Opening the Door to Moral Education

Edythe M. McGovern

A recent syndicated television program entitled "See Dick and Jane Lie, Cheat, and Steal" pointed out that our children, mirroring and mimicking much questionable adult behavior, are in dire need of moral education. It focused on a variety of programs for all age levels that are designed to meet this need without any reference to traditional religious dogma. With Tom Selleck as host and a lively format, the message came through clearly: something must be done to teach moral principles to our children.

This assertion, of course, is part of the "Affirmations of Humanism" found on the back cover of FREE INQUIRY. It is hardly startling. The issue is how we can implement moral education for the majority of children who are not directly involved in such formal programs.

"Education," of course, implies the alteration of attitudes and behavior, a notion that may make secular humanists somewhat wary. What standards can we agree to adopt? What methods do we want to use? A rereading of the affirmations produces a prompt answer to the first question. However, consideration of the methods of educating our children is a more complex issue. There are many ways to bring about desirable results, but none is more effective than the one that is readily available to all adults who care for children and have access to a library. We can simply read to and with youngsters from infancy on.

In addition to the obvious benefits of developing vocabulary, increasing literacy, and encouraging creative thinking, reading aloud is a viable means of inculcating values without resorting to didactic, prescriptive, or proscriptive instruction. Does it work? Paradoxically, we can test its effectiveness by glancing briefly at books meant for children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: books that *were* didactic, prescriptive, and proscriptive, but that without question shaped the attitudes and behavior of their time.

These early children's books often emphasized traditional religious values by using biblical quotations to illustrate even the simplest themes. Accepted social attitudes, such as the work ethic (even for very young children), were graphically reflected in picture books like *Boston Cries—Little Match Boy* and *Goody Two Shoes.* Absolute obedience was expected, so that children learned correct behavior from books like *Little Suck-A-Thumb,* in which a minor infraction is punished by "the tall man with the scissors" who cuts the child's thumbs off. The mother offers no sympathy—or even a bandage for the bleeding digits—saying only, "I told you what would happen." Youngsters were routinely exposed to racially biased material in such books as *Simple Addition by a Little Nigger,* and even into the mid-twentieth century many children's books were very sexist, showing girls and women as brainless and dependent, and boys and men as pugnacious and insensitive.

The point is that the "method" worked: moral standards and subsequent behavior could be influenced by the books read to small children. By the same token, if we select books that embody positive values in keeping with humanistic principles, we should be able to achieve some of the goals of moral education that we seek for our children.

Fortunately, the many positive aspects of the literature now available for youngsters make the selection process easier. This is not to say that some of the "classics" such as *Peter Rabbit* (and other titles by Beatrix Potter) or *Winnie the Pooh* (the original version, not the bowdlerized Disney edition) are less than wonderful. But it is heartening that we are seeing more and more books that "teach" by allowing children to draw their own conclusions, books in which the characters illustrated are not all middle-class Caucasians, and books that deal forthrightly with such issues as adoption, sibling rivalry, handicaps, divorce, old age, and death.

What advantage is there in selecting books that allow children to draw their own conclusions? For one thing, if various viewpoints are presented, children learn to cultivate a healthy skepticism regarding ideas that are often accepted a priori by people with whom they come into contact. For example, if children are exposed to the idea that there are many diverse myths to explain "creation," as Virginia Hamilton points out in *In the Beginning,* they should be able to put Christianity's Genesis tale in proper perspective. Hamilton's book, however, is for children twelve years of age or older, who will probably read it themselves. Does the same process hold true for simpler books read to very young children? The answer is yes if we select books like Natalia Beltin's *Tales of Beginnings* or Kay Sanger's *When Animals Were People,* among many others. Children should then become aware that groups of people the world over have invented stories to explain their origins, their relationships, and the natural phenomena of their world. No single explanation, then, can be considered the "right" one.

