110, 115,121,123,136,137,154,156,158, 177,204,206,219,223,224,231,234, 243,250,251,252,256,261,283,295	34
Responsibility	12,23,25,29,30,32,34,37,39,102,116,121,123,124, 129,140,139,151,153,157,173,215,220,231	24
Trustworthiness	26,32,29,34,37,39,70,73,102,116,121,129,139,151,	19

	153,157,173,215,253	
Respect	2,63,82,86,93,103,106,112,118,124,125,133,151.	17
Citizenship	23,45,210,229,250,251,261,283	8
Fairness	72,90,104,228	4

Table 4.5

Crispin: The Cross of Lead: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total
Respect	2,3,9,11,13,15,24,36,76,77,81,89,90,107, 114,145,181,277,291	20
Trustworthiness	9,10,28,33,42,45,48,52,73,84,85,117,134,142,146, 147,262,289,290	18
Caring	3,4,10,11,16,8,29,31,56,78,80,84	12
Citizenship	11,30,75,81,102	5
Fairness	18,24,28,80,95	5
Responsibility	53,84,226,227	4

Table 4.6

Crispin: The Cross of Lead: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (34)	Respect (20)	Caring (46)
Responsibility (24)	Trustworthiness (18)	Trustworthiness (37)
Trustworthiness (19)	Caring (12)	Respect (33)

Respect (13)	Citizenship (5)	Responsibility (28)
Citizenship (8)	Fairness (5)	Citizenship (13)
Fairness (4)	Responsibility (4)	Fairness (9)
Total positive (102)	Total negative (64)	Total overall (166)

2004 Newbery Award: *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo.

Plot summary. Author Kate DiCamillo was awarded the 2004 Newbery Medal for *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread*. In her children's fantasy novel about a courageous mouse on a quest to save the princess he loves, an abundance of character themes is evident. Despereaux was an undersized mouse with oversized ears, a misfit in his community who loved music, beauty, and the human princess of the castle in which he lived, Princess Pea. For the crime of allowing himself to be seen by a human, he was sentenced to death by members of the mouse community, betrayed even by members of his own family. Refusing to renounce his love for her, Despereaux was thrust into the dungeon below to await his fate. When he learned that his beloved princess had been betrayed by a disgruntled rat and a dim-witted serving girl, he courageously found his way out of the prison in order to save her.

Organized into four separate books, *The Tale of Despereaux* also includes the stories of Miggery Sow, Chiaroscuro, and Botticelli Remorso. Miggery Sow was a mistreated, slow-witted serving girl whose desire to be a princess was exploited by the evil rat Remorso. Remorso was the clear villain of the story, a rat who derived pleasure from tormenting others. Chiaroscuro was another major character, a rat whose broken heart was healed so badly that he was forever torn between the darkness and the light and

thus easily lured to evil by Remorso. In the end, DiCamillo skillfully wove together all these characters and plot elements in a climax where mercy and forgiveness triumphed, and redemption occurred for many of the characters.

Character themes. The themes of *caring*, *respect*, and *responsibility* were exemplified abundantly in *The Tale of Despereaux*. Trustworthiness also emerged as a strong focus as well. Regarding the central conflict of the novel, one reader saw the themes of *caring* and *respect* in Despereaux's striving to "to do what is right, to respect and honor and love Princess Pea." The opposite of *trustworthiness* was quite evident in the schemes of the antagonist, the rat, Remorso. A positive example of this trait was described by one reader as "the courage to do right regardless of the cost, seen here in the refusal of Despereaux to renounce his love for the princess, choosing to return, instead, to the dungeon in order to serve her."

Turning points in the novel were also important junctures where character lessons were in evidence. For example, one reader saw that "Miggory repents of her mistreatment of Princess Pea, who shows her kindness by asking her what she wants." This shows the inter- connectedness of *respect* and *caring*. Despereaux demonstrated the courage to do what is right, illustrating the pillar of *trustworthiness*, by accepting the *responsibility* to save the princess. He, in the words of one of the readers, "decides he must be the knight, the rescuer, doing what is right, though it is very difficult." Another of the readers cited these examples of turning points in the novel that illustrated one of more of the character pillars: "Roscurro, who has a badly mended broken heart, smelled soup. The princess offered him mercy," and, "Despereaux forgave his father for having him banished." Both of these instances offer opportunities to explore the values of *caring* and *trustworthiness*.

Reader responses to the question in the codebook about the main theme of the novel were varied, but all reflected the view that this novel was a rich source for teaching values. One reader said, “Regardless of background, we can overcome breeding and cultural influences to positively impact others’ lives and, as a result, find purpose for our own lives.” Another said, “Be brave to stand up for what is right. Be kind and caring. This is the way we grow into better people. Forgive those who have wronged you and you both find freedom.” A third reader said, “This tale is rife with negative examples of respect and caring, which serve to highlight the positive descriptions of chivalry, kindness and love with which Despereaux and Princess Pea treat others.”

Author Kate DiCamillo’s comments. The author’s Newbery Award acceptance speech was appropriately entitled, “We Do Not Do Battle Alone,” which could serve as a rallying cry for character educators. She expressed one of her chief desires as a writer, which is to deeply touch both the hearts and minds of her audience:

Children’s hearts, like our hearts, are complicated. And children need, just as we do, stories that reflect the truth of their own experience of being human. That truth is this: we all do battle with the darkness that is inside us and outside of us. Stories that embody this truth offer great comfort because they tell us we do not do battle alone (DiCamillo, 2004, p. 9).

She also expressed a key truth that all those who wish to instruct children in virtue must recognize and emphasize:

Yes, the stories say, darkness lies within you, and darkness lies without; but look, you have choices. You can take action. You can, if you choose, go back into the dungeon of regret and fear. You can, even though there is every reason to despair, choose to hope. You can, in spite of so much hate, choose to love. You

can acknowledge the wrong done to you and choose, anyway, to forgive
(DiCamillo, 2004, p. 9).

DiCamillo was a featured speaker at the Calvin College Festival of Faith and Writing in Grand Rapids, MI in April 2010. This researcher attended two of her lectures and was granted a personal interview as well. In her talks, she reminded her hearers that, in the words of this statement from the prologue of her book, “The world is dark, and light is precious” (DiCamillo, 2003, p. 7). She emphasized her understanding of the importance of her ability to deeply influence the lives of children as an author: “Stories are light. It is a sacred trust when you tell someone a story” (K. DiCamillo, personal communication, April 17, 2010).

The following questions and answers were obtained by the researcher during a personal interview with Ms. DiCamillo conducted at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI on April 17, 2010. When asked if she intentionally attempted to write books for children that transcended mere entertainment, she asserted that she is simply telling a story, but did allow that, “The whole time I am working I can see things out of the corner of my eye that have some deeper meaning, but I don’t look at them directly or I know that I am going to mess up if I bring my conscious mind too much to bear on it” (K. DiCamillo, personal communication, April 17, 2010). When asked the following question: Do you write from a position of faith? Does it inform what you think? Is it a part of your life? , she replied:

It does in very subtle ways. It is just *who I am*, and I feel like the stories are emphatically gifts, and that my job is to show up and do the work. I am always amazed that the book is smarter than I am. I know that it is my chance to have a dialogue with something greater than me...I am aware of the presence of

something larger than myself and that this is a gift to be able to connect with it and that it would be wrong for me not to do the work because I've been given a chance to do the work (K. DiCamillo, personal communication, April 17, 2010).

In order to introduce the subject of the appropriateness of deliberate insertion of character messages and didactic themes into children's literature, this researcher read a relevant quotation from children's author Katherine Paterson and asked DiCamillo to respond. Paterson, in an interview for *Christianity Today*, was asked if her Christian background informed her stories:

I think C. S. Lewis said somewhere that the book cannot be what the writer is not, and I think who you are informs what you write on a very deep level. You reveal yourself whether you intend to or not. So you don't put in stuff to signal that you're a Christian; you write the story as well and as truthfully as you can because that is how you glorify God, and you have to be true to the characters and who they are and how they talk. If it comes from a person who has a Christian hope and a Christian knowledge of grace, then I think hope and grace are going to infuse my work- not that I put them in, but because I can't help having them there (Chattaway, 2007, para 10).

This quotation was a springboard for discussion with DiCamillo about the concept of deliberately writing books for the purpose of teaching children virtue. She said, regarding moral messages, "I would take that and go further; if you intended to put them in there, I think it can become problematic for the story" (K. DiCamillo, personal communication, April 17, 2010). She agreed with Paterson about the story revealing the heart of the writer, saying she herself was simply "somebody who believes in mercy and grace, and somebody who hopes for forgiveness, and somebody who believes in

redemption - all those things are there and they are a part of me”(K. DiCamillo, personal communication, April 17, 2010).

When given a list of the Six Pillars of Character and asked if she believed *The Tale of Despereaux* contained opportunities to explore these values, she expressed the opinion that *caring* was a primary theme in the book. Meeting with her and hearing her sense of her calling as a writer confirmed for this researcher the conclusion that DiCamillo’s work provides a strong foundation for character education through literature. Because she so skillfully handles the great and enduring themes that characterize all timeless literature in way that engages the hearts and minds of both adults and children, her stories are especially suited for use in character education. Never heavy-handed or moralistic, they direct the reader’s attention to each of the Six Pillars of Character throughout the course of the book in a way that is both profound and organic. Teachers could find ample opportunities to explore any of the six virtues in the plot, characters, and themes in this novel.

Character education recommendations. The team of readers expressed a variety of positions on the possibilities for use of this book in character education. One member did not see it as being closely aligned with the virtues comprising the Six Pillars of Character, although she did see it as a book that focused on the virtue of hopefulness. Another reader was very favorably disposed to the novel, but cautioned against using it with very young children because she said, “the bad parts are really bad: the tormenting of the prisoners, the beatings of Mig, and the killing of the jailer”. The remaining three readers were most enthusiastic in their support of this novel as a rich source of discussion and exploration of a number of the character pillars.

One reader said, “It portrays courage to do the right thing, and *trustworthiness* is a

pillar. Perseverance is also a major theme. There is also a great deal of disrespectful treatment and these episodes would provide an opportunity to explore a student would feel if there were judged for non- conformity, or some personal failing or weakness.” This researcher would recommend it strongly because of its interesting and complex characters, its emotional appeal, and the very clear message of forgiveness, loyalty, and mercy, all vital elements of the character pillar *caring*.

Numerical data. Members of the reading team ranked the character traits of *caring* and *trustworthiness* highest in terms of both frequency and strength of treatment. When counting actual instances found in the text, however, *responsibility* and *respect* were found in greater abundance than *trustworthiness*, allowing the conclusion that all four of these pillars of character are well represented in the book (See Tables 5.1-5.6). The readers’ reflective journals, which recorded their ongoing impressions, provided additional support by means of description and quotations from the text.

Table 5.1

The Tale of Despereaux: Character Pillar Ranking – Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3 = abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	2.6
Trustworthiness	2.4
Responsibility	2.0
Respect	1.8

Citizenship	0.4
Fairness	0.2

Table 5.2

The Tale of Despereaux: Character Pillar Ranking – Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present 1 = a weak or minor theme 2 = a secondary amount 3 = a strong or main theme

Pillar ranking	Mean
Caring	2.4
Trustworthiness	2.4
Responsibility	1.8
Respect	1.8
Citizenship	0.6
Fairness	0.4

Table 5.3

The Tale of Despereaux: Narrative Response- Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Character Pillar	Readers identifying as a main theme
Caring	5
Trustworthiness	4
Respect	3

Responsibility	2
Fairness	0
Citizenship	0

Table 5.4

The Tale of Despereaux: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Frequency
Caring	21,28,30,32,37,39,40,41,48,49,54, 56,58,61,74,76,79,119,127,132,147, 164,175,176,177,179,180,181,198,202,203,211,219,221, 223,232,233,236,254,256,258,259,263,265,264, 266, 267,270	48
Responsibility	21,39,40,41,52,74,79,110,116,129,158,197,198,203, 209,215,217,218,221,222,223,241,249,262,267	25
Trustworthiness	25,53,54,56,61,104,115,119,197,203,213,215,217,221, 236,241,251,256	18
Respect	40,59,74,104,111,145,146,147,151,216,228,249,269	13
Citizenship	36,44,45,49,69,140,189,207,231	9
Fairness	39	1

Table 5.5

The Tale of Despereaux: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Frequency
Respect	18,24,33,38,39,40,41,44,51,57,65,67,86,88,93,96, 109,113,118,120,128,130,137,147,151,154,165,170, 176,179,183,184,187,188,190,195,230,244,252,256,	43

	260,263,269	
Caring	13,15,19,24,35,46,61,65,81,89,91,93,99,101,113, 116,120,126,128,138,151,165,171,179,181,185,198, 230,239,244,246,252,253	33
Trustworthiness	33,36,43,44,45,47,49,56,57,65,68,69,86,90,91, 97,101,102,114,116,127,152,191,243	23
Citizenship	47,54,119,141,147,224,225	7
Responsibility	24,26,27,116,152,181	6
Fairness	34,43,52,214	4

Table 5.6

Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (48)	Respect (43)	Caring (81)
Responsibility (25)	Caring (33)	Respect (56)
Trustworthiness (18)	Trustworthiness (23)	Trustworthiness (41)
Respect (13)	Citizenship (7)	Responsibility (31)
Citizenship (9)	Responsibility (6)	Citizenship (16)
Fairness (1)	Fairness (4)	Fairness (5)
Total positive (114)	Total negative (116)	Total overall (230)

2005 Newbery Award: *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata.

Plot summary. Author Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira* is a beautifully crafted tale of family love and devotion set in the rural south in mid- century America. The story opened as the protagonist, Katie, and her family were in the process of moving from Iowa

to Georgia to find work in a factory near relatives living in a Japanese-American community. Katie's parents encountered racism and economic hardship, and in a struggle to overcome poverty and achieve the American dream of homeownership, they worked long hours away from their children. Lynn, the older sister by four years, was Katie's hero as her friend, protector, teacher, and surrogate mother. The story took a tragic turn when Lynn was found to have leukemia. Her illness and eventual death brought new challenges to each member of this family, who through this unwanted journey, learned many lessons about responsibility, priorities and familial love. As the light of Katie's life, Lynn taught her her first word: *kira-kira*, which in Japanese means "glittering". Lynn's influence shaped the rest of Katie's life; she began to see all of life through the lens of *kira-kira*. Although her death was untimely and tragic, Lynn had taught her loved ones, both by word and by example, what it meant to live joyously, gratefully, and lovingly.

