4. 'Everybody's Got to Learn': Discourses of Teaching and of Learning in Children's Literature

> "The chimney was the worst," said Susan. Masses of snow fell through and put the fire out."
> "Some of the snow fell bang into Susan's saucepan," said Roger.
> "It won't do it again," said Nancy, "not now we've got a proper stovepipe. Jib-booms and bobstays! Everybody's got to learn."
> *Winter Holiday*[1]

The human being is a learning animal, and none are more assiduous learners than children, and perhaps not surprisingly we can find plenty of examples of learning going on in children's books. That teaching and learning goes on in classrooms in schools seems like a starting point, but a moment's reflection tells us that that is only part, and pretty small part at that, of the totality of learning that goes on in a child's life, both before they ever get to school, and while they are of school age. (The same is true, of course, of adults, but they are not our focus here.) Outside school a lot of learning requires a teacher of some sort or another, but only in the widest sense of the term, and learning can also occur without any teachers at all – we call it learning from experience, as in the example quoted above from *Winter Holiday*. It is also part of my case that even when there is a teacher involved, learning is as active a process as is teaching

Classrooms and Curriculum Content

Two things can happen in classrooms in children's books. The actual curriculum content can sometimes play a role in the narrative, but classrooms also function as sites where character is established and relationships developed. Classrooms are of course found in schools so school stories would be an obvious starting point. Let me look first, then, at *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*.[2] Written 1887 by Talbot Baines Reed It proves to be an interesting case, since though we do not spend much time in classrooms themselves, curriculum content, or more specifically academic achievement, has a central role to play in the narrative. We are at an English public school,[3] and the book effectively has three co-protagonists, sixteen year old Oliver Greenfield, who is in the titular fifth form, his eleven year old brother, Stephen, a new boy, and sixth former Edward Loman, the same age as Oliver. A major narrative strand concerns a scholarship, The Nightingale, the winner of which will be awarded a substantial sum of money We are informed about it at the very beginning of the book when a notice about it appears on the school noticeboard.

> A Nightingale Scholarship, value £50 a year for three years, will fall vacant at Michaelmas. Boys under seventeen are eligible. Particulars and subject of examination can be had any evening next week in the secretary's room.[4]

Oliver's friend and fellow fifth former, Horace Wraysford, also enters for it, though Oliver is the favourite to win it. At this stage we are told only 'one of the Sixth is in for it too,' [5] and it is a couple of chapters before we discover the aforesaid sixth former is their sports rival Loman.

> Loman, Wraysford, and Greenfield *were* rivals in more matters than one. They were all three candidates for a place in the school eleven, and all three candidates for the Nightingale Scholarship next autumn. (original emphasis)[6]

In the course of the plot Loman gets into escalating financial difficulties which start when he is sold an inferior fishing rod at a very vastly inflated price by the local publican, Cripps, 'a blackguard by practice, whatever he was by profession'[7]. His problems escalate until he finds himself in debt to Cripps to the tune of £30 – a huge sum – multiply by 100 to get the equivalent in today's money. Not daring to go to his parents for help, it occurs to Loman that the Nightingale could be the solution.

> "Come now," said Cripps encouragingly, "I'll wager you can raise the wind somewheres (sic)."
> "I wish I knew how. I see no chance whatever, unless" – and here a brilliant idea struck him – "unless I get the Nightingale. Of course; I say Cripps, will you wait until September?"[8]

The Nightingale narrative goes into abeyance for a while but as the date of the examination approaches we learn that Oliver also needs the money, in his case to fund his going to university. Both boys, thus, have strong if very different motivations to win it. The outcome of the examination comes to be of wider interest to Loman's and Oliver's respective fellow form members, being seen as part of the wider rivalry between the two senior forms, and that interest then extends to the school as a whole with the junior forms taking sides as to whom they support to win it. The narrative strand continues as we learn that both boys are working hard, and the scholarship itself and its outcome is by now dominating the plot. Then, in what constitutes the climax of the book, one of the papers is stolen from Doctor Senior's study – Doctor Senior being the headmaster – and suspicion falls on Oliver as the culprit since he was seen near the study at the time by another boy, Simon, and that suspicion is confirmed when Oliver wins it. Loman comes a dismal third. The reader may well have guessed that Loman is the culprit, a guess that might be confirmed when we discover that, at the first glimpse of the paper,

> Wraysford's face slightly lengthened, Loman's grew suddenly aghast, Oliver's betrayed no emotion whatsoever.[9]

And given Loman's reaction we might also guess that the Doctor re-wrote the paper once the original had gone missing, which will indeed prove to be the case. Simon confronts Oliver with his accusations, at which Oliver hits him, an act for which he apologises a bit later, but the damage is done since it also seems to confirm his guilt, and Oliver otherwise makes no attempt to defend himself because, as he tells his younger brother later, '"Because I don't choose, and it would be no use if I did"'[10], and thenceforward Oliver is ostracised by his peers, with even Wraysford reluctantly coming to the conclusion that his friend must have cheated. The word rapidly spreads until the whole school knows about it and again takes sides, and its effects even permeate to the sports field as various of our leading characters refuse to play, '"Everything's stopped for the Nightingale!"'[11] complains the captain of football. Loman, meanwhile, has used

Oliver's 'theft' of the paper to explain to Cripps why he still doesn't have the money. Oliver's only support comes from his younger brother, who declares that Wraysford is a beast. Then a second scholarship becomes available, and Oliver enters for that too, if he does well in this one it will prove he wasn't cheating in the last one, and of course he wins that hands down too, and in what is, for this reader at least, an emotional high point in the novel, Wraysford goes to see Oliver and the two friends are reconciled.

> There was no need for him to announce his errand. It was written on his face as he advanced with outstretched hand to his old friend.
> "Noll, old man," was all he could say, as their eyes met, "the youngster's right – I *am* a beast."[12]

The fifth form itself is slower to come round, but finally does in another emotional moment when a fellow fifth former of Oliver's, one Pembury, who is perhaps the most intelligent character in the story and certainly the one with the sharpest wit, but who also happens to be a cripple, takes the opportunity of a chance meeting in the corridor to swallow his pride in his own unique manner:

> "Noll, old man," said he, in the old familiar tones, "you've got a spare arm. May I take it?"[13]

It will be seen, then, that the discourse of academic achievement has an essential narrative role to play in the structure of the plot as a whole, though, be it noted, we basically have no idea what was in the paper, and in that sense it was a classic MacGuffin[14], the actual content of the paper is irrelevant to the story. It is the two dramas of the narrative, that of the false accusations made against Oliver and that of Loman's increasing entrapment in escalating debt that occupy our interest and engage our concern. The Nightingale is merely the device around which those two dramas are articulated.