Edythe M. McGovern is professor of English at Los Angeles Valley College, who specializes in children's literature. She is the author of They're Never Too Young for Books *and other works. She has agreed to answer any questions that our readers may have regarding this topic. You may write her c/o Secular Humanists of Los Angeles (SHOLA), Suite 307, 249 North Brand Boulevard, Glendale, California 91203.*

The principle of allowing children to formulate their own answers has many other applications. For instance, certain stories, like the folk tale *Stone Soup,* retold and brightly illustrated by Marcia Brown, tells of three hungry soldiers who are refused food and lodging by some selfish villagers. They ask for the use of a very large iron kettle in which to make soup from stones. At first, the curious villagers add condiments, and then gradually bring out their hoarded stores to "improve the soup." Ultimately, all the people eat, drink, and dance together; the soldiers are given lodgings, and in the morning the peasants happily send them off with thanks, saying, "We shall never go hungry, now that we know how to make soup from stones." The benefits of cooperative sharing should be obvious even to a child of four or five.

There are now many books in which the question of race is simply ignored: situations and stories are applicable to all people—the characters are simply drawn as nonwhite. Similarly, the setting no longer is always the traditional "little white house with a picket fence"; nor are mothers found only in the kitchen, dads always returning from work wearing a suit and tie and carrying a briefcase. And, particularly during the past quarter of a century, many picture books realistically face very serious problems. Again, we must remember that the best fiction (for children and adults) only "indicates" and suggests solutions; if the literature is wisely selected, children should be able to make the "moral" choice on their own.

There are literally thousands of fine books for children at every age level, and parents would do well to take their children to the library regularly. Today's libraries welcome youngsters and encourage even toddlers to become familiar with the world of books by putting on puppet shows, read-aloud sessions, and story-telling hours on a regular basis. Librarians are usually eager to assist; however, parents will want to formulate some criteria for selection so that they can make their own evaluations. To test for high quality *fictional* books (as opposed to those that are classified as informational, such as ABC or counting books), adults might wish to make judgments based on answers to the following questions.

1. Does the book have an interesting story line? Although children enjoy having favorite stories read and reread to them, this does not mean that they will enjoy those with just a "moral" and little or no plot.

2. Is the plot the correct level of complexity for the age (or maturity) of the child to whom the story is being read? Basically, the younger the listener, the simpler and more direct the plot should be. Sometimes well-meaning adults choose simplified versions of "classics" that are better left for older children to appreciate on their own. For instance, the original versions of *Peter Pan* and *Pinocchio* are not meant for children under ten or twelve, and reading simplistic editions to very young children only gives them false impressions about their themes.

3. Does the story have a clear line of development—a beginning, middle, climax, and ending? Generally, children under ten are only confused by such literary devices as flashbacks or multiple narrators.

4. Is the theme or main idea made clear within the context of the story, not by didactic insistence?

5. Are the characters (or at least the main characters) well-developed and unique? In books for young children, these may include animals (living or stuffed), toys and other inanimate objects, and human beings. Think of how many books have a bear as a protagonist, and the ways in which they have been differentiated and given distinct personalities—Winnie the Pooh and Paddington Bear are just two examples.

6. Is the setting (time and place) adequately described, both verbally and pictorially? Sometimes "once upon a time" and "in a land far away" are enough, but if these literary elements are important in the story, they must be properly shown.

7. Is the style appropriate to this particular story, both verbally and pictorially? The language level and syntax are significant here; it is never a good idea to "water down" vocabulary even if it is necessary for the adult to explain certain words or expressions. Where but in *Peter Rabbit* is a small child going to be exposed to prose like this: "Peter gave himself up for lost, and shed big tears; but his sobs were overheard by some friendly sparrows who flew to him in great excitement, and implored him to exert himself." Of course, good illustrations help to make meanings clear.

8. Are the illustrations complementary to the text? They should be on the same page, especially for very young children, and they must be both aesthetically pleasing and appropriate to the story. Children like brightly colored pictures; however, certain texts are more effective in black and white or sepia tones. The key word here is "complementary."