Character themes. Members of the reading team agreed that *caring*, *respect*, and *responsibility* were the key character pillars in this novel. As the parents struggled to overcome poverty and provide a better life for their children, the children were left to assume many adult responsibilities and to support one another through difficult and trying circumstances. As her sister's health continued to fail, Katie took on responsibilities previously borne by Lynn, particularly as the encourager in the relationship.

Caring was expressed primarily through the sacrificial actions and attitudes of these family members toward one another. The children knew the parents loved one another and that made them feel safe. Their parents made it clear that they were unconditionally proud of their children. One conflict in the novel involved the elder

sister's seemingly divided affections when she made a new friend at school. Katie became quite jealous, and later was hurt to realize that friends from school had not even cared enough to attend Lynn's funeral. Once again, the strength and importance of the family bond was made clear.

Through their suffering, each member of this family developed stronger empathy and compassion for others. These elements of the character pillar of *caring* were particularly evident when Katie's mother changed her stance toward the union at work and voted to help a family with a young daughter in need. The change was wrought in her in response to her own experience with suffering and loss.

All members of this family experienced changes and turning points in the novel, and these scenes would provide excellent opportunities to discuss the character pillars. Katie's father took responsibility for his angry actions leading to his destruction of his employer's car. He took Katie with him when he went to confess and apologize, and thus modeled for her the importance of doing the right thing, a key aspect of the pillar of trustworthiness. Although he did suffer consequences in that he was immediately fired, he did not lose heart or regret that he had been honest. Because she had developed compassion, an aspect of the pillar of *caring*, Katie's mother set aside self-interest and personal fear of reprisal to join the struggle to organize against their oppressive employer. Finally, Katie herself realized how hard Lynn had worked to achieve good grades and began to take on personal responsibility for doing her best academically. She came to respect Lynn's work ethic as well as her positive outlook on life and sought to honor her memory by emulating her in this regard.

Author Cynthia Kadohata's comments. This researcher was unable to establish personal contact with this writer and did not discover any specific mention of character

education in any of Kadohata's published interviews or articles. In her Newbery Medal acceptance speech she made but a brief reference to values when she stated, regarding what it meant to be an American, "It did not mean a shared history or even shared values with other Americans, but a shared landscape" (Kadohata, 2005, p. 9). In a later interview, she modified or clarified her previous statement about values to acknowledge that Americans do share an understanding of what is to be valued: "...[it is] my belief that not just the sharing of values but the sharing of this amazing land makes us Americans" (Smith, 2006, para. 8). In her acceptance speech, Kadohata made clear her own core family values of *caring* and *responsibility*, as she talked about the orphan baby she had recently gone to great expense and trouble to adopt from overseas (Blasingame, 2007).

In other statements to interviewers, Kadohata provided insight into what she views as her major themes. One of these accords well with the character pillar of *responsibility*, which includes doing what you are supposed to do, persevering, and always doing your best. She said, "My idea is that people can live their daily life and still achieve greatness. Just by going about with her/her everyday life, a person can still be an important person in some way" (Lee, 2007, p. 13). Later, she spoke specifically about the theme of *Kira-Kira*: "...some people see the book as being about racism. In fact, it is a book about family and the depth of family attachments" (Lee, p. 24). The character pillar of *caring* is clearly evident in the novelist's portrayal of the importance of family support. She said, "I think it is true that love does give rise to the sense of safety. A relationship can give people a type of safety that environment won't be able to give. Safety is produced through making human connections" (Lee, 2007, p. 11).

While Kadohata has not specifically acknowledged her role as a character

educator, it is clear that her strong themes of familial love and responsibility qualify her in this regard. The strong characters she has created individuals who exemplify *trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, caring, and even citizenship*, make her novel quite appropriate for use in a character education program. Kadohata expressed her hope for her readership in these words: “I hope readers will see *kira-kira*, which means, “glittering, shining” in unexpected places. That is, I hope that they’ll see every person in the world is living a life of rich, vivid, amazing, sad, and happy events. Even our daily lives are amazing” (Mitchell, Jacobs, & Livingston, 2005, para 12). Her work can be a rich source of encouragement for young readers, especially when skillfully taught by a teacher who is mindful of how well the Six Pillars correlate with the novel.

Character education recommendations. *Kira-Kira* was recommended for use in character education by all members of the reading team without reservation. The readers all agreed that *caring* was the most prominent and moving theme in the novel. One reader said, “This book should be considered a classic. Every child 5th grade and above would find character role models to explore. The simple act of *respect*, or *caring* is portrayed in such a positive manner, that one must be humbled by the dignity of lives such as these.” Another reader gave specific examples of three different pillars being depicted: “Katie becomes responsible in her school work because of her love for her sister. The father is demonstrating trustworthiness to Katie. The mother has begun to care about people outside of her own family.” A third reader, when asked if she could recommend this novel for use in helping student to explore any of the Six Pillars of Character said, “Absolutely yes. This family never forsook one another. They hung together and cared and respected each other.” This reader also wrote, “Family members that care about one another and support one another can foster personal growth and

change that strengthens the individuals and the family.”

A fourth member of the reading team stated her unequivocal support for the use of this novel for character education when she answered the question of whether or not she would be able to recommend this novel. She answered as follows:

Yes. Katie is not a perfect child, but she loves her family and works hard to ease her sister's last days. She and her father do some wrong things for the right reasons. We see very little selfish behavior, but when we do see it, it is not white-washed. Regardless of a person's background, we find there are those who deserve our respect and approval.

Kira-Kira would be a valuable resource for any classroom teacher attempting to integrate the study of literature with character education. While the values of *caring*, *respect*, and *responsibility* are paramount, each of the Six Pillars is in evidence in some measure in this text.

Numerical data. Readers were unanimous in selecting *caring* as the primary character pillar present in *Kira-Kira*. They also rated the frequency of examples of *caring* as abundant and found this to have been a strong main theme. This novel had an especially high number of opportunities to discuss values of *respect*, *responsibility*, *caring*, and *trustworthiness*.

Table 6.1

Kira -Kira: Character Pillar Ranking – Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3=abundant _

Pillar ranking	Total frequency
Caring	3.0
Responsibility	2.5
Respect	2.2
Trustworthiness	1.7
Citizenship	.05
Fairness	.05

Table 6.2

Kira- Kira: Character Pillar Ranking – Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present 1 = a weak or minor theme 2 = a secondary theme 3 = a strong or main theme.

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	3
Responsibility	2.2

Respect	2.2
Trustworthiness	1.7
Citizenship	.05
Fairness	.05

Table 6.3

Kira-Kira: Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Pillar	Identified as main theme
Caring	5
Respect	4
Responsibility	4
Trustworthiness	1
Fairness	0
Citizenship	0

Table 6.4

Kira Kira: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total frequency
Caring	1,2,3,4,5,10,11,19,23,16,17,19,23,25,31,32,33, 39,42,43,44,46,51,53,59,64,67,68,72,74,75, 76,82,83,86,91,93,96,98,101,103,104,106,110,111, 120,126,129,130,133,135,137,138,142,157,159, 161,163,170,172,184,193,196,202,203,204,210, 211,216,220,224,227,228,230,238	75
Responsibility	3,4,12,16,25,41,42,46,48,57,58,59,62,77,79,80, 84,86,89,99,101,103,105,110,111,112,113,122,	53

	129,130,138,140,145,151,152,154,159,164,169, 175,176,181,182,184,192,196,209,210,212,215,227,229, 236	
Respect	6,13,17,25,27,37,39,43,48,50,60,62,67,72,76,80,82,90,92, 98,100,107,110,111,114,120,133,135,147,149,153,154, 156,176,190,204,210,217,219,221,224	41
Trustworthiness	4,8,26,29,38,49,66,67,68,78,79,82,85,86, 110,132,145,181,184,231,235	21
Citizenship	83,88,95,97,171,176,178,179	8
Fairness	0	0

Table 6.5

Kira Kira: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total frequency
Respect	13,27,28,34,37,51,54,55,56,62,70,71,74,83,85, 88,89,90,92,97,98,100,112,124,130,131,149,154,162,173,	30
Responsibility	12,15,19,24,31,52,71,75,95,102,108,115,142,150,180,181, 186,202	18
Caring	68,70,95,97,99,102,111,120,124,130,132,150,183	13
Trustworthiness	76,78,128,130,17,171,188,192,202,207,211	11
Fairness	15,28,124,190	4
Citizenship	85,92,194,209	4

Table 6.6

Kira-Kira: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (75)	Respect (30)	Caring (88)
Respect (53)	Responsibility (18)	Respect (83)
Responsibility (41)	Caring (13)	Responsibility (59)
Trustworthiness (21)	Trustworthiness (11)	Trustworthiness (32)
Citizenship (8)	Fairness (4)	Fairness (4)
Fairness (0)	Citizenship (4)	Citizenship (12)
Total positive (198)	Total negative (80)	Total overall (278)

2006 Newbery Award: *Criss Cross* by Lynne Rae Perkins.

Plot summary. Author Lynne Rae Perkin's novel is a wryly- humorous series of 38 vignettes about teen- age life with all its attendant drama of disillusionment, unfulfilled longings, and the glories of hopeful expectation. Main characters Debbie and Hector, along with a group of other friends and relatives, all sought for connection through friendships and the possibilities of romance as their paths crossed, diverged, and recrossed throughout the course of one summer. *Criss Cross* was aptly described by Newbery Award chair Barbara Barstow:

Perkins deftly captures the tentativeness and incompleteness of adolescence...

This poetic, postmodern novel experiments with a variety of styles: haiku, song lyrics, question- and- answer dialogue, and split- screen scenarios. With seeming yet deliberate randomness, Perkins writes an orderly, innovative, and risk- taking book in which nothing happens and everything happens (ALA/Press Releases,

2006, para. 3).

In this novel, which focused more on characterization than plot, Perkins strongly depicted the virtue of *caring* through a variety of relationships between the characters.

Relationships were central in this novel, and Perkins drew realistic portraits of teen-agers seeking love, romance, and acceptance. Debbie reached out in compassion to an elderly woman and discovered the benefits of inter-generational friendships. After having had a longing for romance focused on a handsome football player, she was disillusioned to learn that he lacked character. In a kind of reaping and sowing, Debbie enjoyed the first stirrings of a romance with her elderly friend's visiting grandson Peter.

Another main character, Hector, was invited to accompany his older sister to a concert, and deriving inspiration from that event, began to learn guitar in order to impress a girl. Hector's journey led him to a new understanding of his own gifting and identity. The novel explored the lives of other teens as well, as they connected and disconnected, searching for the meaning of life and love.

Teen-agers live on the verge of change, and they wonder what the future will hold. This novel captured the thoughts and emotions of group of friends who watched themselves and each other, looking at the transformations that were occurring in each and wondering what it might mean for them. Perkins recognized and perceptively expressed both the angst and joys these young people experienced as they anticipated the endless promise and possibilities that lay before them.

Character themes. Members of the reading team found that the character traits of *caring* and *respect* were most evident in this novel. Love, acceptance, and compassion were all key elements in this book in which a group of teen-agers wondered about the meaning of life as they sought to find their place in the highly stratified society that is

high school. Through relationships with family members, neighbors, classmates and each other, they learned life lessons and had the opportunity to share them as they met in Lenny's driveway and sat listening to the radio in his father's truck. As one reader, who saw *caring* as the strongest of the pillars being exemplified in this novel, said, "These teens are searching for who they are, what they can do and who will recognize it and love them." Another reader said, "The central characters, Debbie and Hector, are searching for love and friendship. They aren't sure how to become the person that they are supposed to be, but both treat family and friends with care and respect."

The theme of *responsibility* was also expressed through the actions of Debbie who cared for her elderly neighbor Mrs. Bruning in a loving and compassionate manner. The most dramatic plot event in the novel was Mrs. Bruning's illness and the ingenuity and teamwork with which Peter and Debbie worked to get her to the hospital. In this scene, the virtues of responsibility and caring were intertwined.

The themes of *caring* and *trustworthiness* were explored in the character of Dan, the conceited, good-looking football player who was the object of Debbie's interest. He toyed with her emotionally and otherwise revealed himself to be a person who lacked integrity. In a memorable scene on a bus, he demonstrated the pendulum swing of his character as he spoke compassionately for a moment to a disabled man, but then just as easily failed to pay for his seat and refused to give it up to a pregnant woman with a toddler on her hip. Perkins pointed to the vagaries of the inchoate adolescent character when she described Dan: "The scales tipped back and forth. It was so hard to tell what he might come back as in another life, or even who he would turn out to be in this one" (Perkins, 2005,p.292). It is this very malleability of children and young adults that makes it so vital that they receive training in character, not through heavy-handed moralizing,

but through the more oblique means of models of virtue that are found in great literature.

Author Lynne Rae Perkins's comments. When asked to autograph her books, Ms. Perkins inscribes them: "Eat Pie. Be Kind", because she wants children who read her books to know that "there are a lot of people out there who are willing to care about you, but that you have to be willing to care about people, too" (Pavao, 1999, p. 25). This correlates well with the research team's findings that the major character pillar exemplified in this novel is *caring*. In her Newbery Award acceptance speech Perkins talked about the role of books in her character formation. She said, "And I think now that, though I didn't fully understand it at the time, they showed me that whatever you encounter, if you can meet it with honesty, intelligence, compassion, and humor, on some level, you win" (Perkins, 2006, p. 10). These elements are found in the pillars of *caring*, *respect*, and *trustworthiness*, and Perkins here acknowledged the value of story in forming these virtues in the lives of children.

Perkins' writing is, in her words, an attempt above all to connect with her readers. She said, "The agenda of a writer is simple. It is 'I want to tell you something.' Maybe it's a joke. Maybe a story. Maybe the secret of life" (Perkins, 2006, p.11). *Criss Cross* does address all three of these levels. She elaborated:

To tell the truth in an interesting way, a way that allows for real sorrow, a way that allows for real laughter, is to open a door where there had seemed to be only a wall. This is the opposite of spin, which paints a picture of a door and hangs it on the wall in a gilded frame (Perkins, 2005, p. 10).