At other points in the book we do have mention of curriculum content, and even get into classrooms, but again generally it serves a double purpose. When Stephen first arrives the Doctor quizzes him on his knowledge of arithmetic in order to decide which form he is to be put into. Initially we are told he struggles with fractions, with Latin, with French, even with his spelling[15]; and later, when he is caught cribbing his Latin, his form teacher upbraids him for not working. Stephen responds to the reprimand, pulls himself together, and goes on to win the Latin prize. On a couple of other occasions we find the Doctor himself in the classroom, the first time being when he sorts out the junior fourth – who have been on strike, no less, refusing to fag for the older boys – and there, finally, we have more detail as he takes them through Gray's *Elegy*.[16] He asks them the meanings of lines, which they stumble over to farcical result, and when he asks them to read the poem they make even more farcical mistakes. He turns his attention to the boy at the bottom of the class, one Bramble, who seemingly knew little or nothing about anything,

> He mixed up William the Conquer and William of Orange; he subtracted what ought to be multiplied, and floundered about between conjunctions and prepositions in a sickening way.[17]

The second time we find the Doctor in the classroom it is with the senior forms, teaching them about 'the comparative beauties of Horace and Virgil and Ovid' discussing the meters of the lines in their poetry, at which point he wants a copy of Juvenal, which Loman provides, which proves to have the stolen scholarship paper between its pages. That it is Juvenal is completely irrelevant, the important thing is the discovery of the paper. Otherwise in the book, reference to curriculum content is oblique rather than direct, as in a spoof paper that Pembury gives to Stephen when he first arrives, asking him 'the gender of the following substantives: "and", "look", "here",' or whose daughter Stephen the Second was, and similar such nonsense.[18] On another occasion the same Pembury has almost single-handedly launched a fifth form newspaper, in one edition of which he ridicules items in the sixth form's equivalent publication: an article on the character of Julius Caesar and a verse translation from Horace.[19] The more specific accounts and the more oblique references of and to the actual learning of curriculum content both have narrative functions: in the case of the Doctor's interventions, dealing with the recalcitrant fourth formers, and furthering the Nightingale narrative itself; and with the first of the more oblique examples serving as part of Stephen's initiation into the school, and the second serving to further the narrative of the already existing rivalry between the fifth and the sixth.

There couldn't be a bigger contrast than that between Reed's English public school and Beverly Cleary's kindergarten as portrayed in *Ramona the Pest*[20], but it is to the latter we must turn if we wish to find narratives that are actually about classroom learning itself. The book consists of a series of self-contained chapters each with a little story about five year old Ramona Quimby and her life at school, in the third of which we find Ramona learning to write. Miss Binney, their teacher, has printed out their names on cards and is requiring them to copy them. Ramona immediately notices that her name is longer that some of the other children's names and will thus require more work but that does not dampen her enthusiasm: 'Not that Ramona minded having to work harder – she was eager to learn to read and write,'[21] and the chapter continues with a detailed account of the work.

> Carefully Ramona printed *R* the way Miss Binney had printed it. *A* was easy… Miss Binney said *A* was pointed like a witch's hat… *O* was also easy. It was a round balloon…
>
> "I like the way Ramona's *O's* are fat balloons full of air," Miss Binney said to the class, and Ramona's heart was full of joy.

Miss Binney moves around the class giving help and assistance where required and Ramona struggles with her *M's* and *N's*.

> "No, Davy. *D* faces the *other* way."
>
> Once more Ramona bent over her paper. The hardest part of her name, she soon discovered, was getting the right number of points on the *M* and *N* Sometimes her name came out RANOMA… "Good work Ramona," said Miss Binney, the first time Ramona printed her name correctly.

When Ramona sees that some of the other children's names also include the first letter of their surname followed by a dot, she asks Miss Binney if she can do the same.

> "Of course you may. This is the way to make a *Q*. A nice round *O* with a little tale like a cat. And there is your little dot which is called a period."

The account of the teaching, and learning, continues the next day.

> Ramona practiced her *Q* while Miss Binney walked around helping those with *S* in their names. All the *S's* were having trouble. "No Susan," said Miss Binney. "*S* stands up straight. It does not lie down as if it were a little worm crawling along the ground."

And Davy is still having problems with his *D*. 'A *D* does not have four corners' she advises him, it has two, and one side is curved 'like a Robin redbreast', at which point Ramona herself decides to play a role in Davy's education by getting him to draw feathers on his *D*. Miss Binney is not amused! As can be seen, one of the narratives of the chapter, with its own unfolding little drama, is constituted by this account of learning to write, and Ramona's developing relationship with Miss Binney is an integral part of that learning to write narrative – when Miss Binney complements Ramona on her O's 'Ramona's heart was filled with joy.' And as will be seen in a later chapter, Ramona's interest in Davy's work is also part of a wider narrative about her relationship with Davy himself.

This is the most detailed account of classroom content that appears in the book, though in the first chapter which deals with Ramona's very first day in school much humour is derived from Ramona's misunderstandings of words and the meanings of words. They start when Miss Binney shows her to her place.

> "Sit here for the present," she said with a smile.
> A present! thought Ramona, and knew at once she was going to like Miss Binney. . . . Nobody had told her she was going to get a present on the very first day.[22]

None of the other children had been told to sit there for the present so Ramona thinks she's been singled out, and remains resolutely glued to her seat when Miss Binney takes the other children through to the cloakroom to find their hooks, and when Miss Binney tells them to stand up like good Americans while they sing *The Star Spangled Banner*, Ramona decides she will have to be a good American sitting down. Finally when all is explained,

> Miss Binney's face turned red and she looked so embarrassed that Ramona felt completely confused. Teachers were not supposed to look that way.
> Miss Binney spoke gently. "Ramona, I'm afraid we've had a misunderstanding."
> Ramona was blunt. "You mean I don't get a present?"

And Miss Binney finally explains that 'for the present' meant 'for now'. It is a learning moment for Ramona,

> Words were so puzzling. *Present* should mean a present just as attack should mean to stick tacks into people.

Ramona's misunderstanding about the meaning of 'for the present' is one of the main narrative strands in the little story of Ramona's first day which constitutes the first chapter of the book, and in the same chapter Ramona also has problems with the first line of *The Star Spangled Banner* itself, 'Oh say can you see at the dawn's early light,'

> Next Miss Binney taught the class the words of a puzzling song about 'the dawnzer lee light,' which Ramona did not understand because she didn't know what a dawnzer was.

She comes to the conclusion that it is a lamp, and that little confusion becomes a tiny little narrative strand of its own which goes into hiding, as it were, until the final chapter of the book when she uses this newly discovered word to actually refer to a lamp, much to the amusement of her older sister, Beezus, and of her mother. Finally, in the same first chapter, Ramona and the other children learn yet another lesson, one that, though it may not have any significance in the narratives of *Ramona the Pest*, does have relevance to my theme in this chapter as a whole, which is that not all learning happens in the classroom: Miss Binney reads them *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* and Ramona asks her how Mike Mulligan went to the bathroom while he was digging the basement to the town hall. Once asked, the same question occurs to the other children in the class. With a smile that 'seemed to last longer than smiles usually last', Miss Binney evades the issue by telling them that it's not an important part of the story. The children of course know that going to the bathroom *is* important and 'Ramona could see that there were some things she was not going to learn in school.' Quite so.

In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* actual lesson content is of peripheral interest, as indeed are lessons themselves. The characterisation and the central relationships of the story are established outside the classroom entirely, and the main dramas of the book unfold, with a one exception, also outside the classroom. In *Ramona the Pest*, by contrast, at least two of the chapters are focused almost entirely upon what is going on in the classroom, and though character relationships are an important element in that, what is actually being learnt and the very process of learning itself is a major narrative strand. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*[23] provides an example that sits somewhere between these two alternatives. The description of classroom lessons almost always serves to further characterisation, but curriculum content is also important in the furtherance of the story.