9. Are the illustrations aesthetically pleasing in themselves? There are many fine artists, such as Brian Wildsmith, Nancy Ekholm Burkert, Leo Lionni, Taro Yashima, and a host of others whose work is outstanding. The books that use "formula" art and usually omit the illustrator's name on the title page should be avoided. One need only compare Trina Schart Hyman's *Sleeping Beauty* with Felix Hoffmann's to see how individual artists can communicate their unique visions to the same story. A comparison of either to formula illustrations of the same story points up the value of fine artwork.

10. Does the book avoid all forms of stereotyping? Many racist children's books have been eliminated from open-shelf collections in most public libraries. However, the caveat here is that sometimes the specter of censorship is raised. Every once in a while an attempt will be made to call *Huckleberry Finn,* for instance, unfit reading for young people. (This particular claim is usually made by a group unable to grasp Twain's vitriolic social critique.)

What must concern us in regard to young children's books, however, are more subtle forms of stereotyping regarding social class and traditional sex roles. These issues affect all children and have a direct connection to their moral education.

A brief glance at many traditional fairy tales will show how the socialization process operates in that genre. Not only are the girls expected to wait meekly for their Prince Charmings, but all males are expected to behave as potential heroes unless, of course, they are poor woodcutters who discard their children when they can no longer feed them. Does this mean that we should not read these stories to children? Of course not; we should, however, select books

that offer other points of view and read them as well. For example, *Tatterhood* (Ethel Johnston Phelps, editor, and Pamela Baldwin Ford, illustrator) is a collection of folk tales from all over the world, many specifically chosen to counteract some of the more odious stereotypes applied to both sexes.

Here is a brief checklist that can help you to avoid sexist or racist stereotypes.

- Look carefully at books with "people in fur," that is, anthropomorphic characters; for young children, they equal people.
- Examine illustrations carefully. Check for subtle stereotypes. Do the characters behave in racially or ethnically stereotyped ways, for example, "brave" Native Americans, "hot-tempered" Irish? Is their language or occupation stereotyped: Japanese gardener, Mexican field worker, black cleaning lady?
- Beware of "tokenism," like when the only girl in the story makes an all-male baseball team, or when the only non-Caucasian becomes the "hero."
- Notice who is doing what. Are the females always passive, wearing aprons, doing domestic chores? Are the male characters always shown as macho, active, "saving the day"? Choose books that enhance a child's self-image. Does a male enjoy ballet? Cooking? Writing poetry? Does a male feel it's permissible to show emotions, such as fear and sadness? Is it all right for a boy to cry? To want a baby doll? Does a female like to participate in active sports? Work with tools? Plan for a career formerly considered taboo for females?
- Consider the story line. If there is a problem, who solves it? Is there a reward just for being beautiful or handsome? Is there cooperation within a group or family without regard to age or sex? Are individuality and originality valued?
- Is the life-style presented honestly? For example, not all children of divorced parents live with the mother. Do the adults show affection for the children and for one another?
- Pay attention to language. Do certain characters speak as though they are stupid or illiterate?

Reread the "Affirmations of Humanism." It can help to make you aware of the values found in books that reinforce the moral education of children from a secular humanist viewpoint.

Use the following list as a beginning; it contains some outstanding titles that young children enjoy, and that are directly connected to education—which brings us to another point. Certain authors seem particularly adept at creating works that meet all of the above criteria, and do it beautifully. When you discover such a writer, do not hesitate to seek additional titles by that author. He or she may very well be a secular humanist.

This list is by no means complete; it is simply a sampling of the excellent books available. It includes books whose characters represent a variety of ethnic and economic groups, and reflect secular humanist principles. Some beloved "classics" have been omitted in favor of books that may be "discoveries" for FREE INQUIRY readers.

Beginnings

Creation: Life Story, Virginia Lee Burton. Although not a "story," this brilliantly executed book with thirty-five full-color paintings shows the changing face of earth from the first cataclysmic upheavals through the various ages of tiny sea creatures, flowering plants, dinosaurs, mammals, and finally the works of man. A unique introduction to the principles of evolution.

Folk Tales from China, Sian-tek Lim. Very brief stories tell the origins of gods and give various "explanations" for natural phenomena, according to various cultural influences on China.