In this way, Perkins expressed a deep respect for her reader that is echoed in the actions of the characters in her novel toward one another. Her novels have value for teen-ager readers who appreciate her realistic portrayal of the questioning that characterizes their

stage of life. She views herself as a fellow traveler, as a caring voice helping young people to understand some part of their world. As she said, “If we are lucky, we might find at times that someone is walking along next to us, and they say, ‘You’re not crazy; I see it, too’” (Perkins, 2006, p. 9).

Character education recommendations. The team responses produced mixed results for this selection. Only three of the five members would recommend this novel for use in helping students to explore values. One said, “Yes, because these are such ‘normal’ young people. They represent the universal needs and longings, not only in adolescents, but also in all people.” This reader also stated that she would have no concerns about using this novel in the classroom because, “We all go through these feelings. Accept others and treat them as you would like to be treated.”

Others were less enthusiastic in their recommendations. One reader responded to the question asking if she would have any concerns about using this in the classroom by stating, “Although this book has a place in the school system, this is not for everyone. There are always those critics who complain about bad words, a bit of lawlessness and even some deception. Life is like that for all of us!” Given so many other stellar choices among the books in this Newbery study set, this researcher would not chose *Criss Cross* for use in character education, finding it more entertaining than inspiring.

References to religion tended to be flippant or negative. For example in the chapter entitled “Confession” Patty spoke of her experience with church: “We just say at the same time how basically sinful and unclean we all are. Which I don’t really believe. So if you think about it, I’m telling a lie when I’m supposed to be trying to be holy” (Perkins, 2005, p. 192). In light of the fact that discussions about religious doctrine would be impermissible in a public school setting, this researcher would hesitate to

introduce a text in a setting in which errors or misperceptions about religion could not be corrected.

Overall, the conclusion of the reading team was that this novel might be used with caution. The themes of *caring* and *respect* are very strong and, with the right focus, a teacher might profitably tie this novel to character education. One reader described the main theme of the novel as follows: “Every individual is unique and full of potential, but it is our choices which prove our true worth. There is an essential dignity in the human heart.” Teaching children to see that the development of good character is founded in good choices would apply to each of the character pillars.

Numerical data. The tables below support the finding of the team that caring and respect were the two predominant pillars. *Trustworthiness* and *responsibility* were also found to be themes addressed in this novel

Table 7.1

Criss Cross: Character Pillar Ranking - Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0= not present 1=infrequent 2=a moderate amount 3= abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	3
Respect	2.8
Responsibility	2.2
Trustworthiness	1.2
Fairness	0.6

Citizenship	0.6
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Table 7.2

Criss Cross: Character Pillar Ranking – Intensity

What is the strength or intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0=not present 1= a weak or minor theme 2= a secondary theme 3= a strong or main theme

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	3
Respect	2.8
Responsibility	2.4
Trustworthiness	1.2
Citizenship	0.4
Fairness	0.2

Table 7.3

Criss Cross: Narrative Response – Pillar Identified as a Main Theme

Character Pillar	Identified as Main Theme
Caring	4
Respect	3
Responsibility	2
Trustworthiness	0

Citizenship	0
Fairness	0

Table 7.4

Criss Cross: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total
Caring	9,14,16,31,34,41,47,48,53,64,87,107,111, 116,117,141,155,169,174,190,193,201,202, 206,214,223,233,242,248,	29
Respect	34,39,55,61,62,63,71,79,81,116,126,128,132,140 178,189,192,199,202,206,214	21
Responsibility	3,23,45,59,62,64,65,71,98,99,100,130,132,136, 165,185,194,195,217,223	20
Trustworthiness	132,149,185,202,209	5
Citizenship	112,174,225	3
Fairness	40,78,169	3

Table 7.5

Criss Cross: Negative Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total
Respect	15,24,44,73,78,83,125,141,160,182,185,212,244, 252,	14
Caring	14,62,125,158,160,182,185,243,245,251	10
Trustworthiness	21,43,48,99,102,103,25,193,232	9
Citizenship	30,198,225	3
Responsibility	195,244,245	3

Fairness	21,292	2
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Table 7.6

Criss Cross: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (29)	Respect (14)	Caring (39)
Respect (21)	Caring (10)	Respect (25)
Responsibility (20)	Trustworthiness (9)	Responsibility (23)
Trustworthiness (5)	Citizenship (3)	Trustworthiness (14)
Citizenship (3)	Responsibility (3)	Citizenship (6)
Fairness (3)	Fairness (2)	Fairness (5)
Total positive (81)	Total negative (41)	Total overall (122)

2007 Newbery Award: *The Higher Power of Lucky* by Susan Patron.

Plot summary. Author Susan Patron was awarded the 2007 Newbery Medal for *The Higher Power of Lucky*, a poignant tale of a plucky 10-year-old girl who endured her mother's death and her father's abandonment. Lucky Trimble was being cared for by her guardian Brigitte, her father's first wife, who responded to his plea for help by moving from her native France into poverty in a remote desert town in California. The town of Hard Pan was sparsely populated, and it seemed a disproportionate number of its citizens were attending various kinds of 12-step meetings, where Lucky overheard them speaking about the concept of hitting rock bottom and finding one's Higher Power. Longing for a mother, she thought she could "catch and trap the exact right one" (Patron, 2006, p. 13), if only she had a Higher Power.

Patron depicted a world where children, neglected by family members, found support in one another and in the kindness of strangers. This was exemplified by Brigitte, who willingly and lovingly cared for an unknown child who was not her own. Likewise, Lucky learned to show compassion and care for five-year-old Miles, who had also suffered the loss of his mother. Childhood fear of abandonment was skillfully explored as Lucky ran away in an attempt to prevent what she imagined was her guardian's plan to move back to France and leave her. In the climax of the novel, Lucky demonstrated the motherly concern and care for Miles that she herself longed for. Her fear of abandonment was allayed when she learned that Brigitte really did love her and had no plans to return to France.

Character themes. Members of the reading team agreed that *caring* and *responsibility* were the key character pillars in this novel. As readers journaled reflectively during and after their reading, they made note of many instances where both caring and responsibility were major themes. One reader observed that at a major turning point in the novel, Lucky accepted responsibility during the storm to care for Miles whose mother was in prison. One reader commented regarding the main theme of this book, "Relationships require commitments of *respect*, *caring* and *responsibility* on the part of all individuals." Another saw that Lucky was attempting to behave responsibly so that her guardian Brigitte would continue to care for her.

As a group, the team could see that Brigitte, a woman who had no real connection to Lucky other than a previous marriage to the child's deadbeat father, was a model of kindness and compassion. As she reached out to take responsibility for meeting the needs of a motherless young girl, she grew to love her and to experience love in return. One reader said, "*Caring* or not caring was the main theme of this book." Another reader

identified a turning point for Lucky illustrating the pillar of *caring*:

Lucky decided to save Miles from the sandstorm and allowed him to read *Are You My Mother?* When she praised him, took the burr out, and fed him, Lucky was finally demonstrating the motherly traits modeled by Brigitte.

The theme of *trustworthiness* was also in evidence. Lucky had the courage to do the right thing, one element of *trustworthiness*, when she found the courage to stay and help Miles survive the sandstorm. She questioned Brigitte's *trustworthiness* when she suspected her of surreptitiously attempting to sneak back to France with Lucky.

Author Susan Patron's comments. Because of a controversy that erupted concerning the use of a single word on the first page of the novel, some school librarians, parents, and teachers, responding with alarm to the use of the word 'scrotum', chose not to purchase, recommend, or even allow children to read this Newbery winner. The Association for Library Services to Children and the American Association of School Librarians released the following statement in Patron's defense:

Recent media coverage failed to discuss the true value of the *Higher Power of Lucky* by Susan Patron. The author's use of one word should not prevent children from having free access to this remarkable piece of children's literature.... a perfectly nuanced blend of adventure and survival, both emotional and physical. It is a gently humorous character study as well as a blueprint for a self-examined life. The book serves as a reminder that children support one another just as adults do (ALA News, 2007, para. 2).

Patron's remarks to the press on the subject of her book have accordingly been defensive. In her comments, she acknowledged the important role parents and other adults have in communicating truth to children: "The child who learns the definition of

scrotum and other body parts in this way, through reading and talking with responsible adults, is armed with, for one thing, an alternative to finding answers through first-hand experience” (ALA News, 2007, para. 4). In this, Patron’s words accord with the central belief of those who seek to support character education through the use of literature: It is the moral responsibility of adults in a society to pass on core values through talking and listening and instructing children about what is most important in life.

Patron’s (2007) explanation of her reason for choosing to use the controversial word is enlightening and supports the view that this novel does indeed portray the core virtue of *caring*. She said:

I needed a sensitive word and subject, something a little taboo, in order for one of the final scenes to have impact and power. In that scene, enough trust has been engendered between Lucky and her guardian, Brigitte, that now, at last, Lucky can ask her question straightforwardly...Brigitte’s answer, explaining the meaning of scrotum is equally important. It shows Lucky, and the reader, that Brigitte deeply loves her ward. If the question had been less intimate, the scene wouldn’t have had the same impact (p. 9).

The virtue of *trustworthiness*, in the sense of honesty, is clear here, as is the virtue of *caring*. Mutual *respect* is also displayed as Lucky trusts Brigitte with an intimate question and receives a thoughtful, truthful answer. Patron (2007) spoke of access to books as being “crucial to children’s ability to make sense of this fragile, battered world-the world we’re handing over to them” (p. 9). Advocates of the use of literature for character education would find much to agree with in this statement.

This researcher conducted an interview with Patron via e-mail on May 1, 2010. The first question posed was, “Do you have any purpose other than simply entertaining

your readers? Are you deliberate at all about helping children learn lessons about life through your stories? Patron wrote the following:

This is a tricky question. I'd say my goal is to entertain, but intrinsic to that is wanting to make a deep connection to the reader. To be dynamic and powerful the connection must be based on meaningful qualities, things that are important to me. However, in no way do I ever set out to help children learn lessons about life. If that is an element in my books, it's an organic outcome from writing what I care about, not a conscious emphasis (S. Patron, personal communication, May 1, 2010).

In the second question, this researcher asked the writer to evaluate the presence of the Six Pillars of Character as depicted in her novels. She said, "...no matter how well equipped your survival kit backpack is, you cannot survive and flourish in life without hope and without love" (S. Patron, personal communication, May 1, 2010). Elsewhere, in a published interview, Patron summed up her themes in these words: "To me these books are about the redeeming power of love: They're about a young girl growing up in a challenging environment and trying to figure out how the world works" (Schulze, 2008, para. 2).

Finally, Patron answered the question of whether or not she was in favor of using children's literature to teach character education. She commented that she was not especially in favor of this approach. Her concerns were expressed as follows:

I worry about damaging that elusive connection with the reader. I've heard of children who have grown to hate beautiful books such as *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, because they are used as teaching tools. In some ways, analyzing specific aspects robs the reader of the deeper experience

of the book in its entirety, which we feel but is almost impossible to articulate. Flannery O'Connor felt that you cannot separate a story from its meaning—that it's indescribable except in its own words. Given that in the hands of a brilliant teacher, a book can become more meaningful and powerful, what concerns me is when that teacher is less than brilliant and ends up undermining the literary experience rather than enhancing it. The student may learn about the Six Pillars

of Character but at the cost of his or her personal literary experience—and I would be opposed to that (S. Patron, personal communication, May 1, 2010).

Character education recommendations. Four of the five readers responded in their reflective journals that they would advocate using this novel to help students explore the character pillars of *caring* and *responsibility*. One reader expressed the view that while the novel could be used, there were other books stronger in these areas that she would choose and so she did not recommend it.

Caring and *responsibility* were displayed most clearly by Lucky's guardian Brigitte. Lucky's character also developed as she moved from being annoyed with Miles to having compassion on him. During the dramatic runaway scene, Lucky took *responsibility* for Miles and cared for him so that they both survived the storm.

Themes of *respect* and *trustworthiness* were also present. The citizens of this small town took care of one another and remained loyal to one another. Students exploring values in this novel could learn that, in the words of one of the readers, "Relationships require commitments of *respect*, *caring*, and *responsibility* on the part of all individuals." Exemplification of positive character traits outweighed negative traits in this novel. While the absent father behaved irresponsibly by abandoning his daughter,

there were no real villains in this story. The *Higher Power of Lucky* could be utilized effectively to explore the values *caring* and *responsibility*.

Numerical data. Upon analysis, it was found that the qualitative and the quantitative data were in accord. When the reading group came to consensus concerning page numbers where examples of character exemplification were found, caring and responsibility were seen to have the highest frequencies, both of positive and negative examples, as can be seen in Table 8.4 and Table 8.5. Table 8.6 indicates that in *The Higher Power of Lucky* overall, the most abundant opportunities to explore values would be found under caring and responsibility. Finally, after the group discussion, readers completed a rating scale ranking of their impressions of the intensity and frequency of the Six Pillars of Character as found in this novel. Again, *caring* and *responsibility* were ranked highest, as can be seen in Table 8.1 and Table 8.2.

Table 8.1

The Higher Power of Lucky: Character Pillar Ranking - Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text? 0=not present 1=infrequent 2=a moderate amount 3=abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	2.8
Responsibility	2.6
Respect	1.8
Trustworthiness	1.8

Citizenship	0.8
Fairness	0.4

Table 8.2

The Higher Power of Lucky: Character Pillar Ranking - Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

Zero =not present, a weak theme 1=a weak or minor theme 2 =a secondary theme 3 =a strong or main theme.

Character Pillar	Mean
Caring	3
Responsibility	2.6
Respect	2
Trustworthiness	2
Citizenship	0.6
Fairness	0

Table 8.3

The Higher Power of Lucky: Narrative Response- : Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Character Pillar	Identified as Main Theme
Caring	5
Responsibility	5

Trustworthiness	2
Respect	3
Citizenship	1
Fairness	0

Table 8.4

The Higher Power of Lucky: Positive Character Depictions Frequencies

Character Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total Frequency
Trustworthiness	38,61,63,109,112,124,134,134	9
Responsibility	4,5,9,14,15,42,49,54,70,73,91,94,98,108,112,119,122,129,132,134	20
Respect	19,49,53,55,68,93,129,130	8
Fairness	14,64	2
Caring	8,11,12,15,30,54,56,58,65,72,73,81,84,88,91,95,99,111,111,114,118,124,126,129,130,131,132,134	28
Citizenship	21,25,43,54,56,91	6

Table 8.5

The Higher Power of Lucky: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Character Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total Frequency
Trustworthiness	5,70,78,93,101,102,103,105,112	9
Responsibility	3,15,36,45,48,72,80,80,91	9
Respect	11,78,82,85,101,123,124	7
Fairness	85	1

Caring	34,67,84,100,102,105	6
Citizenship	0	0

Table 8.6

The Higher Power of Lucky: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall values.