Just in case there is anyone out there who has not collided with the Harry Potter phenomenon, a couple of sentences by way of introduction. The bulk of the action of the book, and indeed of the series as a whole, takes place in a magical world populated by wizards and witches, and by magical beasts and other magical artefacts: dragons, three headed dogs, broomsticks and etc., with the odd ghost and talking portrait thrown in; and the characters have to operate within that

magical world in accordance with its rules. The action takes place in and around Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and the major team sport in this magical world is Quidditch, played on broomsticks. The Philosopher's Stone of the title is the McGuffin of the piece, 'a legendary substance with astonishing powers',[24] and our protagonists, Harry, Hermione and Ron, have to find it before the evil wizard Voldemort does. The reader has to enter that world, and, just like the characters in the book, understand its nature and how the magic within it operates, and lesson content and wider curriculum knowledge clearly have a role to play here. The first thing we learn is how the curriculum itself is organised into subject areas, which we do when Hagrid, Hogwarts' gamekeeper, arrives in the human world on Harry's eleventh birthday to take him to the school for the first time and gives him a reading list which includes books about the following: *Herbology*; *The History of Magic*; *Charms*; *Defence Against the Dark Arts*; *Transfiguration*; and *Potions*. We learn a bit more about those subjects and about the teachers who teach them once Harry has arrived in the school.[25] *Herbology* is taught by 'a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout' who teaches them about the care of and uses of the strange plants and fungi to be found in the greenhouse. *History of Magic*, 'easily the most boring lesson' is taught them by a ghost; and they learn *Charms* with Professor Flitwick, 'a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk', and who, at the mention of Harry's name 'gave a tiny little squeak and toppled out of sight'. We learn a little more of Professor McGonagall, that she is 'strict and clever', that she isn't a teacher to cross. She teaches them *Transfiguration*: 'Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned.' Professor McGonagall turns her desk into a pig, and has the pupils try to turn matches into needles. Only Hermione succeeds. Next there is *Defence Against the Dark Arts* with Professor Quirrell, whose lessons are described as 'a bit of a joke'. He claims to have once fought off a troublesome zombie for an African Prince, but when Seamus Finnegan, one of the students, asks him how he did it, he 'went pink and started talking about the weather'.

So far we have had only fairly brief accounts of the lessons, but when it comes to *Potions* with Professor Snape, there is considerably more detail.

> Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the register, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name.
>
> "Ah yes," he said softly, "Harry Potter. Our new – *celebrity*."
>
> Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered behind their hands.

Snape then uses the ostensible lesson content to belittle Harry.

> "Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"
>
> *Powdered root of what to an infusion of what?* Harry glanced at Ron, who looked as stumped as he was; Hermione's hand had shot into the air.
>
> "I don't know, sir," said Harry.
>
> Snape's lips curled into a sneer.
>
> "Tut, tut – fame clearly isn't everything."
>
> He ignored Hermione's hand.

The lesson continues in like vein, with Snape asking Harry similar questions to which he, Snape, knows that Harry will not have the answer while Hermione continues to raise her hand, even standing up in her enthusiasm. Finally, when Snape asks him what the difference is between monkshood and wolfsbane Harry plucks up courage and answers back.

> "I don't know," said Harry quietly. "I think Hermione does, though, why don't you try her?"
>
> A few people laughed; Harry caught Seamus's eye and Seamus winked. Snape, however, was not pleased.
>
> "Sit down," he snapped at Hermione.

At the end of the lesson we learn that asphodel and wormwood when mixed produce a powerful sleeping potion, and that monkshood and wolfsbane are different names for the same plant, aconite – as indeed they are – nothing magical about that little piece of knowledge! The account of the lesson continues. They have to work in pairs and mix a potion to cure boils using dried nettles, crushed snake fangs, stewed horned slugs, and porcupine quills. Neville Longbottom manages to melt Seamus's cauldron and thus release the unfinished potion with disastrous results, covering himself in boils in the process.

The account of these lessons serves both to further the characterisation of the characters we have already met, and to establish new relationships with those that we haven't. Perhaps the first thing to be noted is the varying response of two of the teachers to Harry himself. Flitwick is immediately overcome and topples off his pile of books, and Snape also refers to his fame. At this stage neither Harry nor the reader quite knows of what his fame consists, but he is clearly an important character in the scheme of things. Otherwise, amongst the teachers, we have already met Professor McGonagall, and our view of her is confirmed. We have also previously met Quirrell in a blink and you miss it moment when he is introduced by Hagrid to Harry in The Leaky Cauldron, one of the gateways into the magical world itself, and who is there established as a weak, nervous character, and who here seems to be something of a charlatan as well, making claims about his past which seem to be unfounded. His weakness as a practitioner of defence against the dark arts is highly relevant to the story since at the end of the book his body will have been colonised by Voldemort himself. In Snape's lesson there is more to note. First there is Snape's character. We have so far only met Snape at a distance when he glares at Harry during the beginning of term feasts, but now we meet him up close and personal, and it is clear that he has it in for Harry right from the start, and is to subject him to withering sarcasm at every turn. Snape is a leading character and his attitude to Harry leads Harry, Ron and Hermione to suspect that it is Snape who tries to unseat Harry in a Quidditch match later in the story, and that he is in league with Voldemort to steal the stone. That suspicion is an important narrative thread, a thread in which, in a final narrative twist, we will discover to be a red herring, that the children's suspicions of him are unfounded, that in fact he has been trying to protect Harry against Quirrell. So far as the other students are concerned the account of Snape's lesson serves to further confirm what we have already learnt about them. Malfoy's attitude and that of his cronies is something of a major feature in the succeeding narrative, and Hermione's status as the brainy one is also confirmed. She's the academic one who has read all the books and already knows all the answers at the theoretical level, and at this point comes across as a know-it-all, and bossy with it,

and initially neither Ron nor Harry can stand her, though that will change. She is of course a major character, involved in the action throughout. Ron we already know to be a friend of Harry's, so Harry's glance merely confirms the fact, and Harry himself already demonstrates his strength of character by refusing to be browbeaten by Snape and answering back. Seamus is to remain a friendly minor character, but Neville does play a more important role. He has already been established as a bit incompetent and inept, and, as we see here, accident prone, but he is to prove to be a courageous and staunch ally, piling in to help Ron when he, Ron, physically attacks Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle at the aforementioned Quidditch match.

As far as the specific lesson content is concerned, none of it will have any role to play in the narrative overall. Nowhere in the story will the ability to turn desks into pigs or matchsticks into needles, nor the ability to create sleeping potions or cure boils prove to be of any use. Nor will knowledge of alternative names for aconite. Later in the story, however, both more general knowledge of the subject areas and even on one occasion specific lesson content does have an important role to play. Here's the specific example. It is a lesson where Professor Flitwick is teaching them charms to make objects fly[26].

> "Now don't forget that nice wrist movement we've been practicing," . . . "Swish and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the magic words properly is very important too."

To Ron's chagrin he has been paired with Hermione. He is practicing, without much success.

> "*Wingardium Leviosa!*" he shouted, waving his long arms like a windmill.
> "You're saying it wrong," Harry heard Hermione snap. "It's Wing-*gar*-dium Levi-*o*-sa, make the *gar* nice and long."