Wind Rose, Crescent Dragonwagon. A tasteful account of a little girl's creation and birth, as told to her by her mother. Ronald Himler's soft line-drawings speak eloquently of the love in this family.

In the Rabbit Garden, Leo Lionni. This book caused some negative comment from the traditional religious community because it echoes the story of the Garden of Eden, but here the snake is helpful, and the old rabbit who warns the young rabbits not to eat the apples is proved wrong.

People, Peter Spier. Again, not really a "story" book, but a wonderfully illustrated account of the diversity of people. Spier considers race, ethnicity, geography, history, and all other areas where differences exist, stressing the basic theme that as members of the human race it is important to live in harmony in "one world."

Endings

When Violet Died, Mildred Kantrowitz. Amy and Eva have a funeral for their pet bird, Violet, and bury her in the garden. After their friends have gone home, they look at the empty cage sadly. Then Eva suggests a way to refute Amy's statement that "nothing lasts forever." Their cat, Blanche, is going to have kittens; they decide they will call one Blanche. One day, she too will have kittens, and they will call one Blanche, and so on, thus continuing life for "a long, long time."

The Accident, Carol Carrick. A poignant look at the death of a dog and its effect on the boy who loved him. First, Christopher is angry at the blameless truck driver, then at himself. He rejects his parents' attempts at sympathy until he and his dad find the perfect stone for Bodger's grave, and the boy gives vent to his grief.

The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, Judith Viorst. Told by a small boy whose cat has died. There is a specific rejection of his friend's insistence that the cat is in "heaven," and a realization that the now-buried Barney is "helping flowers to grow, which is a pretty good job for a cat."

My Grandson Lew, Charlotte Zolotow. A boy of six, waking in the night, surprises his mother by speaking of his grandfather, who had died when Lew was only two. The child remembers a great deal about the man and their warm relationship, and he shares memories with his mother lovingly.

The Two of Them, Aliki. A tender tale of a little girl whose friendship with her grandfather begins at her birth and continues until she is a teenager, when their roles reverse, and she takes care of him until he dies. Then she "hurts inside and out," but she continues to tend his apple tree, picking the fruit as he would have wanted her to do.

Annie and the Old One, Miska Miles. In this Navajo family Annie and her grandmother have a very special relationship, so Annie tries very hard to avoid the fact that her grandmother is getting old and will die. The girl is told that when the rug now on the loom is complete, her worst fear will be realized, and she tries everything to keep the rug from being finished. However, when her grandmother explains that she can't hold back time, that all things are of the earth and must return to the earth, the child takes up her grandmother's weaving stick and weaves.

Goodbye Rune, Marit Kaldhol. Translated from the Norwegian, this exquisitely illustrated story tells of two children, Sara and Rune, who have always been best friends. Sara finds Rune drowned in the lake, and her grief is intense. She doesn't like to think of her friend lying alone under the winter snow, but when spring comes, she visits his grave with her mother and begins to accept his death.

Nadia the Willful, Sue Alexander. The Bedouin girl, daughter of Sheik Tarik, is a stubborn child with a bad temper. Only Hamid, her eldest brother, can tease her out of her moods. When he dies, the sheik forbids mention of Hamid's name so that he may forget his son's death. Nadia, however, persuades her father to talk of his lost son and keep his memory alive. Then Nadia is renamed Nadia the Wise.

I Had a Friend Named Peter, Janice Cohn. This book for adults is by a psychotherapist whose specialty is helping children and their parents to deal with crises. It has a fine introduction that answers some questions and concerns that arise when children confront death. The approach is decidedly secular humanist.

My Grammy, Marsha Kibbey. Amy's grandmother, who has Alzheimer's Disease and can no longer stay on her farm alone, moves in with her daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter, Amy. At first, the little girl is resentful of the intrusion and puzzled by Grammy's rather strange behavior. However, Amy finally understands what is causing Grammy's problem and the two form a loving attachment.