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (28)	Trustworthiness (9)	Caring (34)
Responsibility (20)	Responsibility (9)	Responsibility (29)
Trustworthiness (9)	Respect (7)	Trustworthiness (18)
Respect (8)	Caring (6)	Respect (15)
Citizenship (6)	Fairness (1)	Citizenship (6)
Fairness (2)	Citizenship (0)	Fairness (3)
Total positive (73)	Total negative (32)	Total overall (105)

2008 Newbery Award: *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* by Laura Amy Schlitz.

Plot summary. Laura Amy Schlitz was awarded the 2008 Newbery Medal for her collection of fictional playlets comprised of monologues and dialogues vividly depicting life in the Middle Ages. Having been a librarian at the elite Park School of Baltimore, Schlitz wrote these vignettes specifically for performance by a class of 5th- graders who were studying medieval times (“Sweet Lady”, 2008). The author painted evocative portraits of the thoughts, feelings and activities of young people from all levels of society through these short poetry or prose pieces. Her work depicts “prejudice, loneliness, guilt, remorse, resentment- with some freedom and good fortune thrown in to keep the

mix lively and hopeful” (“Sweet Lady”, p. 30). In between tales of such colorful characters as Nelly, the eel sniggler; Jack, the half- wit; and Barbary, the mudslinger, Schlitz interwove informational pieces about life in 1255 in an English village. Her background narratives included historical explanations of the three- field system of agriculture, the medieval pilgrimage, the Crusades, falconry, Jews in medieval society, and the feudal system of stratification.

Character themes Members of the reading team saw *caring* and *responsibility* as the predominant character themes in this piece of literature. The compassion that is a by-product of suffering was depicted in a number of instances where characters developed empathy for one another. One example was Barbary the mudslinger who reflected on her disrespectful actions toward the rich Lord’s daughter. She came to regret having pelted her and ruining her silk dress in an act of unprovoked jealousy. In seeing the wealthy, privileged young girl’s hurt face, she felt sorrow at having been the cause and recognized the common plight of women.

Turning points, where characters came to more mature understandings and more responsible, respectful, or caring behavior were numerous. Jacob and Petronella, for a brief time forgot their respective places in society and treated one another as equals. Jack, the village half- wit befriended another rejected outsider, Otho, the miller’s son. Jack saw him suffering the bullying of the other boys and reached out to encourage him, echoing the comforting words he had heard from Mogg, his sister. As a result, Otho no longer joined in with the throngs of children who taunted Jack.

For Taggot, the blacksmith’s daughter, her turning point came when she received a small token of appreciation from a young man whose horse she had cared for. Taggot had been told by her family that she should not expect to find a husband due to her

ugliness and she stayed away from the village celebration of May Day. However, her inner beauty was seen by a young man whose injured horse she treated. Her compassion and caring for the horse resulted in her receiving a spring of hawthorn from the young man, a surprise offering that made her feel wonderful and worthy, like the more beautiful girls who never wanted for suitors. Animals were an integral part of the lives of these rural people, and the story of Alice the shepherdess beautifully portrayed unselfish and sacrificial caring on the part of one young girl for her treasured lamb.

Responsibility came early to young people during medieval times. Hugo, the Lord's nephew's tale was about his learning to conquer his fear and assume the manly responsibility of hunting game. Will, the plowboy learned from his father the importance of a man's duty to his family to provide food and shelter. Lowdy, the varlet's child was responsible to keep house as her mother had died in childbirth. In this humorous tale, she bewailed her fate of having to constantly fight a battle with the fleas that are part and parcel of her father's *responsibility* to care for his master's hounds.

Author's comments. Author Laura Amy Schlitz has not spoken explicitly of the link between character education and literature in her interviews. In the foreword to *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!*, she did provide her reason for writing this work: she wrote this series of monologues so that her students would have something to perform that would enliven for them the history of the medieval period. She stated, "It was from novels that I learned that history was the story of survival..." (Schlitz, 2007, p. ix). Because she portrays this struggle so vividly, children in the 21st century are afforded a glimpse of the lives and emotions of children of a different era and thus develop empathy and understanding. Lessons about *caring*, *responsibility*, and *respect* are very evident as the young people in this book learn truths about life through their difficult experiences.

In her Newbery Award acceptance speech, author Laura Amy Schlitz expressed her belief in the importance of stories as a teaching tool: “Dramatic narrative creates meaning, and what is meaningful takes root in memory” (Schlitz, 2008, p. 8). She also said, “ Stories enlarge our lives...they help us make sense of a random world” (Schlitz, p.8). While Aronson, writing in *The School Library Journal*, took issue with Schlitz’s expressed preference for fiction over non-fiction, he did express an opinion shared by authors and character educators alike and illustrated by the tales told in *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* : “We’re especially fond of the idea that a well-crafted story can simultaneously reach young people and touch upon larger truths” (Aronson, 2008, para. 4).

Schlitz (2008) also expressed her care and concern for children when she spoke of the way librarians feel toward children: “We try to help them when they’re stuck and catch them when they fall” (p. 8). It is clear that she is a librarian, writer, and educator who crafts her historical fiction with the intention of helping her young charges to live lives of *caring* and compassion.

In a personal email to this researcher, Schlitz answered questions about her intentions regarding the deliberate placement of moral messages in the literature she writes. In the quotation that follows she describes an occasion when she did include a deliberate instructional theme:

There have been two times in my life when I had a specific object in telling or writing a story. One was when I began to tell (orally) *Bearskinner*. As a school librarian, I do a lot of storytelling, generally fitting my stories to the needs of the curriculum. I began to tell *Bearskinner* because one of my children remarked that she thought that committing suicide required a great courage. I wanted to tell a

story that argued that it takes infinitely more courage to continue living in the face of discouragement and despair (L. A. Schlitz, personal communication, April 23, 2010).

However, in addressing her intentions with regard to *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* Schlitz indicated that she, like most of the other authors under consideration in this study, usually does not deliberately plant moral messages in her stories; rather, any content that might bear on this subject flows naturally from that which moves and concerns her. She said:

When I wrote the monologues for GOOD MASTERS! SWEET LADIES! I was trying to teach children about everyday life in the Middle Ages. A Park schoolteacher was kind enough to say that the monologues are "radical in their critique of tyranny, sexism, poverty and superstition." If so, that is a moral stance- - but it was one I assumed unconsciously.

Schlitz expressed the view that preaching is not part of her job description as an author. She said,

For the most part, I try to steer clear of inserting "moral values" in my stories. It's not that I wish to be immoral, or amoral, but I think that overt didacticism is insulting to the reader, and often inartistic. I also trust that if I know anything- - if I have acquired any wisdom or compassion in my 55 years- - it will come out in the story on its own accord. As virtues go, I think I'm most interested in courage, imagination, and mercy (L. A. Schlitz, personal communication, April 23, 2010).

Schlitz is both an educator, as a school librarian, and an author. When asked to comment on her sense of the efficacy of using literature for character education she said:

I think it depends on how character education is taught. I think children tend to

start out with a good moral compass. As a storyteller, I watch their faces, and you can see it- - their outrage when an innocent person is oppressed or treated cruelly, their pleasure when generosity or mercy is rewarded, their satisfaction when justice and order prevail. The trouble is, one can have a splendid sense of right and wrong, and still find it difficult to be truthful, compassionate, and mindful of others. I think if children are allowed to read good books, and encouraged to talk about them from a literary point of view...these discussions can be thought-provoking and engaging (L. A. Schlitz, personal communication, April 23, 2010).

Like many of the other Newbery authors who have addressed this topic, she, too, is wary of using too heavy a hand to attempt to teach children right from wrong:

I think it's vitally important that discussions about books should not be opportunities to nag, browbeat, or instill feelings of guilt or shame. Children dislike being preached at just as much as adults do- - and they are capable of forming their own opinions about what they read; they don't always need an adult to point things out to them. I also think that the moral ambiguities in stories should be cherished, not simplified (L. A. Schlitz, personal communication, April 23, 2010).

Character education recommendations. Members of the reading team were enthusiastic in their recommendation of this work of historical fiction for character education, with one exception. One of the readers stated that she would not recommend this book for use in helping students to explore the Six Pillars of Character because she saw evidence of “situation ethics.” While she believed that the historical content was excellent and provided sufficient reason to teach this work, she did not see the characters develop during the course of the book. One instance she cited was the tale of Mogg who

switches her family's cow for a neighbor's mangy, less valuable one to outwit the feudal master's cruel plan to exert his right to take their only means of support. She stated, "It seems like a reasonable act of self-preservation but was an act that broke medieval rights." Her comments gave rise to some lively disagreements during the course of the group discussion of the merits of the book. In a number of instances throughout the text, the poor serfs resorted to acts of thievery or deception that seemed, to some readers, quite justified in light of these poor people's struggle for survival. For example, in one vignette a man poached a hare, a crime punishable by hanging, from the wealthy lord of the manor in order to feed his starving family. Based on the fervor with which the team of readers expressed their viewpoints, it is the impression of this researcher that this book would indeed make for suitable material with which to engage students in meaningful ethical discussions.

All other members of the team believed that this book could provide a basis for meaningful discussions of the Six Pillars of Character. One reader said, "While *respect* was a major trait, expressed in how they treated or mistreated one another, both *caring* and *trustworthiness* were strong themes." Another reader expressed her impressions of the character expressions depicted in the book:

Death was nipping at their heels. To survive and live another took vigilance. Lives were marked by duty, courage, and cunning. The characters were faced with tough choices and survival generally hung in the balance. Their lives were marked by a sense of exacting, unforgiving realism. There was no room for fanciful, idealistic notions of reality. Reality just was. Simply accept that or die.

Team members agreed that *caring* and *responsibility* were themes treated with both frequency and intensity in *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* The themes of

trustworthiness and *respect* were also evident. The theme of *fairness* occurred as well, in fewer instances, but quite powerfully. The tale of Mogg, the villein's daughter, illustrated the medieval custom of heriot, wherein the feudal lord had the right to confiscate the most valuable piece of livestock from the family of the deceased villein. Another specific instance of unfairness involved the treatment of the Jewish moneylender's son, Jacob Ben Salomon. Schlitz amplified this for her readers by explaining the various kinds of unfair treatment Jews received during the Middle Ages, particularly during the Crusades.

This work, which invites comparison with *The Canterbury Tales*, does provide abundant opportunities for exploration of character elements. Because each of the 22 vignettes is the tale of a different individual, and each one contains at least one reference to traits such as *caring*, *trustworthiness*, *respect*, and *responsibility*, it would be an excellent choice for incorporation into a character education curriculum.

Numerical data. The data table below supports the reading team's recommendations that this book can be profitably used for teaching the pillars of *respect*, *responsibility*, and *caring*.

Table 9.1

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Character Pillar Ranking - Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1= infrequent 2= a moderate amount 3=abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	2.8

Responsibility	2.6
Trustworthiness	2.4
Respect	2.0
Fairness	2.0
Citizenship	0.8

Table 9.2

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! : Character Pillar Ranking - Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present, a weak theme 1= a weak or minor theme 2=a secondary theme

3=a strong or main theme

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	2.6
Responsibility	2.4
Trustworthiness	2.4
Respect	2.0
Fairness	1.0
Citizenship	0.6

Table 9.3

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Narrative Response- Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Pillar Ranking	Readers identifying as a main theme
Caring	4

Responsibility	3
Trustworthiness	2
Respect	2
Citizenship	0
Fairness	0

Table 9.4

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total frequency
Caring	2,4,6,7,9,11,14,15,16,24,29,30,31,32,39,46,49,51,54,61, 63,66,74,76	24
Responsibility	2,3,7,8,10,11,14,16,18,21,24,3,35,46,57,60,63,66,75, 77	20
Trustworthiness	4,11,33,34,47,60,67,77.	8
Respect	30,31,33,43,51,67,74	7
Citizenship	34,63	2
Fairness	43	1

Table 9.5

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Negative Character Depictions Frequency Counts

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total frequency
Trustworthiness	11,18,19,26,27,29,38,45,48,57,62,63	12
Respect	6,20,21,28,42,43,47,51	8
Citizenship	11,26,29,39,63	5

Caring	19,25,29,30	4
Fairness	18,25,51,53	4
Responsibility	45	1

Table 9.6

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall values (# of occurrences).

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (24)	Trustworthiness (12)	Caring (28)
Responsibility (20)	Respect (8)	Responsibility (21)
Trustworthiness (8)	Citizenship (5)	Trustworthiness (20)
Respect (7)	Caring (4)	Respect (15)
Citizenship (2)	Fairness (4)	Citizenship (7)
Fairness (1)	Responsibility (1)	Fairness (5)
Total positive (62)	Total negative(34)	Total overall (96)

2009 Newbery Award: *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman

Plot summary. Author Neil Gaiman was awarded the 2010 Newbery Medal for *The Graveyard Book*, a horror story for children patterned after Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*. The most frightening chapter is the first, wherein is graphically told the story of the murder of a family by assassins and the escape into the night of the only survivor, a small, diapered child who found his way into a graveyard. In the graveyard, the toddler met and was adopted by ghosts who jointly committed to the responsibility for his care. Based on the opening scene, one might argue with Gaiman's contention about his book that "It's not scary" ("Nobody knows", 2009, p.19), but it is true that there is much that

was heartwarming about the tale of a young boy, Bod, raised by the deceased denizens of a cemetery, along with the help of a werewolf and a vampire. Silas, the vampire, was Bod's mentor and steered him through his journey to adulthood. In this coming-of-age tale that is part gothic horror story, part fantasy, Bod discovered the meaning of sacrificial love, learned to confront the power of evil and his own fears, and developed into a young man who was responsible, brave and caring.

Character themes. Members of the reading team agreed that *caring* and *responsibility* were the key character pillars in this novel. Although the trait of *trustworthiness* was not found with as much frequency in the text, it was considered a strong theme by team members. The pillar of *trustworthiness* is the only pillar that includes a reference to courage, specifically courage to do the right thing, so whenever courage of any kind was seen as a theme in the text readers were most inclined to include it as an example of *trustworthiness*. Upon analysis, it was found that the qualitative and the quantitative data were in accord. As readers journaled reflectively during and after their reading, they made note of many instances where both *caring* and *responsibility* were major themes. *Trustworthiness* and *respect* were featured significantly as well.