Within a couple of pages the spell has to be used by Ron himself when Hermione finds herself trapped in the girls' toilets with a troll and the boys have to rescue her. It turns on them and is just about to bash Harry on the head with its club when Ron,

> . . . heard himself cry the first spell that came into his head: "*Wingardium Leviosa*!"
> The club flew suddenly out of the troll's hand, rose high, high up into the air, turned slowly over – and dropped with a sickening crack, on to its owner's head.[27]

Otherwise when curricular knowledge is needed, it will be provided by Hermione, who will have recalled it from previous lessons which we will not have been privy to, or who will have discovered it in her reading, and who, in the process, becomes teacher by proxy. Thus when they have to find out more about the Philosopher's Stone itself, Hermione, because of her knowledge of The History of Magic, knows where to look it up. And when spells of one sort and another are needed it is Hermione who will know which spells are required and has learned how to do them. The leg-locker curse and its counter curse provides a slightly more extended example. We first meet it when Neville tumbles into the common room having had his legs stuck together

by Malfoy. Immediately Hermione 'leapt up and performed the counter curse.'[28] Within a couple of pages, realising that the curse itself could be useful to them, she tries to teach it to Ron, '"Now don't forget, it's *Locomotor Mortis*" . . . "I know", Ron snapped. "Don't nag."'[29] It doesn't get used again however, though later in the narrative when Neville will have to be bound by a stronger curse when he tries to follow them and thus inadvertently jeopardise their mission, it is Hermione who knows the full Body-Bind curse, '*Petrificus Totalis*'.[30] In the final phase of the action, as they are trying to get to the Stone before Voldemort does, they are met with a series of obstacles, the first of which is a magical plant, Devils Snare, which catches them up in its tendrils, and it is Hermione who recalls being taught about its properties by Professor Sprout.

> "Stop moving!" Hermione ordered them. "I know what it is – it's Devil's Snare.
> "Oh, I'm so glad we know what it's called, that's a great help," snarled Ron, leaning back, trying to stop the plant curling around his neck.
> "Shut up. I'm trying to remember how to kill it!" said Hermione.
> "Well hurry up, I can't breathe," Harry gasped, wrestling with it as it curled around his chest.
> "Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare.. What did Professor Sprout say? It likes the dark and the damp – "
> "So light a fire!" Harry choked.[31]

.. at which Hermione points her wand at the plant and burns it up. My point here is that Hermione is able to bring knowledge directly acquired in lessons to bear upon the problem, and indeed to take charge, telling the others what to do, and is able to deal with the plant and release the two boys. '"Lucky you pay attention in Herbology, Hermione," said Harry.' Yes indeed. And when they press on, having to negotiate further obstacles, it is Hermione who recognises that each obstacle is related to a curriculum subject area.

> "We've had Sprout's, that was the Devil's Snare – Flitwick must have put charms on the keys – McGonagall transfigured the chessmen to make them alive – that leaves Quirrell's spell, and Snape's…"[32]

Finally, be it noted, we are never told how it is that Hermione is always so successful in the practice of her spells, and we can only conclude that it is a result of her greater concentration and the force of her personality that she can turn matches into needles when the rest of the class can't. Notice in my example above that it is only when Ron has to muster and focus his energies to disable the troll that he too becomes successful at using the *Wingardium Leviosa* spell. In lessons he can't do it, presumably because he's not trying hard enough or concentrating properly.

<u>Outside the Classroom</u>

Moving outside the classroom we also find a lot of teaching and learning going on, but it is rare that teachers per se have anything very much to do with it. Instead it tends to be characters who are closer to the protagonists and who themselves have a role to play in the unfolding narrative, either other children, or friendly and supportive adults. Let me illustrate this with a couple of

examples. I'll start with *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* again – why not? We have already noted that Hermione is much inclined to be the little teacher in the text when needed, bringing academic knowledge to bear where necessary, but other things need more thoroughgoing teaching, Quidditch for one. One of the major dramatic events in the novel is the inter-house quidditch match in which Harry will play a leading role. All he knows to start with is that the game is played on broomsticks, and the very first time Harry rides one it turns out to be an activity at which he naturally excels without having to be taught it. He flies into the air 'and in a rush of fierce joy he realised he'd found something he could do without being taught'[33]. More pertinently, so far as his skills at Quidditch are concerned, even on that same very first ride, he discovers the ability to ride both very fast and very accurately. The circumstances are these: Malfoy has stolen Neville's Remembrall (a glass ball that glows red whenever its owner has forgotten something) and soared up into the air with it. When Harry chases him he drops it, and Harry swoops down at incredible speed and catches it just before it hits the ground. Professor McGonagall sees him and marches him off to meet Oliver Wood, the captain of Quidditch for Gryffindor house, Harry's house – Gryffindor is Professor McGonagall's house – and tells him, Wood, that they have found their Seeker. Harry has no idea what a seeker is, nor do we as readers, but our interest has been piqued and a number of questions promptly arise. What is a Seeker? What role does a seeker play in Quidditch? What has Harry's remarkable turn of speed and accuracy on a broomstick got to do with it? These are questions to which we as readers are going to a have to learn the answers, and luckily for us, Harry also needs to learn the answers to them, and who better to teach him than Wood himself, the captain of Quidditch, and so he does.

> "I'm just going to teach you the rules this evening, then you'll be joining team practice three times a week."[34]

'"There are seven players one each side. Three of them are called chasers,"' he informs him, and proceeds to remove four balls from a crate he has with him. The first and largest is called a Quaffle. '"The chasers throw the Quaffle to each other and try to get it through one of the hoops to score a goal."' On each team there is a keeper whose job it is to stop them from scoring. The lesson, for so it is, goes on in like vein as Wood shows Harry a couple of Bludgers, balls that shoot into the air and zig-zag around the place trying to knock the players off their broomsticks. There are two beaters on each team whose job it is to deal with them. Finally there is a tiny walnut sized gold ball, with little wings.

> "This," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch because it's so fast an difficult to see. It's the Seeker's job to find it."

Whoever catches it will most probably win the game for their side. Harry finds something to compare it with, (an extremely effective learning strategy I may add): '"it's sort of like basketball on broomsticks,"' and at Wood's bidding and in order to get it into his head, Harry rehearses the information.

> "Three chasers to try and score with the Quaffle; the Keeper guards the goalposts; the Beaters keep the Bludgers away from their team," Harry reeled off.

The whole exchange is as an exemplary account of teaching and learning as you could hope to find and has also served to inform the reader of what is involved, which means that in terms of narrative function when we get into the excitement of the match itself a bit later, the action does not have to be held up in order to explain what is going on. Most of the actual description of the match is mediated through the live commentary of one of the older boys, Lee Jordan, and here is a sequence of examples mostly taken from that commentary, just to show what I mean.

> "And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor – what an excellent chaser that girl is . . . . Slytherin have taken the Quaffle . . . . stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper Wood . . . . OUCH – that must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger . . . . wait a moment – was that the Snitch"
>
> Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived downwards after the streak of gold.[35]

Etc. Harry would have been quite incapable of playing the game had Wood not taught him how to play it, and we as readers would have been quite incapable of understanding what was going on had we not ourselves also learned, by default as it were, the meaning of all those technical terms and how the game was played.

For second example let me go back 150 years to have a look at Marryat doing something similar in *The Children of the New Forest*.[36] The book is set during the English civil war and the story starts in the lead up to Charles I's execution. Edward, Humphrey, Alice, & Edith, 13, 12, 11, & 8 respectively, children of the landed gentry, find themselves having to hide out after their father has been killed and their home is in danger of being burned down by the Parliamentarians, which indeed it is before very long. They are rescued by their faithful retainer, Jacob Armitage, and hidden away in his cottage in the middle of the New Forest. He is old, and realising that he may not be around for long – indeed he dies in the course of the book – he decides that he will have to teach them to fend for themselves, 'I will teach them to be useful; they must learn to provide for themselves'[37], and so he does, starting with the very basics – cooking, cleaning, washing, etc. none of which have they ever had to do for themselves, but from the very start he encourages the children to take charge of their own learning which they rapidly do. Thus the first time that Jacob and Edward go out for Edward to learn how to stalk a stag, they return to find dinner waiting for them.