But She's Still My Grandma, Doreen Rappaport. Jessica's parents are reluctant to take the child to the nursing home in which Grandma Pearl lives now that she is senile. However, the little girl insists on visiting her grandmother; sadly, the elderly lady doesn't remember the members of her family. She does, however, respond momentarily to Jessica's recitation of a favorite poem that she and her beloved grandmother had shared in happier days.

Conflict versus cooperation

Millions and Millions of Cats, Wanda Gag. When a little old man goes to find a pet kitten, there is fierce competition to be the "chosen one." One little kitten who believes itself homely remains and is selected. In its new home, the kitten grows into a sleek and beautiful cat.

Drummer Hoff, Barbara Emberley. In this rhymed folk verse a cannon is built and finally shot off. In the final illustration the futility of war is made very clear.

The Alphabet Tree, Leo Lionni. Letters form words, words become sentences, and the most important sentence must be taken to the president: Peace on Earth.

Potatoes, Potatoes, Anita Lobel. A simple tale about the immorality of war with its needless destruction of life and property. After they have sought glory and have achieved only loss, the warriors are finally convinced by their mothers that peace is preferable to armed combat.

The Knight and the Dragon, Tomie de Paola. A knight and a dragon prepare for battle, but both prove inept at fighting. Books given them by the castle librarian lead to cooperation and to more useful persuits.

On the Other Side of the River, Joanne Oppenheim. After the collapse of a rickety bridge that connects East Wynlock and West Wynlock, people on both sides of the river think they will be happier, but they find that they need each other and rebuild the bridge.

The Butter Battle Book, Dr. Seuss. The longstanding feud between the Yooks and the Zooks is a thinly disguised satire that holds up to ridicule the current arms race and nuclear standoff between the two superpowers.

Six Crows, Leo Lionni. An irate farmer tries to protect his wheat field by building a scarecrow. The crows retaliate and the fight escalates until an owl suggests "discussing" the problem. The crows and the farmer finally settle the dispute to their mutual advantage.

It's Mine! Crosby Bonsall. Two small children stake claims on all their possessions until a goat eats Mabel Ann's picnic lunch while they are arguing. The two tots then decide to share the one carrot that's left and their toys as well.

The Story of Ferdinand, Munro Leaf. One of the first stories to feature a noncombatant male figure, this book tells of a bull who prefers sitting under a cork tree and smelling flowers to fighting in the bull ring.

Harvey's Hideout, Russell Hoban. Harvey Muskrat and his sister, Mildred, fight constantly until they realize that it is more fun for both to play together amicably.

The Little Brute Family, Russell Hoban. Every member of the Brute Family is miserable, quarrelsome, and mean until one day Baby Brute finds a "good feeling" in the woods. It stays with them and by spring they change their name to the Nice Family.

Inch by Inch, Leo Lionni. A little inchworm is willing to measure all the birds, but he cannot measure the song of the nightingale, who therefore threatens to eat him. Cleverness wins as he escapes by "inching" out of sight.

Swimmy, Leo Lionni. Left alone and frightened when all the other little fish are consumed by the big fish, Swimmy finds another group and persuades them to swim in the formation of a gigantic fish, thus scaring away the predators.

Dr. DeSoto, Arnold Lobel. A mouse dentist figures out a clever scheme to work on a fox and survive the ungrateful patient's plan to eat him after the work has been completed.

I'm Not Oscar's Friend Anymore, Marjorie Sharmot. A boy mirrors his own feelings as he imagines his friend Oscar's whole life turning sour because of their quarrel. Giving Oscar one more chance makes them both happy.

Let's Be Enemies, Janice May Udry. John and James used to be good friends, but today John is upset with James. They are enemies for awhile, but soon make up. Good friends don't stay angry for long.

The Quarreling Book, Charlotte Zolotow. A rainy morning sets off a chain reaction of cross feelings and sharp words. But the family dog's friendly reaction to little Eddie reverses the situation.