Readers saw clear evidence of the character pillars exemplified in the central conflict of this novel. One observed that "in the conflict between good and evil, Silas was trustworthy in his efforts to protect Bod from the evilness personified in Jack." Another of the readers said, "The climax of the novel is when the Jacks invade the graveyard looking to kill Bod. Just as he has been protected all his life (responsibility), his first action is to secure Scarlet's safety." A third reader stated, "The central conflict of the *Graveyard Book* is an obligation for the people of the graveyard to protect the weak... an innocent young boy, so that he may not only survive, but go on to lead a life

of integrity, generosity, and purpose.” This is a clear demonstration of the importance of the pillars of responsibility and caring. The same reader continued, “Bod learns to value his life because of the great sacrifices of those who love him.” There was a clear-cut character arc in this novel, where it can be seen that the protagonist, Bod, grew and changed as a result of the positive input of the individuals who willingly assumed the responsibility of loving and caring for him.

Author Neil Gaiman’s comments. Neil Gaiman’s position of eminence and notoriety in the world of children’s literature is unique. Enthusiastic fans lined up on one occasion, waiting outside in the rain for six hours, to hear him read and speak on his work. The audience swelled to an astonishing one thousand adults and children (Goodyear, 2010). Such rock star status is unique among children’s authors, and as such it is impossible to divorce the man and his public persona from his work. He influences children. Described as a “trailblazer and iconoclast” (Howard, 2009, p. 351), Gaiman is a prolific writer in a variety of genres, including horror fiction for adults and children, comics, and graphic novels. In recent years, critics have accused the Newbery committee of having lost its way due to their choices of books librarians have found to be quite unpopular with children (Silvey, 2008). Gaiman, the 2009 winner of the Newbery Award has laid that concern to rest, as this statement in the *School Library Journal* indicates: “They’ve been arguing about whether the Newbery Winner should be popular or whether they should be excellent, and they’ve got *The Graveyard Book*, which effectively demolishes the argument because it is both” (Sutton, 2009, p. 31).

Evidence of his great popularity is Gaiman’s list of 10,000 Twitter followers, and it is his use of this medium of communication with his audience that has caused a notable controversy. Gaiman proclaimed his triumph at having won the award for the most

distinguished and excellent children's book in 2009 by announcing it to his 10,000 Twitter followers in a short message that repeatedly used the single most offensive profane word available in the English language (Howard, 2009). At another event widely attended by his adoring young fans:

He was wearing a T- shirt printed with a passage from "American Gods," which he says is the most direct expression of his religious beliefs: "I can believe things that are true and I can believe things that aren't true and I can believe things where nobody knows if they're true or not. I can believe in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and Marilyn Monroe and the Beatles and Elvis and Mister Ed... I believe that the greatest poets of the last century were Edith Sitwell and Don Marquis, that jade is dried dragon sperm, and that thousands of years ago in a former life I was a one- armed Siberian shaman (Goodyear, 2010,p. 55).

Gaiman clearly has no desire to be a conventional role model for children or to didactically teach them moral truths through his stories. In fact, he said that he has written merely because he wants to know where the story will lead and to earn a living. In his Newbery Acceptance speech he asserted that, "When people tell me that my stories helped them through the death of a loved one...or helped them cope with a disease or a personal tragedy.... when these things have happened as they have, over and over, my tendency is to be polite and grateful, but ultimately to dismiss them as irrelevant" (Gaiman, 2009, p. 9). He continued, "I did not write the stories to get people through the hard places and difficult times...I wrote because I was interested in the stories" (p. 9). However, Gaiman's intentions aside, people have been helped by and felt connections with the characters and situations he has created. Later in this same speech Gaiman did, however, concede that he had begun to come to a new understanding. He continued his

Newbery Award reflection:

I would not be the person I am without the authors who made me what I am – the special ones, the wise ones, sometimes those who got there first. It's not irrelevant, those moments of connection, those places where fiction saves your life. It's the most important thing there is (p. 9).

In a personal e-mail to this researcher, Gaiman answered questions about his intention in writing his novels and impressions of character education. When asked, "Do you have an purpose other than simply entertaining your readers? Are you deliberate at all about helping children learn lessons about life through your stories?", he replied, "I guess, but it's a byproduct, I hope, of a well- written story. You had better have something to say." When asked which of The Six Pillars of Character he saw as most predominant in his work, he stated, "It probably changes from book to book. In *The Graveyard Book*, I hope they're all there. But probably *citizenship*, in which the city in question is a graveyard." Finally, in response to the question, "Are you in favor of using children's literature to teach character education?" he replied, "Yesss....as long as it's not a moral wrapped in a story, like a dog- pill, wrapped in enough cheese to make the dog eat it. I'd rather they saw how characters in stories behave and react, and empathize (N. Gaiman, personal communication, April 20, 2010).

The conclusion of Gaiman's Newbery acceptance speech might actually be loudly applauded by those who contend that literature is a vital means of character education for children. He said:

We who make stories know that we tell lies for a living. But they are good lies that say true things, and we owe it to our readers to build them as best we can. Because somewhere out there is someone who needs that story. Someone who

will grow up with a different landscape, who without that story will be a different person. And who *with* that story may have hope, or wisdom, or kindness, or comfort (Gaiman, 2009, p. 10).

Character education recommendations. The team of readers gave this book mixed reviews as far as being able to recommend it as a reliable source for character education. One of the readers suggested that it would be effective for students in middle school and above. She stated:

Despite the ghost scenario, individuals behave in selfless ways to protect the innocent and the weak. The boy comes to true appreciation of the sacrifices others have made for him. He develops into an individual who puts the good of other above his own desires.

That particular reader also saw integrity and *caring* being expressed throughout the novel on many levels, particularly among friends who acted in each other's best interest.

Another reader expressed concerns about using this book with younger children because of its violence, citing the frequency of negative expressions of the pillars of caring and respect she had found. A third reader would not recommend it because of its focus on the darkness of ghouls and ghosts, feeling that novels about real humans would be better suited to the purpose of character education.

Despite advance warnings via journalism and word of mouth about the darkness and lack of value of this novel, this researcher was actually quite surprised by the amount of positive moral content contained therein. Especially noteworthy was the relationship between Silas, the vampire, and Bod, which depicted beautifully the tension between parents and children as the former attempt to prepare their children for life and to then let them go. Many lessons about *respect*, *responsibility*, and *caring* might be derived from

this aspect of the text. The hero of the story, Bod, repeatedly demonstrated concern for others, going out of his way to help or rescue them. He was contrite and apologetic when he was disobedient and admitted that he had learned his lesson. As one of the readers noted, “Mrs. Owens, Silas, and Miss Lupescu display courage to do the right thing, promise-keeping, perseverance, and dependability in protecting Bod. Bod learns to be a strong, generous, and selfless person from following their examples.”

While the violent content and fascination with the dark supernatural world of ghouls and goblins would not make this an optimal choice for character education, for those teachers who find their students have read this book on their own, there is certainly ample opportunity to discuss positive character values depicted in this novel.

Numerical data. Tables 10.1-10.6 provide numeric data compiled from the reader’s codebooks. These data support the teams’ findings expressed through the rich narrative portion of the codebook.

Table 10.1

The Graveyard Book: Character Pillar Ranking- Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 =not present 1=infrequent 2= a moderate amount 3= abundant

Pillar	Mean Frequency
Responsibility	2.6
Caring	2.6
Trustworthiness	2.2
Respect	1.2

Fairness	0.8
Citizenship	0.4

Table 10.2

The Graveyard Book: Character Pillar Ranking - Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 =not present 1=infrequent 2= a moderate amount 3= abundant

Pillar	Mean Frequency
Caring	2.0
Respect	2.0
Responsibility	2.0
Trustworthiness	1.8
Fairness	1.2
Citizenship	0.0

Table 10.3

The Graveyard Book: Narrative Responses Pillars Identified as a Main Theme

Pillar Ranking	Frequency
Responsibility	5
Caring	4
Trustworthiness	3
Respect	1
Fairness	0

Citizenship

0

Table 10.4

The Graveyard Book: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Character Pillar	Page #	Total Frequency
Caring	14,16,17,23,30,38,60,98,113,131,149, 176,179,198,204,204,209,220,217,227, 235,247,276,289,302,303,306	27
Responsibility	16,17,18,21,23,39,55,56,60,67,116,139, 181,185,193,204,205,209,210,246,251, 264,278,290,291	25
Trustworthiness	16,17,37,50,68,98,118,137,138,143, 183,205,215,247,291,303	16
Respect	29,43,94,104,187,193,290,298,303	9
Fairness	21,30,137,178,230,250	6
Citizenship	29,35,99	3

Table 10.5

The Graveyard Book: Negative Character Depiction Frequencies

Character Pillar	Page #	Total Frequency
Caring	7,8,45,74,127,130,208,217,232,276,286	11
Trustworthiness	86,120,122,123,138,183,197,199,202,254,287	11
Respect	5,67,72,106,125,135,183,187,188,261	10
Responsibility	58,73,205	3
Fairness	68,125,183	3

Citizenship	125,194	2
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Table 10.6

The Graveyard Book: Ranking of Opportunities to Explore Negative, Positive, and Overall Values (# of occurrences).

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (27)	Caring (11)	Caring (38)
Responsibility (25)	Trustworthiness (11)	Responsibility (28)
Trustworthiness (16)	Respect (10)	Trustworthiness (27)
Respect (9)	Responsibility (3)	Respect (19)
Fairness (6)	Fairness (3)	Fairness (9)
Citizenship (3)	Citizenship (2)	Citizenship (5)
Total positive (86)	Total negative (40)	Total overall (126)

2010 Newbery Award: *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead.

Plot summary. Rebecca Stead was awarded the 2010 Newbery Medal for her book *When You Reach Me*, which inventively incorporated elements of fantasy, science fiction, mystery, and history. Katie O'Dell, chairwoman of the Newbery Committee, called this novel "exceptionally conceived, finely crafted and highly original" (Rich, 2010, p. C3). In recent years, critics have noted that Newbery Award winners have not always been popular with young readers, but this book was a *New York Times* bestseller prior to its having been named for this award. One unique feature was the way in which Stead incorporated references to another Newbery winner, *A Wrinkle in Time*, the 1963 children's book involving time travel. In an interview, Stead revealed aspects of L'Engle's work that she admired, and perhaps attempted to emulate: "What I loved about

L'Engle's book is how it deals with so much fragile inner human stuff, at the same time that it takes on life's big questions" (Flood, 2010, para. 6).

Life's big questions for young adolescents often have to do with identity and their place in the world of their peers. In *When You Reach Me*, the story began with 12-year-old Miranda struggling with rejection by her childhood friend, a neighbor boy named Sal. The novel was set in New York City in the late 1970's, where Miranda lived with her single mother, whom she was helping to prepare for an appearance on a television quiz show. One day Sal was attacked by another boy named Marcus, and suddenly it seemed that he wanted nothing more to do with Miranda. At the same time, she began to receive mysterious messages that appeared to reveal aspects of the future and to warn her that her action would be required in order to avert a tragedy in the future. Through her interactions with other students at school, Miranda learned empathy and tolerance for others. Interwoven with the story of the challenges of relationships faced by all young teens was a tale of time travel and adventure involving the mysterious Marcus and a homeless man who lived on the street outside her apartment.

Character themes. Members of the reading team saw the themes of *respect*, *responsibility*, and *caring* as paramount in this book. The theme of *respect*, involving tolerance and acceptance of others, was depicted in Miranda's anger over the racist attitude she found in her boss. *Respect* might also be introduced as a topic of discussion in the classroom because of the many examples of lack of respect. For example, the fear of violence on the streets of New York City, even for young children on the way home from school, pointed to the lack of respect people have for one another. The cruelty of school children who formed cliques, bullied, and excluded others can be seen as both disrespect and lack of caring.

Miranda was an extremely responsible girl who cared for eccentric mother, who sometimes behaved irresponsibly by remaining in bed and not getting up to see Miranda off to school. At a climactic moment, however, Miranda's mother did show up to school to help her. Her mother's *trustworthiness* was called into question in that her pilfering of office supplies from work is a clear-cut incidence of dishonesty. One of the readers believed that the main theme of the book centered on *responsibility*: "There are consequences for most every action. We are all responsible to help others. We should sympathize with their trials because they are not unlike our own. Miranda and Marcus showed responsibility as they systematically persevered to save Sal's life." Another of the readers echoed this view: "The central theme was being *responsible* and being a good parent or child, helpful and considerate of the needs of others. Miranda was learning the art of listening and watching for reasons people behave the way they do."

Caring was a theme seen throughout, most markedly in the scene where the Laughing Man sacrificed his life to save Sal. One reader said, "The fact that the Laughing Man and his reason for time travel had to do with making amends with the help of Miranda indicates respect and caring. The friendships that abound in this story are filled with respect and caring." Miranda is surrounded by adults who care for her, including not only her mother, but also her mother's boyfriend, her friend's father, her boss, and finally, the mysterious Laughing Man. She learned a valuable lesson about loyalty when Sal rejected her, and so she was able to respond with empathy and friendship toward Julia, a girl with whom she had previously clashed.

Author Rebecca Stead's comments. With the award having been granted only recently, Stead had not yet made her Newbery Acceptance Speech as of the time of this writing. She did, however, respond to this researcher's emailed questions in a note sent

on April 18, 2010. When asked if she had a purpose other than simply entertaining her readers, and did she deliberately attempt to help children learn lessons about life through her stories, she replied:

When I am writing, I don't consciously think about imparting lessons at all. My goal is to write a story that pulls readers in, holds them, and gives them some moments of satisfaction before letting them go. I want my characters to feel "true", and to struggle with the same kinds of questions that everyone in the world has to answer for themselves. These include questions of identity (Who am I? How do I want to act?). For me, part of the pleasure of reading is the ability to explore my own feelings and outlook by using the book as a sort of lens - would I have made that choice? Have I ever seen the world from this perspective before, and what does it change for me? As a writer, I try to provide that experience for other people by creating compelling characters and situations. If a book is uninteresting, it is unlikely to make a reader think much at all, about anything.