> Alice and Humphrey had cooked the dinner themselves, and it was in the pot, smoking hot, when they returned . . . Alice was not a little proud of this.[38]

The stalking of the stag provides a more extended example of the discourse of teaching and learning informing the narrative. The New Forest was a royal domain, and the forest workers,

of whom Jacob was one, had their salaries paid by the Crown. With the commencement of the Civil War these salaries dried up and the workers found themselves having to fend for themselves, with venison playing a dominant role in this new economy: it was part of their staple diet, and what they didn't eat themselves could be traded in the local towns, where the hides could also be traded. The situation is explicitly described later in the novel when Edward meets and challenges the new Intendant who has just been appointed by the Parliament to take charge of the forest.

> "They (the forest workers) were still servants of the king, for they were not dismissed; and having no other means of support they considered that their good master would be but too happy that they should support themselves by killing, for their subsistence, that venison which they could no longer preserve for him without eating some themselves."[39]

Thus, back at the start of the book, Jacob realises that if the children are to become self-sufficient he needs to teach them to hunt.

> "Edward is the oldest, and he must go out with me in the forest, and I must teach him to kill deer and other game for our support . . . then Humphrey shall come out and lean how to shoot."
> "Yes," said Humphrey, "I'll soon learn."[40]

The first time they run out of venison Jacob makes of the opportunity to teach Edward how to stalk.

> "Recollect that you must always be hid, for his sight is very quick; never be heard, for his ear is sharp; and never come down to him in the wind, for his scent is very fine . . . . we must keep more to the left, for the wind is in the eastward, and we must walk up against it."[41]

Jacob carries in in like vein until they actually do find a stag, but it is startled and gets away from them and then the teaching becomes incorporated into the action itself.

> "You see, Edward, that it requires patience to stalk a deer. . . . now we must go through the woods till we come to the lee of him on the other side of the dell."
> . . . .
> "What startled him, do you think?" said Edward.
> "I think, when you were crawling through the fern after me, you broke a piece of rotten stick that was under you, did you not?"
> "Yes, but that made but little noise."
> "Quite enough to startle a deer . . . "

They work their way around and do finally get to kill it. 'Edward started up on his legs with a shout of exultation,' but Jacob reprimands him, and when Edward asks him why, tells him there could have been another nearby.

> "How do you know but what there may be another lying down in the fern close to us?" . . . .
> "I see," replied Edward, "I was wrong; but I shall know better another time."

Once they have the deer Jacob teaches Edward how to decide how old it is.

> "I thought that he was a hart royal, and so he is."
> "What is a hart royal, Jacob?"
> "Why, a stag is called a brocket until he is three years old; at four years he is a staggart; at five years a warrantable stag; and after 5 years he becomes a hart royal."
> "And how do you know his age?"
> "By his antlers: you see this stag has nine antlers . . . "

Etc. Notice how Edward takes a role in his own education. Jacob may tell him a lot but Edward also asks questions to which Jacob responds. Later in the story when they are once again short of venison Jacob teaches him how to recognise the age of a deer from its trail.

> … they came upon the slot or track of a deer, but Jacob's practiced eye pointed out to Edward that it was the slot of a young one . . . He explained to Edward the difference in the hoof-marks and other signs by which this knowledge was gained.[42]

They find the slot of a stag and trace it to a thicket

> They walked around the thicket, and could not find any slot or track by which the stag had left the covert.[43]

Edward himself shoots the animal and, 'Remembering the advice of Jacob, Edward remained where he was, in silence and re-loading his piece.'[44] Sure enough there is one nearby which Edward himself spots, and when Jacob wonders how to get near him Edward takes charge, again putting into action the lessons he has learned, even echoing Jacob's words.

> "We cannot get at him from this spot," replied Edward; "but if we were to fall back to leeward, and gain the forest again . . . so as to get a shot at him. . . . It will require care and patience to manage that; but I think it might be done."[45]

Time passes, and we are into the second winter of their dispossession and Edward can now manage perfectly well on his own, 'Edward knew his business well, and no longer needed the advice of Jacob.'[46] Concern about venison, and the issue of Edward's stalking abilities goes into

abeyance for a while, but surfaces again when he goes across the forest to pick up a couple of young dogs from fellow forest worker, Oswald Partridge. It is there that he meets Heatherstone, the new Intendant, and has the debate with him that I quoted earlier. He goes out hunting with Oswald where his knowledge is put to the test when Oswald quizzes him.

> "Can you stalk a deer?"
> "I seldom go out without bringing one down."
> "Indeed! That Jacob is a master of his craft is certain. But you are young to have learnt it so soon. Can you tell the slot of a brocket from a stag?"
> "Yes, and the slot of a brocket from a doe."
> "Better still. We must go out together . ."[47]

And a couple of days later that is exactly what they do. Edward takes the lead and gives Oswald advice and instructions, of which the following are examples, and in all of which Edward demonstrates what he has learnt:

> "The wind is fresh from the eastern quarter: we will keep face of it, if you please – or rather, keep it blowing on your right cheek for the present"
> . . . . . .
> "This is the slot of a doe," said Edward in a low voice pointing to the marks; "yonder thicket is a likely harbour for the stag."
> . . . . .
> Edward pointed out to Oswald the slot of the stag into the thicket. They then walked around and saw no sign of the animal having left its lair.[48]

They end up shooting two deer, and Oswald is well impressed with Edward's accomplishments.

> "Well," said he, "you made me suppose that you knew something of our craft, but I did not believe that you we so apt as you thought yourself to be. I now confess that you are a master, as far as I can see, in all branches of the craft."[49]

Two examples, then, of the discourse of teaching and learning, or even, we might say, of learning and teaching, outside the classroom, in which what is learnt has an important role to play in the unfolding narrative. In both cases the learner is highly motivated to learn; Harry, not least because he has discovered that riding a broomstick was 'something he could do without being taught' and is also clearly desirous of learning how to play Quidditch; and the effectiveness of his learning is clearly demonstrated in his success in the actual match itself. In my example from *The Children of the New Forest* Edward is equally keen to learn, taking control of his learning by asking questions and seeking clarification: 'what startled him', 'what is a hart royal', 'how do you know his age'; and otherwise listening attentively to Jacob so that, before he is very much older, he is now 'master in all branches of his craft'.

Book Learning

We have already seen in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* how Hermione is able contribute to the plot by drawing on her reading, and similar examples can be found in other children's books, so, for an example, let me return to Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events Book the First: The Bad Beginning*, which I looked at in an earlier chapter.[50] The reader may recall that the dastardly Count Olaf, acting in loco parentis, wishes to get his hands on the orphaned Baudelaire children's inheritance, and lays plans which Klaus, by means of his reading, and Violet by means of her quick wittedness are able to thwart. We learn early on that Klaus is a keen reader, and makes extensive use of the books in his parents' large library. Though only twelve, '…. he had read a great many of them and had retained a lot of information from his readings.'[51] Count Olaf does not have a library but it turns out that his kindly next door neighbour, Justice Strauss, does; and when they express their enthusiasm for reading she tells them, '"..you are welcome to use any of my books, at any time."'[52] Count Olaf has a problem, since Violet is only 14, and he cannot lay his hands on her fortune until she comes of age, as Mr Poe, the banker, informs him. , '"The Baudelaire fortune . . . will not be used at all until Violet is of age."'[53] He discovers however, that he can get round this by marrying her, which he plans to do by means of a ruse which involves getting her to say the necessary words in front of a judge, who will be Justice Strauss herself, who is to read the real words of the wedding ceremony from the appropriate law book, all within the context of a play he has written in which Violet is to play a leading role. Olaf himself will play the lead, and, as he explains to Violet, she is to play the young woman that he marries.