The Queen Who Couldn't Bake Gingerbread, Dorothy Van Woerkom. In this adaptation of a German folktale, King Pilaf seeks a wife who can bake perfect gingerbread. He settles, however, for Princess Calliope, who wants a husband who plays the slide trombone. Neither fulfills the desire of the other, and they become estranged until Pilaf bakes his own gingerbread and Calliope learns to play the slide trombone herself. Then they and their subjects live in harmony ever after.

Finders Keepers, William Lipkin. Nap and Winkie, two farm dogs, find a bone and quarrel about which of them is its owner. They submit their disagreement for arbitration to a farmer, a goat, and a student barber, but get no decision. Then a large dog offers to "store" the bone for them and starts to leave with it. Nap and Winkie take it back and share it with no further discussion.

Benjamin and Tulip, Rosemary Wells. Tulip is a bully and she makes Benjamin's life miserable, especially since no one believes his accounts of her behavior. An unexpected truce settles things for both of them.

The North Wind and the Sun, Jean de la Fontaine. A really exquisite retelling of the classic story, in which the Sun achieves by warmth and gentleness what the North Wind in all his strength and fury fails to do.

The Hunter and His Dog, Brian Wildsmith. A hunter trains his dog to fetch ducks. The dog, however, hides the wounded ducks and fetches sticks instead. Then the hunter watches the dog secretly take bread to the wounded ducks, and, feeling ashamed, the man rescues the ducks and sets them free when they have recovered from the bullet wounds.

Individual differences

Considering the trend to "mainstream" children who are somewhat handicapped, it seems wise to suggest some titles to be read both to handicapped children and to those who are not handicapped so that they may develop empathy.

I Have a Sister; My Sister Is Deaf, Jeanne W. Peterson. This is a warm intimate portrait of a little sister who is deaf and very "special." She responds to people in different ways, which her older sister interprets to those outside the immediate family.

Crow Boy, Taro Yashima. With distinctive artistry this author has created a touching story of a Japanese boy, Chibi, who is retarded. When a new teacher comes to the village school, he brings out this boy's hidden talent to imitate the sounds of crows, and the child attains a new status in his group.

He's My Brother, Joe Lasker. Jamie suffers from "the invisible handicap," a learning disability. This book explains through the voice of his older brother what this means to Jamie and to his family.

Where's Chimpy? Bernice Rabe. Illustrated with color photographs, this is the story of little Misty, a Downs' Syndrome child. Misty can't find her stuffed monkey, although as she looks for Chimpy, she does find nine other "lost" items. Finally she and Daddy find Chimpy, and Misty settles down for the night.

My Feet Roll, a wordless book illustrated by Winnie Mertens. The simple drawings show a little girl who uses a wheelchair but actively participates in many activities with her family and friends.

Self-acceptance

I'm Terrific, Marjorie Weinman Sharmat. Jason Everett Bear is a "goody-goody," but he's also a show-off. After an attempt at a complete reversal of personality, Jason finally decides to just be himself. All of his behavior receives understanding support from his mother.

Dandelion, Don Freeman. When a lion puts on fancy clothes for a friend's birthday party, his personality changes. After a rainstorm has ruined his outfit and uncurled his mane, he

returns to the party and vows to remain himself in the future.

The Green-Tailed Mouse, Leo Lionni. An innocent group of mice frolicking in the woods are persuaded by a strange mouse to devise costumes for a Mardi Gras celebration. They start to behave in aggressive ways to live up to their frightening new images. A second mouse advises them to burn all the masks and return to their original state. However, one mouse who has dyed his tail green is unable to remove the paint.

Maria Teresa, Mary Atkinson. After moving from a small town in New Mexico, where she spoke mainly Spanish, Maritere finds no friends in school until she brings to "show and tell" her lamb puppet, Monteja, who speaks only Spanish.

The Biggest House in the World, Leo Lionni. A small snail learns about the disadvantages of expanding his shell to enormous proportions when he is so encumbered that he cannot move to a new food supply.

Family relationships

Jo, Flo and Yolanda, Carol de Poix. This warm picture of a Puerto Rican family in New York emphasizes cooperation, love, and respect for individual differences among the children.