A second question to which Stead responded was: The Six Pillars of Character are *responsibility, respect, caring, citizenship, fairness, and trustworthiness*; which of these do you see as predominant in your work?

I don't know. I know that kindness and fairness are very important to me personally, and that injustice makes me angry. As I've said, I don't think in terms of teaching any particular lesson when I write, but *When You Reach Me* is, in part, inspired by a time in my life when I discovered racism and realized that, in a bigger sense, we all make a lot of assumptions about one another, some of which are just plain wrong. And I think that there is no cure for this - we will *always be* putting people into categories. But we can be *aware* that we are doing

it, and that awareness might help us to question our assumptions, and to realize they may be wrong - to see beyond them. I think this is the closest thing to a "message" in the book. But it was not deliberately planted.

Finally, Stead was asked: Are you in favor of using children's literature to teach character education?

I'm in favor of books that allow readers to explore other perspectives, worlds, and ideas, and to reflect upon their own perspective, world, and ideas.

Character education recommendations. Four of the five readers would recommend this book for use in character education. One reader did add the caveat, "Only with wise guidance from teachers. There is a great deal of experience that might remind one of painful memories. Children today are often carrying family problems." The reader who did not recommend this book seemed to have stylistic objections more than content objections. She commented, "I would not recommend this book. It flows in streams of consciousness - the way the minds of junior - highers work - but the focus shifts too often to make continuity of discussion practical." This reader's views were decidedly in the minority, as all others were enthusiastic in their support of this novel as a source and springboard for discussions of values with young people, particularly because it dealt so intensely with issues surrounding friendships, a subject of great immediacy to children.

Numerical data. The charts below indicate that in this book, like the others in the study set, the values of *caring, respect, and trustworthiness* are paramount.

Table 11.1

When You Reach Me: Character Pillar Ranking - Frequency

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How frequently does this theme appear in the text?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3 = abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Caring	2.6
Responsibility	2.2
Trustworthiness	2.0
Responsibility	1.8
Citizenship	0.6
Fairness	0.2

Table 11.2

When You Reach Me: Character Pillar Ranking - Intensity

What is the strength of intensity with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0 = not present 1 = infrequent 2 = a moderate amount 3 = abundant

Pillar Ranking	Mean
Respect	2.2
Caring	2.0
Responsibility	1.6

Trustworthiness	1.6
Citizenship	0.2
Fairness	0.2

Table 11.3

When You Reach Me: Narrative Response- Pillars Identified as Main Theme

Pillar Ranking	Readers identifying as main theme
Responsibility	4
Caring	3
Respect	3
Trustworthiness	2
Fairness	0
Citizenship	0

Table 11.4

When You Reach Me: Positive Character Depiction Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of positive depictions	Total frequency
Caring	8,17,23,27,28,35,38,81,85,86,90,98,111,114,116,122,133,134,140,141,144,147,148,149,160,162,164,165,170,178,189,192,193	33
Responsibility	2,9,13,15,19,23,25,27,28,40,55,58,105,125,144,189	16
Trustworthiness	3,5,13,55,64,77,98,126,151,164,167,173	12
Respect	16,26,35,52,80,102,121,141,146	9

Citizenship	8,10,13,46,85	5
Fairness	0	0

Table 11.5

When You Reach Me: Negative Character Depictions Frequencies

Pillar	Page #s of negative depictions	Total frequency
Respect	7,9,10,14,21,22,27,33,35,39,45,46,56,62,63,64,73,74,76,77,78,79,92,98,104,115,116,118,121,123,129,145,152,158	34
Trustworthiness	1,3,6,8,19,31,33,49,54,61,67,69,74,87,94,109,112,114,120,124,126,131,140,151,152,176	27
Responsibility	11,19,20,69,96,97,118,123,137	9
Caring	35,57,80,94,112,115,122,141	8
Fairness	0	0
Citizenship	0	0

Table 11.6

When You Reach Me: Opportunities to Explore Positive, Negative, and Overall Value (# of occurrences)

Positive	Negative	Overall
Caring (33)	Respect (34)	Respect (43)
Responsibility (16)	Trustworthiness (27)	Caring (41)
Trustworthiness (12)	Responsibility (9)	Trustworthiness (39)
Respect (9)	Caring (8)	Responsibility (25)

Citizenship (5)	Fairness (0)	Citizenship (5)
Fairness (0)	Citizenship (0)	Fairness (0)
Total positive (75)	Total negative (78)	Total overall (153)

Chapter Five: Discussions and Conclusions

Chapter Five will begin with a review of the research problem and guiding questions. This study was a qualitative content analysis of the 21st century Newbery Award winners and, as such, the design continued to emerge as the study unfolded (Ary, et al, 2006). The study team consisted of a team of five educational professionals who read and coded 11 children's novels for examples of the Six Pillars of Character as defined by the Character Counts! Curriculum. The coders were looking specifically for characters and situations in the stories that would afford students opportunities to explore the following values: *caring, citizenship, respect, responsibility, fairness and trustworthiness*. The general research problem was: Are 21st century Newbery novels valuable sources for use in character education?

Data were gathered in both quantitative and qualitative formats, with an emphasis on the latter. An unexpected dimension of the study that emerged was the opportunity this researcher had to personally meet and interview two of the Newbery authors whose works were studied. In addition, the researcher was able to acquire detailed personal email interviews with four others. Thus, the input of many of the Newbery authors themselves, which was then supplemented with research in other in- print interviews, further informed the findings. Findings which are here reported in narrative form are taken from Part 2 of the Codebook (see Appendix A), which provided opportunity for the expert readers who participated to write rich narrative descriptions of their impressions and analyses.

Guiding Research Questions

The following specific questions guided the inquiry:

Guiding question #1: Do the 21st century Newbery Award novels provide opportunities for students to explore the universal values set forth as the Six Pillars of Character in the Character Counts! Curriculum (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009)?

Guiding question # 2: What are the frequencies of negative vs. positive character traits being modeled in the characters in these novels?

Guiding question #3: How would each of these 11 novels be ranked in terms of most opportunities to explore each of the Six Pillars of Character?

Guiding question # 4: Which of these 11 Newbery Medal books would be best suited for use in a school program of character education?

Summary and Discussion

It was a distinct privilege to serve as the leader of a team of seasoned professional educators who volunteered to spend untold hours reading and coding 11 books in 12 weeks due simply to their passion for children and literature. As was detailed in Chapter Three, means of data collection were two- fold, both numeric and non- numeric. Onwuegbuzie and Daniel (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers enhance and support their findings by obtaining frequency counts in addition to their narrative description. As another form of presenting findings, “quasi- statistics,” a term coined by Barton and Lazarsfeld (1955), enable the researcher to “assess the amount of evidence in your data that bear on a particular conclusion” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 5). In this qualitative study, it was the numbers: the frequency counts, the page numbers, the rankings that informed and supported the research findings, but it was the rich narrative description based on reflection that truly told the story. The organization of this chapter reflects the researcher’s emphasis on rich description. Appropriate topics for a concluding summary include unexpected findings, researcher’s insights, implications for practice, and

recommendations for further study; these will be embedded within the discussion that ensues. Answers to the guiding research questions, because they are more complex than simple, will be found within these sections as well.

At the conclusion of the 12 weeks of study, participants were debriefed in a series of written answers to questions focusing on what they had learned and what they would do to improve the process. The questions used were those posed by Bryant (2008) to her team members in the study after which this one was patterned. In the narrative portion of their codebooks, the reader/coders had analyzed such literary elements as themes, turning points, and central conflicts in the books in light of character trait exemplification. They had also been asked to evaluate whether or not each book would be valuable for use in a character education program emphasizing the Six Pillars of Character traits of *caring*, *citizenship*, *trustworthiness*, *respect*, *responsibility*, and *fairness*.

In drawing conclusions, this researcher reviewed the participants' codebook reflective narratives. Taken in sum, these contributed to the answer to the researcher's first guiding question: How do the 21st century Newbery Award novels provide opportunities for students to explore the universal values set forth as the Six Pillars of Character? Their answers to the following summary questions speak to their understandings of the study set as a whole and further amplify the findings of this study. Responses of the researcher to the study teams' answers are found at the end of each section.

Readers' Responses to Summary Questions

21st Century Newbery Books. Q: What did you learn about the books we studied?

Reader # 1: "Most Newbery books have enough emotional and moral depth to use

as springboards for character discussion. Whether the traits are positive or negative, there are many avenues for exploration. Good literature has no age limits; a high caliber children's book has as much to offer as any that are aimed at adults. The length of a book has no correlation to the depth of emotion it can evoke or how deeply the reader can connect with the characters and their difficulties."

Reader #2: "I learned that good wholesome literature for young readers is alive and well in the 21st century. Not all the books we read would I describe as wholesome, but certainly more than half of them I would."

Reader# 3:"Whether the author would be aware of character traits or not, they are present and hold a powerful impact for the reader. They are tools for study in a classroom situation."

Reader #4:"That I love to read children's books. Each one was a joy. They are about children who have to face challenges in their lives and learn to survive them."

Researcher's comments and analysis. Based on the articles this researcher had read prior to beginning the study, expectations were that the depiction of positive character qualities and moral values in Newbery fiction had diminished. Critics were claiming that the Newbery had lost its way, that its themes had become too dark (Barbieri, 2000; Silvey, 2008). This researcher had approached the study expecting to find this set of books lacking in the qualities that had caused the Newbery Award winners written in the previous century to be rich sources for moral education (Edgington, Brabham & Frost, 1999; Knafle, Wescott & Pascarella, 1988; Leal, Glascock, Mitchell & Wasserman, 2000; Lowry & Chambers, 1968). Instead, this researcher was pleased to note that each of the 11 volumes was replete with virtuous role models and uplifting themes. Table 12.1 reveals that even in the book ranked last as far as opportunities to

explore values, *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* readers found 96 examples of the Six Pillars of Character that would afford teachers opportunities to explore these values with students. *Kira-Kira*, the highest ranking volume, afforded 278 opportunities to explore values, which means, practically speaking, that they are contained on nearly every page of the book. Table 12.1 also answers guiding question #3: “How would each of these novels be ranked in terms of most opportunities to explore the Six Pillars of Character?”

After the study team finished reading and coding all 11 novels in the study set, the books were ranked in order to reveal which of the novels provided the most numerous opportunities to explore values. This information is contained in Table 12.1. Table 12.2 displays the ranking of novels for positive examples, and Table 12.3 indicates the ranking of novels for negative examples. Table 12.4 notes which pillars were deemed main theme in which books. *Caring* and *responsibility* were foremost; *citizenship* and *fairness* were not seen to be main themes in any of the 11 novels. This designation was made holistically based on both the coding and the rich narrative. It is also noteworthy that whereas *caring* was seen as the main theme in five books and *responsibility* was seen as the main theme in four books, the actual tallies of instances recorded in the codebooks show that *caring* was ranked as highest in 10 of the books. Only in *When You Reach Me* was *trustworthiness* (43 instances) higher than *caring* (41 instances), but they were quite close.

Table 12.1

Rank	Novel	# of opportunities to explore The Six Pillars of Character
1	<i>Kira-Kira</i>	278

2	<i>The Tale of Despereaux</i>	230
3	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	206
4	<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i>	166
5	<i>When You Reach Me</i>	153
6	<i>A Year Down Yonder</i>	142
7	<i>A Single Shard</i>	137
8	<i>The Graveyard Book</i>	126
9	<i>Criss Cross</i>	122
10	<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i>	105
11	<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies</i>	96

Supplementing this information, Table 12.2 also supplies information on which books would work best with which specific pillar.

Table 12.2

Six Pillars and Newbery Award Books - Main Themes

Pillar: Caring	Pillar: Respect	Pillar: Responsibility
<i>The Tale of Despereaux.</i>	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	<i>A Year Down Yonder</i>
<i>Kira- Kira</i>		<i>A Single Shard</i>
<i>Criss Cross</i>		<i>The Graveyard Book</i>
<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i>		<i>When You Reach Me</i>
<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies.</i>		
Pillar: Trustworthiness	Pillar: Citizenship	Pillar: Fairness
	n/a	n/a
<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i>		

Guiding question #2 was, “What are the frequencies of negative vs. positive character traits being modeled in the novels.” As was explained in the rationale for this particular question: “Opportunities to explore values exist whether or not main characters behave heroically, but it would be useful to know if children are being exposed to examples that should be emulated or avoided.” Tables 12.2 and 12.3 display the ranking and frequency of negative and positive examples of the Six Pillars.

Table 12.3

Opportunities to Explore six Pillars of Character- Positive Depictions

Rank	Newbery Award Book	Positive depictions of Six Pillars of Character
1	<i>Kira-Kira</i>	198
2	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	138
3	<i>The Tale of Despereaux</i>	114
4	<i>A Single Shard</i>	106
5	<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i>	102
6	<i>A Year Down Yonder</i>	91
7	<i>The Graveyard Book</i>	86
8	<i>Criss Cross</i>	81
9	<i>When You Reach Me</i>	75
10	<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i>	73
11	<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!</i>	62

Table 12.4

Opportunities to Explore Six Pillars of Character- Negative Depictions

Rank	Newbery Award Book	Negative Depictions of Six Pillars of Character
1	<i>The Tale of Despereaux</i>	116
2	<i>When You Reach Me</i>	102
3	<i>Kira-Kira</i>	80
4	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i>	68
5	<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i>	64
6	<i>A Year Down Yonder</i>	51
7	<i>Criss Cross</i>	42
8	<i>The Graveyard Book</i>	40
9	<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!</i>	34
10	<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i>	32
11	<i>A Single Shard</i>	31

An important and encouraging finding was that in these books good and evil are not confused. The protagonist in each of the novels was a character who was largely virtuous, although not artificially perfect. Edgington, Brabham, and Frost (1999) found this to be the case in their study of historical fiction for children, “Main characters tend to have enough faults or flaws to make them real and interesting to the reader, but not so many that the reader cannot or will not identify with them (p. 40). In the 21st century Newbery winners, negative examples were clearly just that. These books did not feature rebellious anti- heroes. For example, *The Tale of Despereaux* ranked highest in number of negative depictions of the character pillars, yet none of the characters displaying these

traits could be confused as role models. Each of the negative depictions was clearly intended to be viewed as reprehensible, as an element of the darkness the heroic mouse fought in order to bring salvation, redemption, and forgiveness.