> "It's a *very* important role," he continued … though you have no other lines than 'I do,' which you will say when Justice Strauss asks if you will have me."
> "Justice Strauss?" Violet said. "What does she have to do with it?"
> "She has agreed to play the part of the judge," Count Olaf said.[54]

Both children are suspicious:

> "I wish we knew something more about inheritance law," Klaus said. "I bet Count Olaf has cooked up some plan to get our money, but I don't know what it could be."[55]

.. and it doesn't take them long to think of turning to their next door neighbour's library for help, 'Surely Justice Strauss would have a book on inheritance law.' They go next door, but are interrupted in their studies. Nothing deterred Klaus hides a book entitled *Nuptial Law* under his shirt, spends all night reading it, and by dawn 'Klaus, had found out all he needed to know.'[56] He confronts Count Olaf with his findings.

> "'The laws of marriage in this community are very simple,'" he read out loud. "'The requirements are as follows: the presence of a judge, a statement of "I do" by both the bride and the groom, and the signing of an explanatory document in the bride's own hand.'"[57]

Olaf argues that that couldn't possibly be his aim because Violet isn't old enough to get married, but Klaus has found out the answer to that too.

> "She can get married if she has the permission of her legal guardian, acting in loco parentis," Klaus said. "I read that too."

And when Count Olaf asks Klaus why on earth he would want to marry Violet, Klaus has found out the answer to that as well.

> Klaus turned to a different section of *Nuptial Law*. "'A legal husband," he read out loud, "'has the right to control any money in the possession of his legal wife.'" Klaus gazed at Count Olaf in triumph. "You're going to marry my sister to gain control of the Baudelaire fortune!"

Count Olaf is not yet beaten: he gets hold of their baby sister, Sunny, puts her in a cage and dangles her from the tower, threatening to drop her if Violet doesn't go through with it. As he explains to Klaus,

> "You may have read more books than I have, but it didn't help you gain the upper hand in this situation. Now, give me that book which gave you such grand ideas, and do the chores assigned to you."[58]

The children are stymied, but Violet is to get a last minute idea. We have established earlier that she is right handed, which we initially discover when she is serving out food to the assembled theatre troupe,

> Violet's right hand ached from holding the heavy ladle. She thought of switching to her left hand, but because she was right handed she was afraid she might spill the sauce.[59]

and the fact is reiterated at various further points in the narrative, the final example occurring right at the point at which the play is about to begin. The children have been up the tower in the hope of rescuing Sunny at the last minute, but get caught, and it is on her way back down that Violet gets her idea.

> … she reached out with her right hand to grasp the banister, for balance. She looked at her right hand for a second, and began to think. All the way down the stairs, and out the door, and the short walk down the block to the theatre, Violet thought and thought and thought, harder than she had[60] in her entire life.

And we are to discover what that idea is once we get into the account of the play itself. We get to the marriage itself and Violet has already said 'I do' after Justice Strauss asks her if she will marry the count. Klaus has been watching from the wings.

> Klaus clenched his fists. His sister had said "I do" in the presence of a judge. Once she signed the official document, the wedding was legally valid.
> . . .
> .. he watched Violet take a long quill pen from Count Olaf. Violet's eyes were wide as she looked down at the document, and her face was pale, and her left hand was trembling as she signed her name.[61]

The count is victorious and when Justice Strauss has looked at the evidence she has to reluctantly agree that he and Violet are indeed married. The Count sends a message to get Sunny released and once she is safe Violet reveals her plan.

> "I did not sign the document in my own hand, as the law states . . . Like most people I am right handed. But I signed the document with my left hand."[62]

They consult Justice Strauss once again, and she finds for the children.

> "If Violet is indeed right handed," she said carefully, "and she signed the document with her left hand, then it follows that the signature does not fulfil the requirements of the nuptial laws. The law clearly states that the document must be signed in the bride's *own hand*. Therefore we can conclude that this marriage is invalid."

The important role that book learning has played in the evolving plot is clear enough. If the children hadn't read the law books they would not have discovered what Count Olaf was up to, and it is Violet's close attention to the detail of the text that gives her the idea that will save the day.

The Didactic Text

Finally in this chapter I want to look at a couple of examples where it would seem that the author has the aim of teaching readers themselves about some matter or other which they, the authors, hold dear. This teaching can take two forms. In the first we have a sense of the author teaching the reader indirectly by having one character teach another character directly, within the story. In the second the teaching is not mediated in this way and instead seems to be addressed directly to the reader. I run the risk here, of course, of falling into the intentionalist fallacy,[63] but some writers make no bones about their didactic purposes. Here, for example, is Captain Marryat's preface to *Masterman Ready*. He tells how he had been asked by his children to write a book for them along the lines of *Swiss Family Robinson*,[64] which he proceeded to read for himself, only to discover it to be full of the wildest factual inaccuracies and misinformation. 'Fiction,' he argues, 'when written for young people, should, at all events, be *based* upon truth,' and he continues,

> My idea is to show the practical man in Ready, and the theoretical in the father of the family; and, as the work advances, to enter more deeply into questions which may induce children to think, or, by raising their curiosity, stimulate them to seek for information.[65]

So let me take my first example from *Masterman Ready* itself.[66] The plot: the Seagrave family, on their way to Australia where they are intending to settle, are wrecked on a desert island. With them is the seasoned old seaman, the Masterman Ready of title, and effectively the co-protagonist of the book alongside the 12 year old Seagrave son, William. William does indeed gain a good deal of practical knowledge working alongside Ready, but here is his father teaching him about the formation of coral reefs. [67] William has taken his father across to the leeward side of the island to show him where he and Ready have discovered a source of fresh water and in the process discovered a lagoon protected by reefs. When he and his father get there William comments on the beauty of the lagoon.

> "Is not this beautiful, father?" said William.
> "Yes, indeed it is, my dear boy," replied Mr. Seagrave.

Mr Seagrave now makes the most of his opportunity to explain to William how coral islands are formed.

> "Who would have ever imagined, William," said Mr. Seagrave, "that this island, and so many more which abound in the Pacific Ocean, could have been raised by the work of little insects not bigger than a pin's head."

Having piqued William's curiosity Mr Seagrave picks up a piece of coral, and shows him the hundreds of little holes that once held the insects that were responsible for producing it and William then wants to know more.

> "Yes I understand that; but how do you make out that this island was made by them? that's what I want to know."
> "The coral grows at first at the bottom of the sea, where it is not disturbed by the winds or waves: by degrees, as it increases, it advances higher and higher to the surface, till at last it comes near to the top of the water…."