My Daddy Don't Go to Work, Madeena Spray Nolan. A father who can't find a job almost leaves his family to look for work in another location, but with encouragement from his wife he decides to stay at home and keep trying.

My Mother Lost Her Job Today, Judy Delton. Barbara Ann is frightened because of her mother's situation, but is assured that there will still be birthdays. Mom will find another job.

Everett Anderson's Nine Month Long, Lucille Clifton. Part of a series, this book shows Everett learning to accept the child of his mother and stepfather. He learned to love his stepfather in an earlier book, *Everett Anderson's 1-2-3.*

Abby, Jeanette Caines. Big brother Kevin thinks his adopted younger sister Abby is a pest; but after she tries to please him by pretending to be a boy, he makes a poster that says "Abby is a SUPER girl," and asks to take her to school for "show and tell." She asks what he will tell. "That you're adopted, that we get to keep you forever, and I gave you my fire engine for your birthday," he replies. After he has left, Abby asks her mother if they can adopt a little brother for Kevin, and Mother promises to ask Daddy about that.

I Wish Daddy Didn't Drink So Much, Judith Vigna. A little girl is disappointed by her father's broken promises but she learns, with the help of her mother and another adult friend, to "detach from the problem with love," and not feel responsible for it.

Adoption Is For Always, Linda Walvoord Girard. When Celia begins to understand the word "adopted," she worries about her birth-mother and fears that her adoptive parents will leave her as well. By the book's end, she is reassured.

Sometimes Mama and Papa Fight, Marjorie Weinman Sharmot. A simple, realistic story of the way parental fighting affects children.

On Mother's Lap, Ann Herbert Scott. A small boy puts all his toys on his mother's lap, then climbs up, to avoid having his new baby sister usurp his spot. Mother shows that there is plenty of room for everybody.

My Mother's Getting Married, Joan Drescher. Katy's mother is marrying Ben and everyone is happy about it except Katy, who shows her displeasure by wearing her blue jeans under her flower-girl dress. Katy catches her mother's bouquet, and no one notices the jeans. However, Katy still exhibits jealousy when she finds she is not included in the honeymoon. Her mother lovingly reassures her that all will be well, and she will always remain her mother's "Katydid."

My Mother and I Are Growing Stronger, Inez Maury. A little girl and her mother learn to cope with life when they have to take over the father's gardening route after he is jailed for hitting a man who had made a disparaging remark about Chicanos.

Daddy and Ben Together, Miriam B. Stecher. A warm relationship between a little boy and his father becomes even stronger when they are left to take care of each other while Mommy is away for a few days on business.

Sam, Ann Herbert Scott. Sam, the youngest child, wants to be involved in various activities that are occuping his parents and siblings. They are all too busy, but finally the problem is resolved when the right "job" is found for him.

Just Momma and Me, Christine Engla Eber. Regina's artist mother has adopted her, and the two have a very happy family. Then Momma's friend Karl comes into the picture and Regina is a bit jealous. Finally baby Keith is born, but by then Regina has learned to see the family as a unit.

Big Sister and Little Sister, Charlotte Zolotow. A very protective older sister makes all the decisions for her sibling. One day Little Sister slips away to a nearby field, hides, and doesn't respond to Big Sister's calls. The older girl begins to cry, and now Little Sister is the one who offers the handkerchief. They realize that they can take care of each other.

All Kinds of Families, Norma Simon. This series of stories stresses the supportive function of the family and shows a great variety of social patterns that may be defined as "family" in many settings.

We Don't Look Like Our Mom and Dad, Harriet Langsam Sobol. This book tells of two Korean boys who have been adopted by an American Caucasian family. Although no one

in the family is biologically related to any of the others, they get along well, sharing work and love.

Black is brown is tan, Arnold Adoff. The unusual typography is worth deciphering in this book about a black father, a white mother, and their children.

Little Blue and Little Yellow, Leo Lionni. Colors are personified in this charming book where the two friends, blue and yellow, hug each other and become green. Their respective parents don't recognize them until they cry and become separate colors again. All ends happily as the blue and yellow families embrace and all become green.