Also applicable to guiding question #1, the study team as a whole never failed to find the book of the week to be stimulating, uplifting, and thought provoking. These books clearly provided, to a great extent, opportunities to explore universal values. The authors of these novels, as was documented in Chapter Four, consistently expressed the message that they did not want to preach or treat their subject in a heavy-handed didactic manner. English teachers who have been skillfully using their course materials to promote good character for years have recognized that “no one wants to be told what to do, but when we see characters living and acting and the consequences of those actions, all kinds of topics spring up”(Albritton, Turnball, Yeazell, & Dolan, 1985, p. 16). Edgington, Brabham and Frost (1999) found that the prize-winning historical fiction that they studied, the “narration does not admonish characters for poor behavior or choices. Rather, the characters themselves seemingly come to that realization” (p. 40).

Carr and Davis (2007) examined the moral purposes of art and argued against moralising. They saw that great works of Shakespeare like *MacBeth* did not serve to inform audiences that murder was wrong; this was a given. Instead this play aroused emotion that caused the hearers to feel abhorrence, to be morally outraged, to not just acknowledge truth, but to take it to heart. They asserted:

At all events, if moral development is not just a matter of the grasp of moral truths, rules or imperatives, but of coming to perceive or feel in a morally appropriate way, then it may seem better assisted by the contemplation of art-words that also so perceive and feel than those that do not (Carr & Davis, 2007,

pp. 106-107).

These findings were echoed in this research on 21st century Newbery books. The authors' expressed desire was to present the truth artfully, in a way that would challenge, inspire and bring hope. This is precisely what the study team discovered. These books did not simply list The Ten Commandments or reiterate the Sermon on the Mount. They illustrated it. They made readers take to heart the importance of forgiveness or loyalty by causing young readers to care very much what happened to the characters.

As a concrete example of an unanticipated finding, this researcher had initially expected to find *The Graveyard Book* highly objectionable based on impressions gleaned in advance. In fact, the graveyard was just a setting, and when the plot was stripped down to its elements of character, conflict, and climax, it was truly a heart-warming coming- of- age tale that promoted caring community, sacrificial love, and the power of influence of older mentors. The group found that examples of the pillars of *caring*, *responsibility*, and *trustworthiness* were present in abundance.

The Six Pillars of Character. Q: What did you learn about the Six Pillars of Character and character education?

Reader #1: "I learned that many people perceive a great deal of overlap between character traits, and that any two individuals can disagree upon details. What one reader interprets as trustworthiness, another sees as responsibility. One sees caring while the other sees respect... Motivation for many positive (or negative) traits boils down to respect. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Reader #2: "I discovered that most writers we read still consider appropriate behavior between and among teens requires attention to development of character."

Reader #3: "Children have the right to choose to believe in their success even in

their own lives.”

Reader #4: “The pillars are more interested in external behavior. They ignore character traits based upon motivation, like courage. Also, many of the pillars are ambiguous - - I had trouble distinguishing between responsibility and caring sometimes.”

Researcher’s comments and analysis. This researcher, as the moderator of the discussions, experienced some difficulty in having the group come to consensus as far as how to count certain examples. As reader #1 stated above, there was a great deal of overlap between character traits. The categories were not mutually exclusive. Also the categories were extremely broad, for example, *caring* encompasses the virtues of compassion, kindness, gratitude, forgiveness, and helping those in need. While this made it inconvenient to attempt to reduce the findings to numeric data, it would not necessarily make it difficult to use these books for character education in conjunction with the Six Pillars.

Reader #4 made the point that the Six Pillars focus on external behavior. One source of frustration was that virtues such as bravery, humility, or devotion were notably absent from the Pillars, but very present in the literature. These are character traits that display a person’s inner attitude and motivation. This suggests that the Six Pillars, which address the way in which people best function in groups, are, at least in part, designed to insure the smooth functioning of life in schools. It is notable that *citizenship* was rarely found as a theme in the literature studied. The pillar of *citizenship* is defined by such behaviors as obeying rules, recycling, voting, and cooperating. The pillar of fairness is defined in terms of playing by the rules and taking turns. Most often great literature does not address such prosaic themes.

On the other hand, the pillar of *caring* was found to be of major import in every novel. Table 12.2 (above) shows the degree to which *caring* and *responsibility* were identified unanimously by the readers as main themes. *Caring* was the main theme in five of the books, while *responsibility* was the main theme in four of the books. *Respect* and *trustworthiness* were considered main themes in one book each, but *citizenship* and *fairness* were never identified as main themes.

In addressing guiding question # 4, “Which of these Newbery Medal books would be best suited for use in a school program of character education?”, Table 12.5 illustrates the findings of the group with regard to the number of opportunities to explore each of the Six Pillars. It is notable that *caring* is the top value depicted in 10 of the 11 books. Books containing role models for children of individuals who are compassionate, kind, grateful, helpful, and forgiving are clearly a useful resource for character education.

Table 12.5

Newbery Award Books- Most Frequent Opportunities to Explore Top Three Values in Order

Book Title	#1	#2	#3
<i>Bud, Not Buddy (2000)</i>	Caring	Respect	Trustworthiness
<i>A Year Down Yonder (2001)</i>	Caring	Respect	Responsibility
<i>A Single Shard (2002)</i>	Caring	Respect	Trustworthiness
<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead (2003)</i>	Caring	Trustworthiness	Respect
<i>The Tale of Despereaux (2004)</i>	Caring	Respect	Trustworthiness
<i>Kira- Kira (2005)</i>	Caring	Respect	Responsibility
<i>Criss Cross (2006)</i>	Caring	Respect	Responsibility
<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i>	Caring	Responsibility	Trustworthiness

(2007)			
<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!</i>	Caring	Responsibility	Trustworthiness
(2008)			
<i>The Graveyard Book</i> (2009)	Caring	Responsibility	Trustworthiness
<i>When You Reach Me</i> (2010)	Respect	Caring	Trustworthiness

Taken as a whole, these data suggest that the succinct answer to guiding question # 4, which of these novels is best suited for character education, is: all of them! But for individual teachers working on specific pillars of character, the question of which books are best suited to their particular classroom needs can most profitably be answered by both viewing the individual data tables and reading the narrative descriptions for each of the books in Chapter Four. For each book, information on the plot and character themes can help teachers identify whether a certain book would work well with the particular character pillar on which they are focusing. Authors' comments on the subject of character and values can guide classroom discussion and also indicate author's whose additional work could be recommended. The final component in the analysis of each Newbery book is a specific recommendation about using that work for character education.

Newbery Books and Character Education. Q: Overall, what is your sense of the Newbery Books as effective tools for use in character education, specifically the Six Pillars?

Reader #1: "It is natural that people disagree as to the quality of any given Newbery selection, but in general, I believe we can safely suppose that these books have something to say for themselves. I have not read even one that has not touched me in some respect. They represent a broad spectrum of the human experience, and, as such,

give us many and varied examples of good and bad character. I believe juvenile fiction is a wonderful source for character education.”

Reader #2: “I would say the Newbery books are an excellent place for a parent/teacher/grandparent to start their search for a worthwhile book that would not embarrass the adult's belief that character is important.”

Reader #3: “They have always been extraordinary books for children and this study has only reinforced that belief.”

Reader #4: “They are well written books, whose main characters can serve as exemplars for character traits, whether the Six Pillars or other scales, in the course of their stories. All good stories exhibit character traits, whether positive or negative examples. Children have an innate sense of fair play. They will make judgments about the events of a story. Using the pillars provides some framework for this evaluation.”

Researcher’s comments and analysis. The answer to the overarching research question: “Are 21st century Newbery novels valuable sources for use in character education?” was clearly found by this researcher and study team to have been “yes”. Bryant’s (2008) research indicated that Newbery Award winning books from 1997- 2007 did in fact reveal example elements of character education. The way in which this study expanded upon that research was two- fold. Although a similar set of books was used, Bryant selected her books as an extension to a study done by Leal (1996), an analysis of values found in Newbery books from 1922- 1996. In the present research, the study set was limited to books published in the 21st century. Literature is often identified by century, as in 16th century British literature. Another important narrowing of focus, the intent of which was to make the study of practical use to classroom teachers, was to use coding categories taken from the Six Pillars of Character, a popular character education

curriculum. Bryant's categories were broader, consisting of 9 coding categories of her own choosing based on the acronym C.H.A.R.A.C.T.E.R. Overlap occurred for the character traits of *respect, citizenship, trustworthiness, caring, and responsibility*.

Implications for Practice: Benefits of the Study

Q: How will what you learned by participating in this study benefit you as a librarian/teacher/grandmother/writer/professor?

Reader #1: "As a writer, I see that the best literature does more than entertain; it illuminates the mind and touches the heart. To quote George Fredrick Handel, 'I should be sorry if I only entertained them. I wished to make them better.' "

Reader# 2: "It broadens my awareness of the quality of literature that is out there."

Reader #3: "These experiences have broadened my perception of the written word, and as is the case with all "moments of truth," they have become a philosophical part of my actions and reactions in the real world."

Reader #4: "I will be able to talk to students/library patrons about the books I have read and suggest titles they might read to complete assignments for their children lit classes."

Researcher's analysis and comments. An important element of any meaningful endeavor is reflection on the process. The study was quite significant to the researcher, who is a teacher of teachers. A new ability to coach teacher candidates in methods for character education has been developed. Valuable experience was also gained in leading a collaborative research team. An appreciation for the beauty and meaning of children's literature was magnified by close reading and group discussion, and then further enhanced by in-depth conversations with many of the prominent authors of these books.

Working with such a collegial group of readers was enlightening and inspiring. Their comments about the meaning of the study in their own lives is gratifying.

Reflections on the Process

Q: If you could change something about the way we did this study, what would it be and why?

Reader #1: We learned as we went forward. When we disciplined ourselves to a more orderly frequency count, we had more time for the enjoyable and fruitful discussion of the narrative questions. Discipline is key.

Reader #2: Define the designation of a significant passage more succinctly. Train coders to focus on the broad picture, not the minutiae of the single page.

Reader #3: As a book club member for many years, I only wish groups could be this organized and make good use of collaboration.

Reader #4: I think the way that we finished the last two books worked the best. I thoroughly enjoyed the exercise. Reading with a purpose caused me to think more intentionally about the story, about the characters and their actions and motivations. I was able to ask what are they doing and why? Does the book have an event that clearly shows the main character both exhibiting a character trait but also, changing their behavior/attitudes toward something in their lives - - normally for the better. Finding that gave me great satisfaction.

Researcher Analysis and Comments: Limitations of Study

This question raises the issue of limitations of the study. Using the Character Counts! Six Pillars meant that many important universal values were not counted. The duration and breadth of the study was dictated by a number of factors, one being time limitations. In order to complete the study in a timely manner that would not require the

participants to commit more than 3 months, training was necessarily brief. Over the course of weeks, modifications were made that enabled the group to come to consensus more quickly. There clearly was a learning curve. Analysis of literature will always be subjective, however, and the use of qualitative research design embraces that fact. The study was also limited to the 11 books that comprise the 21st century Newbery Award books as of the date of this writing.

Recommendations for Further Study

Q: What would be your recommendations for further study?

Reader #1: "I felt that The Six Pillars of Character in Character Counts! were more than a little limiting. Certain elements of true character were not even mentioned such as integrity, courage, piety, bearing up under hardship, and self- sacrifice. These elements could easily be added to the others, reinforcing and improving the usefulness of juvenile literature in education."

Reader #2: "Develop some careful lesson plans for teachers, as suggestions/guidelines. Offer seminars in this subject."

Reader #3: "The Caldecott Winners could be analyzed in a similar way. A positive approach is always the most rewarding."

Reader #4: "I would be interested to see a comparison between the Newberys from the 1990's as compared to the 2000's as far as character traits. Which would score higher?"

Researcher's analysis and comments. Perspectives of the participants were included here because of their qualifications as professional educators and therefore, beneficiaries of this type of educational research. This researcher would agree with Reader #1. A study that included a broader palette of virtues, particularly those reflecting

inner fortitude would be useful. There are a myriad of other character education initiatives, each of which promote a slightly different set of virtues, and these could be employed for further study. A retrospective analysis of the Newbery books from the 20th century using the Six Pillars could extend the scope of this research as well.

Reflections on the Research Results

Teaching is often the act of simply pointing out that which an attentive observer would willingly see if only they knew where to look. Many parents and teachers are eager to discover effective ways to build moral character in children and may have overlooked Newbery books as just such a resource. Children are drawn to these well-crafted works of literature in part because they do not feel they are reading thinly-disguised sermons, but rather compelling stories about characters encountering the same kinds of struggles, joys and sorrows that they experience. This research has attempted to focus attention on examples of virtue and opportunities to explore moral values in this set of widely read children's books for the purpose of aiding parents and teachers in their attempt to foster character education.

Some critics have complained that the most recent Newbery books are becoming too dark and are focused too heavily on difficult social issues (Barbieri, 2000; Silvey, 2008; Strauss, 2008). It is true that these books feature a disproportionate number of abandoned or orphaned children, but the encouraging truth is that the balance is struck when these children encounter caring adults who are willing to help them on their journey toward maturity (Sutherland, 1997). When asked why children's books seem to be populated with so many urchins and waifs, Newbery Award winner Avi remarked that in a coming-of-age story the writer has to find a way to get the children away from their parents so they have an opportunity to develop independence and learn lessons on their

own (Avi, April 14, 2010, personal interview). Rather than Newbery books contributing to moral decline by normalising family dissolution, they are simply still moving in the same direction as a long line of classic children's literature that has always included such notable orphans as *Anne of Green Gables*, *Heidi*, and *Tom Sawyer*.

In conducting a content analysis of 21st century Newbery medal books, this team of readers discovered that each of these acclaimed novels contained a myriad of opportunities to explore character values. This, however, is not sufficient to ensure that students who read them on their own will find these lessons and make the important life applications. For character education through the use of literature to work most effectively, what is required is attentiveness on the part of the adult who is guiding the child and the deliberate seeking out of avenues of exploration of values. This study demonstrated the abundance of the six positive character traits examples contained in these children's books, and, as such, it appeared to the study team that this set of texts provided substantial opportunities to teach children virtue by good example.