And he explains how, once it has reached the top of the water it becomes a reef. William prompts again:

> "Then how does it become an island?"
> "By very slow degrees; the time, perhaps, much depending upon chance: for instance a log of wood floating about, and covered with barnacles, may ground upon the coral reefs; that would be a sufficient commencement, for it would remain above water, and then shelter the coral to the leeward of it, until a flat rock had formed,

> level with the edge of the water. The seabirds are always looking for a place to rest upon, and they would soon find it, and then their droppings would, in the course of time, form a little patch above water, and other floating substances would be thrown upon it; and land birds, which are blown out to sea, might rest themselves on it, and the seeds from their stomachs, when dropped, would grow into trees and bushes."
>
> "I understand that."
>
> "Well then, William, you observe there is an island commenced as it were, and, once commenced, it soon increases, for the coral would then be protected to leeward, and grow up fast…."

And so on and so forth, as Mr Seagrave adds leaf mould and a passing coconut or two until you have an island. It is to be noted that the explanation is driven by William's questioning: William asks the questions that an interested reader would also want to ask, and I myself have a sense that I have 'always known', as the saying is, how coral islands were formed, and I'm pretty certain that I got the knowledge from reading the book when I was young. And given Marryat's declared didactic aim of encouraging his readers 'to enter more deeply into questions which may induce children to think, or, by raising their curiosity, stimulate them to seek for information,' at least so far is this reader is concerned, he would seem to have admirably achieved his purpose. As for his further stated aim that fiction for young people should be based upon the truth, it should be noted that he was a member of the Royal Society, of which Darwin was also a member, and the formation of coral islands was very much a matter of current interest, Darwin himself having delivered a paper to the society on the subject some two years before the publication of the novel, and Marryat's explanation was one of several that were current at the time.

As far as the actual story is concerned, the account has only a tangential relationship to it. The fact that there is a lagoon protected by coral reefs is one factor that will contribute to the families decision to move their base camp there, though the discovery of fresh water is a much more crucial factor in that decision but otherwise Mr Seagrave's account functions only in the most general sense of describing the origins of the island that they find themselves living on, and explaining how there came to be a coral reef there in the first place. Even more tangentially it can perhaps also be seen as part of the minor discourse of the idyll that runs through the book, in that on several other occasions in the text the beauty of the island is also commented upon, and the sense of being independently self-sufficient in a beautiful place suffuses the narrative. For instance after they have discovered water, Ready suggests to William that '"Now we have everything we can wish for on this island"'[68]; and at the end of the book when they have been rescued, Mrs. Seagrave is sorry to leave, '"We shall never be more happy than we were on that island."'[69]

My next example, *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serraillier, was written some 105 years later in 1956. It set in the Second Word War, and for all that the events it describes had only happened some sixteen or seventeen years previously to the date of publication, for young readers it is effectively a historical novel, and as such the historical background needs to be generally accurate, and while there are certainly some passages that read like undigested history lesson[70], other didactic

elements are woven into the unfolding narrative more thoroughly. Perhaps the didactic purpose can be detected in the very first paragraph of the story.

> This is the story of a Polish family, and of what happened to them during the Second World War and immediately afterwards. Their home was in a suburb of Warsaw, where the father, Joseph Balicki, was headmaster of a primary school. He and his Swiss wife Margrit had three children. In early 1940, the year when the Nazis took Joseph away to prison, Ruth, the eldest was nearly thirteen, Edek was eleven, and the fair haired Bronia, three.[71]

In the paragraph the fictional family who are to be the focus of the story are established, but so is the factual background of the behaviour of the Nazis in Warsaw at the time. And rather as Marryat did in his preface, Serraillier establishes his bona fides in an introductory note where he tells us that, though some of the place names are fictional,

> All the other place names are real and can be found on the map of Europe. The description of the Red Army on the March is based on eye-witness accounts in J. Stransky's *East Wind over Prague*.[72]

As the story proceeds the children's mother also gets arrested and their house is blown up, and the children find themselves living in a cellar amongst the ruins. Ruth and Bronia get ration cards and Edek scavenges for food and gets odd bits of casual labour. He daren't apply for a ration card for fear of being arrested and carted off to Germany to work in the labour camps.

> Edek had no ration card. He had not dared to apply for one, as that would have meant disclosing his age. Everyone over twelve had to register, and he would almost certainly have been carried off to Germany as a slave worker.[73]

In the summer they move out into the country and Edek smuggles food into the city to sell on the black market, but again the threat of the labour camps hangs over his head.

> Boys as strong as he was would be carried off to Germany, for the Nazis were getting short of labour at home.[74]

Then one night he gets caught and Ruth feels the loss dreadfully.

> Edek had been their life-line. Food, clothes, money – they depended on him for all of these.[75]

Finding Edek now becomes an important narrative imperative, and the question as to whether he has been shipped off to the labour camps and what happened to him there and whether he has even survived becomes an important one. The narrative then skips a couple of years, and Warsaw has been occupied by the Russians. Ruth finds a friendly Russian sentry whom she persuades to find out what has happened to Edek. He discovers that he is in a transit camp at

Posen, and so, with the further intention of travelling on to Switzerland where they hope to find their grandparents, off to Posen they go. There indeed they do find Edek, an emotional moment, and carry on to Switzerland, jumping a train and riding in a cattle trucks with other refugees who tell stories of their escapes to pass the time. Edek has one to tell, which he will if he and his sisters can get nearer to the stove that's in the truck.

> "I was caught smuggling cheese into Warsaw, and they sent me back to Germany to slave on the land," he said. "The farm was near Guben and the slaves came from all parts of Europe, women mostly, and boys of my age. We were at it from dawn to dark. In winter we cut peat to manure the soil. In spring we did the sowing – cabbage crop mostly. At harvest time we packed the plump white cabbage heads in crates and sent them into town.. We lived on the outer leaves – they tasted bitter. I tried to run away, but they always fetched me back. Last winter when the war turned against the Nazis and the muddles began I succeeded.[76]

It is difficult to read this paragraph without feeling that his description of the farm and the work that went on there is as much history book as there is fiction. The clause, 'the slaves came from all parts of Europe, women mostly, and boys of my age' has a particular ring to it that speaks to me of history lesson. But the paragraph is also an integral part of the story so far, in that we finally find out that Edek was indeed caught smuggling and that he did indeed end up in a labour camp, which gives the phrase 'boys my age' a double function. The didactic and the fictional are woven together in a single narrative. It should be added that Serraillier had done his research or in other ways knew whereof he wrote: there was indeed a labour camp near Gruben, a real town on the Polish German border, and the area was predominantly agricultural, so farm work would certainly have been the order of the day.[77]

For my final example let me look at a 'young adult' book, *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow, in which the didacticism is in one way so obvious that it passes you by, concealed, as it is, within the first person narration of the protagonist. He is one Marcus Yallow, a high school student, and the story involves him and three of his friends getting arrested and held incommunicado by the Department of Homeland Security, the DHS, when there is a terrorist attack in San Francisco. Marcus is released after a couple of days but one of his friends disappears much more permanently, and the overarching story arc is about Marcus's attempts to find out where he is and to get him released. Marcus is a computer whizz kid, and a good deal of the text is taken up with accounts of what he is doing on his computer or on his Xbox, but in order for readers to understand what is going on he has to explain it to them, thus effectively putting him in teaching mode and the reader in learning mode, most of the time by implication, though quite often by the use of the generic 'you' or even by direct address. A couple of examples taken at random of the generic 'you' which I've underlined to make my point:

> Gait-recognition software takes pictures of <u>your</u> motion, tries to isolate <u>you</u> in the pics as a silhouette, then tries to match the silhouette to a database to see if it knows who <u>you</u> are.