Specific virtues

Miss Rumphius, Barbara Cooney. Alice Rumphius wants to grow up to travel the world and then live by the sea, as her grandfather did. But first she must make the world more beautiful, which she does by scattering flower seeds everywhere so that the countryside is ablaze with color every spring and summer.

Frederick, Leo Leonni. A different view of the work ethic than we may remember from the fable "The Ant and the Grasshopper." Frederick's contribution of imagination and poetry is as valuable as the food-gathering done by his fellow mice.

The Tale of Meshka the Kvetch, Carol Chapman. A woman who spends all of her time complaining soon finds her complaints coming true. The rabbi tells her she has Kvetch's Itch and explains that she can cure herself by "praising the good in life."

Tico and the Golden Wings, Leo Lionni. A little bird who was born without wings is granted his wish when he gets feathers of gold, but he gives them all away to people in need. As he does so, each feather is replaced by a black one.

Emma, Wendy Kesselman. Inspired by an artist the author knew, this beautifully illustrated book tells the story of an older woman who began to paint and "was never lonely again," surrounded by pictures of friends and places she has loved.

Harlequin and the Gift of Many Colors, Remy Charlip. Each child gives a piece of cloth from his new carnival costume. Sewn together they make a splendid costume for Harlequin, who is too poor to buy his own, but is now "clothed in the love of his friends."

Louie, Ezra Jack Keats. A touching story of an inarticulate child who relates only to a puppet. Neighborhood children show great kindness.

I Was So Mad! Norma Simon. Using illustrations of boys and girls and adults of all races, this book takes a child's point of view about what kinds of situations make people feel angry. Reassures children that "being mad isn't being bad."

There's a Nightmare in My Closet, Mercer Mayer. A small boy decides to face his nightmare, and when the comic-looking nightmare is frightened and starts to cry, the child takes it to bed with him.

Who's Afraid of the Dark? Muriel Stanek. Kenny, brave about everything else, is afraid of the dark. Each family member confesses to being afraid of something, and Kenny's grandfather solves the boy's problem by giving him a pencil-shaped flashlight to carry with him.

A Big Fat Enormous Lie, Marjorie Weinman Sharmat. A small boy has told a lie, a great big fat enormous gigantic lie in regard to a jar of cookies. The falsehood has a life of its own and grows and grows until the truth finally drives it away.

Like Jake and Me, Marvis Jukes. Alex discovers that even his "tough guy" cowboy stepfather, Jake, can panic in fear when the boy tells him that a spider has crawled into his clothing. With great humor Alex helps Jake to strip down to capture the spider.

The Girl Who Would Rather Climb Trees, Miriam Schlein. Melissa, an all-around sort of girl, is faced with a problem when her mother, grandmother, and her mother's best friend surprise her with a doll and carriage. She doesn't want to hurt their feelings, so she tells them the doll is asleep, and goes out to do what she likes best—climb trees.

Sam, Bangs and Moonshine, Evaline Ness. Samantha, nicknamed Sam, has a bad habit of telling lies, which almost costs the lives of her cat Bangs and a little friend, Thomas. She finally understands the difference between truth and what her dad calls "moonshine."

There are inevitable differences in levels of sophistication among children, so that what one child will find interesting at age four might fascinate another at eight. Older children are sometimes comforted by rereading books they have "outgrown," particularly when they are reading aloud to a younger child. Also, reading a book that may seem a little above the age level of the listener may actually have advantages, particularly for the listener's vocabulary. And of course, reading aloud should not be discontinued simply because a child has learned to read. People like Hal Holbrook have made careers—and very successful ones at that—out of reading to adult audiences.

If you are unsure of the amount of interest that a child will have in a particular book, a single reading with the child will provide a prompt answer. Does the child enjoy the reading and request an encore? If so, you may safely assume that the book is an appropriate choice.

What is most important, after all, is that adults open the door to the world of literature in an effective way to foster moral education in youngsters from the outset. Most children will never want to close that door again. •