The most frequently exemplified character pillar, *caring*, was defined in the Six Pillars as the quality of being compassionate, grateful, forgiving and helpful. The study team concluded that this set of virtues was exemplified strongly by the main characters in each one of these novels. Trustworthiness, another of the character pillars, was defined as the quality of being honest, reliable, loyal, and having the courage to do the right thing. The demonstration of this attribute was a frequent theme in each of the books. Respect and responsibility were also clearly valued in the novels. Fairness and citizenship were less frequently exemplified; they were not denigrated, rather they were simply not employed as themes as often as the other four character pillars.

A survey by The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) reported a steep drop in

literary reading among all age groups, but the most severe decline, a stunning 28%, was found among young people (Gifford, 2004, para 1). In combating this growing trend toward illiteracy, parents and teachers have often found that Newbery books can be very motivating for reluctant readers. Because children will read and enjoy these books, Newbery books can prove to be a valuable asset to character educators. It is hoped that this research will provide a helpful resource to parents and teachers who desire to discuss and explore character values with children by using these engaging texts.

Character education by concerned teachers and parents is needed now more than ever. Statistics tell the tale of family dissolution in America, including a 33% rate of divorce and a 10 fold increase in the rate of illegitimate births between 1960 and 2000. Nearly 40 % of children today are born to unmarried mothers. (Stein & St. George, 2009, para. 6). Children are growing up with far less adult guidance than ever before. Crime, especially violent crime, is on the rise, and one in 32 of all Americans is either incarcerated, on probation or on parole (Schwartz, 2009). Pornography is an ever-growing menace. One source found that 90% of children between the ages of 8 through 16 have viewed pornography online, where 12% of all websites are sexually explicit ("Statistics on Pornography", 2010). In light of these dismal statistics, what hope is there for the future? It is clear that responsible, loving adults must take on the responsibility of training the next generation in the values that have sustained American democracy for centuries. An important component in this essential task is taking the time to read thoughtfully to and with children. It is a vital part of their education.

Researcher's Personal Summary Statement

Undertaking this study has only served to deepen this researcher's passionate belief in the power of stories to change lives. An incident that took place at the Festival

of Faith and Writing in Grand, Rapids, MI during the course of this research serves as a concrete example of this truth. While preparing to meet with authors Avi and Kate DiCamillo at the Calvin College event, this researcher sat next to another Festival attendee during lunch. The young woman shared that she was a foster parent and had cared for a number of children in addition to her own. Impressed at her selflessness, the researcher asked her how she had become involved in foster parenting. Although entirely unaware of the nature of this research project and her lunch partner's interest in children's literature, she said, "It was because I read *Anne of Green Gables* as a child and realized how much I could change the life of an orphan." Does quality children's fiction have the power to mold character? Indeed, it does. Bumper stickers and pencils embossed with the character trait of the month do not have the power to change lives. Great works of literature that reveal great truths do. In the words of the narrator of *The Tale of Despereaux*, "The world is dark, and light is precious. Come closer, dear reader. You must trust me. I am telling you a story"

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Appendix A

Codebook for Analysis: Cover Sheet

Newbery Novels and the Six Pillars of Character

Reviewers Name:

Date:

Book Title:

Author:

Year of Newbery Award:

Main Characters:

Brief Plot Summary

Main Theme of the Book:

Which of the Six Pillars is/are exemplified in this novel?

THE SIX PILLARS OF CHARACTER DEFINITIONS (Josephson Institute,2009).

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Be honest, don't deceive, cheat or steal, be reliable, do what you say you'll do, have the courage to do the right thing, build a good reputation, be loyal, stand by your family, friends and country.

RESPECT

Treat others with respect, follow the Golden rule, be tolerant of differences, use good manners, not bad language, be considerate of the feelings of others, don't threaten, hit, or hurt anyone, deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements.

RESPONSIBILITY

Do what you are supposed to do, persevere, keep on trying, always do your best, use self-control, be self-disciplined, think before you act, consider the consequences, be accountable for your choices.

FAIRNESS

Play by the rules, take turns and share, be open-minded, listen to others, don't take advantage of others, don't blame others carelessly.

CARING

Be kind, be compassionate, and show you care, express gratitude, forgive others, help people in need.

CITIZENSHIP

Do your share to make your school and community better, cooperate, get involved in community affairs, stay informed, vote, be a good neighbor, obey laws and rules, respect authority, protect the environment.

Coding Instructions

1. Each week you will receive a coding sheet called the Frequency Chart specific to the book we will be reading. The text will have been divided up into episodes delineated by numbered pages, which may or may not correspond to chapters. After you have read an episode, give it a brief name in the numbered box. This is to help you to remember it for the purposes of discussion and also to help you process its meaning.
2. As you are reading, take note of any opportunities a teacher might have to discuss one or more of the Six Pillars of Character based on this specific passage. This is necessarily and appropriately subjective, as you bring your own experience and perspective into the exercise, just as you would in a classroom. However, please keep referring back to the definitions provided by Character Counts! found on pages 2 and 3 of this codebook. This will ensure that we are applying uniform definitions of these character traits. There may be other virtues you see in these passages that are not included in any of the Six Pillars. Do not include them.
3. View these episodes holistically. What is the main theme or character lesson, if any, that could be drawn? Example: In a certain episode the main character is feeling sorrow over the loss of her mother. She stops at a stop sign and notices a robin perched on a branch. The robin, the harbinger of spring and renewal, causes her to experience hope mixed with grief as she remembers a childhood scene involving her mother tenderly caring for a baby bird and teaching her to feed it with an eyedropper.
 Given this scenario, *caring* would be the value that would be best explored. You could technically point out that she was being an obedient citizen by stopping at the stop sign, and count this under the *citizenship* pillar, but this would be focusing on the trees rather than the forest. We need to find the balance. We want to make sure we do not miss subtle, but important points. We also want to avoid getting distracted by minutiae.
- The purpose of this research is to provide guidance for classroom teachers who wish to use literature to teach the Six Pillars of Character. Use your experience as an educator and or parent who finds teachable moments to help you view your analysis through that lens.
4. Record the page number in the corresponding box, working down in column form. If the example you have found is negative, please circle it.
5. As you find particularly vivid examples in your reading, please jot down your thoughts and include important quotations from the text. You will not need to do this for every example. Take some time in formulating your thoughts for the passages that particularly speak to you, as I will be including some of this rich description in my reporting.
6. You will also complete Part 2: Rich Narrative Description page and then, after our discussion, Part 3: Character Trait Ranking Sheet, which asks you to rate both frequency and strength of opportunities to explore values in this book on a rating scale.

PART 1: Frequency Chart

Episode #	Trustworthiness	Responsibility	Respect	Fairness	Caring	Citizenship
--------------	-----------------	----------------	---------	----------	--------	-------------

PART 3: Character Pillar Rating Form

FREQUENCY

To what extent does this novel offer an opportunity for students to discuss this character trait? How **frequently** does this theme appear in the text?

0. not present 1. Infrequent 2. a moderate amount 3. abundant

Trustworthiness	0	1	2	3
-----------------	---	---	---	---

Responsibility	0	1	2	3
----------------	---	---	---	---

Respect	0	1	2	3
---------	---	---	---	---

Fairness	0	1	2	3
----------	---	---	---	---

Caring	0	1	2	3
--------	---	---	---	---

Citizenship	0	1	2	3
-------------	---	---	---	---

INTENSITY

What is the **strength or intensity** with which this theme is treated in the text? To what extent is this a main theme, regardless of the frequency with which it may appear?

0. not present, not a theme. 1. a weak or minor theme 2. a secondary theme 3. a strong or main theme

Trustworthiness	0	1	2	3
-----------------	---	---	---	---

Responsibility	0	1	2	3
----------------	---	---	---	---

Respect	0	1	2	3
---------	---	---	---	---

Fairness	0	1	2	3
----------	---	---	---	---

Caring	0	1	2	3
--------	---	---	---	---

Citizenship	0	1	2	3
-------------	---	---	---	---

Appendix B: Reading Schedule and Book List

Reading Schedule	Newbery Award Novel
Week One: January 19, 2010	Practice Text: <i>Walk Two Moons</i> (1995)
Week Two: January 26, 2010	<i>The Graveyard Book</i> (2009)
Week Three: February 2, 2010	<i>Good Masters! Sweet Ladies</i> (2008)
Week Four: February 9, 2010	<i>The Higher Power of Lucky</i> (2007)
Week Five: February 16, 2010	<i>Criss Cross</i> (2006)
Week Six: February 23, 2010	<i>Kira Kira</i> (2005)
Week Seven: March 2, 2010	<i>The Tale of Despereaux</i> (2004)
Week Eight: March 9, 2010	<i>Crispin: The Cross of Lead</i> (2003)
Week Nine: March 16, 2010	<i>A Single Shard</i> (2002)
Week Ten: March 23, 2010	<i>A Year Down Yonder</i> (2001)
Week Eleven: March 30, 2010	<i>Bud, Not Buddy</i> (2000)
Week Twelve: April 5, 2010	<i>When You Reach Me</i> (2010)

Appendix C: Sample Pages from Completed Codebook

Codebook Bones 1

Codebook for Analysis: Cover Sheet

Newbery Novels and the Six Pillars of Character

Book Title: *The Tale of Despereaux* Date: 5-2-10

Year of Newbery Award: 2004 Author: Kate Di Camillo

Main Characters: Despereaux, Princess Pea, Rosuro, Miggory Sow

Brief Plot Summary: a small mouse with a love of beauty defies mouse convention and seeks out a lovely princess. When she is betrayed by disgruntled rat and foolish maid, the mouse finds his way out of the dungeon and attempts to rescue his princess.

Main Theme of the Book: Be brave to stand up for what is right. Be kind and caring. There is the way we grow into better people. Forgive those who have wronged you and you ~~are~~ both find freedom

Which of the Six Pillars is/are exemplified in this novel?

1. Trustworthiness - the courage to do what is right regardless of personal cost. Despereaux is condemned for refusing to reject his love of Princess Pea. He returns to the hideous dungeon to save her.
2. Responsibility - Des. perseveres. He always does his best and strives for self control.
3. Caring Desp. risks all for love. Princess Pea and Desp. both forgive someone who did them wrong. Mig is foolish, but she is not unkind. She hopes to spare Desp. Also Princess Pea treats Mig with kindness and
4. Respect. Desp. receives no respect from families nor does Miggory

PART 2 : Rich Narrative Description

After you read the novel, please answer the following questions, supplying explanations and rationales when you answer in the affirmative. You may submit your answers on separate paper and include as much detail as you wish.

1. Did the central conflict in this novel involve one or more of these character traits?

Desp. strives to do what is right, to respect and honor and love Princess Pea.

Also Roscuro tries to make amends when he realizes he does not want to torture others, but just to experience light and beauty. pg 263

2. Was there a turning point in this novel where a character came to a new understanding or changed for the better in one of these six areas of character?

*Miggy repents her mistreatment of Princess Pea when P.P. shows her kindness, asks her what she wants. pg 254
Despereaux decides he must be the knight, the rescuer - do what is right, though very difficult pg 515*

3. What kinds of explanations did the characters displaying these traits make for their behaviors?

*Desp. says the knightly suit of honors was empty because it was waiting for him. pg 215
Roscuro realizes he really only wanted some light and beauty for himself.*

4. Were any of these character attributes central to the main theme of this novel?

*Horis says Despereaux is truly free and nips the red thread from Despereaux's neck. "You are free. You see, you're not going into the dungeon because you have to. You're going because you choose to." Our choices reveal our character. Despereaux is brave and caring - his actions prove this. Princess Pea is kind she is kind to small mice and foolish serving girls, even to repentant rats.
* Also there are times in which we act in order to maintain a clear conscience*

PART 2 : Rich Narrative Description

After you read the novel, please answer the following questions, supplying explanations and rationales when you answer in the affirmative. You may submit your answers on separate paper and include as much detail as you wish.

1. Did the central conflict in this novel involve one or more of these character traits?

Desp. strives to do what is right, to respect and honor and love Princess Pea.

Also Roscuro tries to make amends when he realizes he does not want to torture others, but just to experience light and beauty. pg 263

2. Was there a turning point in this novel where a character came to a new understanding or changed for the better in one of these six areas of character?

→ Miggory repents her mistreatment of Princess Pea when P. P. shows her kindness, asks her what she wants. pg 254
Despereaux decides he must be the knight, the rescuer - do what is right, though very difficult pg 515

3. What kinds of explanations did the characters displaying these traits make for their behaviors?

Desp. says the knightly suit of honor was empty because it was waiting for him. pg 215
Roscuro realizes he really only wanted some light and beauty for himself.

4. Were any of these character attributes central to the main theme of this novel?

Horia says Despereaux is truly free and nips the red thread from Despereaux's neck. "You are free. You see, you're not going into the dungeon because you have to. You're going because you choose to." Our choices reveal our character. Despereaux is brave and caring - his actions prove this. Princess Pea is kind she is kind to small mice and foolish serving girls, even to repentant rats.
* Also there are times in which we act in order to maintain a clear conscience

PART ONE: Frequency Chart

Episode #	Trustworthiness	Responsibility	Respect	Fairness	Caring	Citizenship
1. Ch. 1-4		20-21 R 22			① 11-15 ② 16-19 ③ 24 28	
2. Ch 5-8	⑨ 36 ⑤ 44	40-41, 41		⑤ 34-36 39 ⑤ 43-45	30-33, - 30-33 - 37+39 - 39-41 -	
3. Ch. 9-12	⑤ 47-49 ⑤ 51 - 53-56 - ⑤ 57 ⑤ 62-65 ⑤ 65-65	52-55 .	⑤ 51-57 ⑤ 64-65 59		46-49 58, 61 ⑤ 61 ⑤ 65	
4. Ch. 13-15	⑤ 68-71 74 -	74 -	74 -		74 - 76-81 ⑤ 78-79	
5. Ch. 16-19	⑤ 97 ⑤ 99-102		⑤ 86-87 104-105		⑤ 88-91 ⑤ 93 ⑤ 100-101 -	
6. Ch. 20-23		⑤ 109 118 -	111 ⑤ 113		102 ⑤ 116 - 119 - ⑤ 120 -	
7. Ch. 24-27	⑤ 126-127		⑤ 137 -		⑤ 125-127 - ⑤ 128-130 132 ⑤ 138	
8 Ch. 28-31		141 ⑤ 152-153 ⑤ 159 158	⑤ 147 ⑤ 151 ⑤ 154-157 158		147 ⑤ 151	140 141

(75)?