Or:

> To build <u>your</u> own laptop, <u>you</u> start by ordering a "bare-book" – a machine with just a little hardware in it and all the right slots.

And as I say from time to time he even uses direct address:

> Let's just leave it at that, okay?

And clearly he enjoys explaining things:

> Teaching people how to use technology is always exciting.[78]

One of the major themes of the book concerns the surveillance of our everyday lives by the authorities; it is a theme that is established in the very first sentence of the book.

> I'm a senior at Cesar Chavez High in San Francisco's sunny Mission district, and that makes me one of the most surveilled people in the world.[79]

And right from the start Marcus is using his knowledge of computers and how they work to circumvent the various surveillance tools that the school has, the phone monitoring, the monitoring of school computer use, the radio ID tags on library books, the gait recognition software mentioned above, etc. Things become more serious when, after he has been released, he discovers that his computer has been bugged by the DHS, and he is faced with the task of trying to evade their surveillance, which he is now determined to do. For Marcus,

> The world had changed forever. "I'll find a way to get them," I said. It was a vow.'[80]

He faces two problems, the first is to build a network of friends and supporters to help him, and the second is to find a way of communicating with them that beats the DHS's surveillance, which he proposes to do by using his Xbox rather than his computer, and then creating an unbreakable code to do it with, complete with its own cyphers, the operation of which he proceeds to illustrate by going back to World War II and giving us a little history lesson.

> The Nazi cypher was called Enigma, and they used a little mechanical computer called an Enigma Machine to scramble and unscramble the messages they got. Every sub and boat and station needed one of these, so it was inevitable that eventually the Allies would get their hands on one.
>
> When they did, they cracked it. That work was led by my all-time personal hero, a guy named Alan Turing, who pretty much invented computers as we know them today. Unfortunately for him, he was gay, so after the war ended the stupid British government forced him to get shot up with hormones to "cure" his homosexuality and he killed himself.[81]

As the narrative progresses things get a great deal more complicated, but the lessons learned from the breaking of the Enigma code are never far from Marcus's mind, and are continuously brought to bear on the developing story. As can be seen Marcus also takes the opportunity to inform the reader that Turing was gay, a fact which, by contrast with the Enigma account, has little or no structural importance.

To sum up: in this chapter I have looked at a number of examples of the discourses of learning and teaching that are to be found operating in children's books. Within the context of schools and classrooms official school curriculum knowledge has various roles to play in the plot. In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* the testing of curriculum knowledge becomes the McGuffin that drives the whole plot. At various points in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, curriculum knowledge, generally mediated by Hermione, is an important element in the developing story. And in *Ramona the Pest* the actual learning going on in an actual classroom is a little story in and of itself. Outside the classroom we find characters who, though not actual teachers, effectively act as teachers: Wood teaching Harry about Quidditch in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* or Jacob Armitage teaching Edward how to stalk deer in *The Children of the New Forest*. In both cases what is taught has an important structural role to play in the unfolding narrative. I then looked at book learning, similar in form to curriculum knowledge in many ways, and we saw how the children in the Lemony Snicket novel were able to use Klaus's researches in the next door library to outwit the dastardly Count Olaf. I have only looked at one example here, but I hope it makes my point. One needs to look no further that Hermione's contribution in the Harry Potter example to see that it is working in exactly the same way. Finally I examined three examples of didacticism in texts. In *Little Brother*, though it is well concealed within the first person narration, we nonetheless find ourselves as readers suddenly learning about Alan Turing, and what we learn is again important in plot terms. In *The Silver Sword* the little history lessons are not so well concealed, but again are important in plot terms. In *Masterman Ready*, learning about the formation of coral islands can be seen as having an overall plot relevance, but only in the most general terms, and perhaps comes the closest to being a piece of information aimed directly at the reader, mediated only by William's highly pertinent interest in the whole subject. As for learning from experience, which I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I shall postpone discussion of that until my next chapter about Robinsonades, where it is, it seems to me, of particular relevance.

[1] Ransome 1933 p.55

[2] *The Fifth Form and St Dominic's* being a Victorian children's book was, thank goodness, published long before the days that there were such things as young adults, instead there was just juvenile fiction so it didn't matter how old you were when you read it.

[3] For the benefit of those readers not familiar with the English education system, public schools are far from being 'public' in the sense of being funded by the state. They are, rather, fee paying schools, where most of the pupils are boarders, and back in the time that Reed was writing, they were boys' schools, the girls didn't get a look in.

[4] Reed 1887, p.2

[5] ibid p.5

[6] ibid. p.37

[7] ibid. p.39

[8] ibid. pp.95, 96

[9] ibid. p.171

[10] ibid. p.210

[11] ibid. p.212

[12] ibid. p.234

[13] ibid. p.247

[14] For those of you unfamiliar with the term it is Hitchcock's term for the pretext for the plot - it doesn't matter what it is, the important thing is that it should 'be of vital importance to the characters' – see Truffaut 1968 pp.157, 158

[15] op.cit. p.65

[16] ibid. p.126 et seq.

[17] ibid. p.128

[18] ibid. pp 20, 21

[19] ibid. pp.86, 87

[20] Cleary 1968

[21] This, and the following quotes, ibid. p.71 et seq

[22] This, and the following exchanges ibid. p.17 et seq.

[23] Rowling 1997

[24] ibid. p.161

[25] ibid. Ch 8, p.99 et seq

[26] ibid. pp.126, 127

[27] ibid. p.130

[28] ibid. p159

[29] ibid. pp162,163

[30] ibid. p.198

[31] ibid. p.201/202

[32] ibid. p.206

[33] ibid. p.111

[34] This, and the following quotes, ibid. p.124 et seq.

[35] ibid. pp 137,138

[36] Marryat 1847

[37] This, and the following examples, ibid. Loc 138988 et seq

[38] ibid Loc 139232

[39] ibid. Loc. 139995

[40] ibid. Loc. 139135

[41] This, and further quotes in this account, ibid. Loc. 139163 et seq

[42] ibid, Loc. 139316

[43] ibid. Loc. 139325

[44] ibid. Loc. 139332

[45] ibid. Loc 139340

[46] ibid. Loc. 139728

[47] ibid. Loc. 140145 et seq.

[48] These examples ibid. Loc. 140213 et seq

[49] ibid. Loc. 140247

[50] Snicket 1999. I have already discussed the book a bit in Ch. 3 which is about relationships between children and adults in kids' books.

[51] ibid. p.4

[52] ibid. p.38

[53] op. cit. p.23

[54] ibid. p.77

[55] This, and the following quote, ibid. pp.79, 80

[56] This, and the following quotes, ibid. p. 95 et seq.

[57] ibid. p.97

[58] ibid. p.110

[59] ibid. p.51

[60] ibid. p.132

[61] ibid. pp 143,144

[62] This, and the following quotes, ibid. p.150 et seq.

[63] Just to elaborate for a moment, up until this point I have been at pains to talk only about readers not writers; to suggest that an author intends something is something only an author her or himself can confirm. Hence 'the intentionalist fallacy'. For example to suggest that J.A.K Rowling 'intended' to show the impact of learnt lesson content on the developing plot in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* would seem to be patently absurd, though of course you never know, and only Rowling herself could actually confirm or deny it.

[64] Wyss 1814

[65] Marryat 1841, p.xii

[66] In this section I am re-working material from my essay *Some Thoughts About Masterman Ready* : see Sarland 2013

[67] ibid. pp.85 – 87

[68] ibid. p.74

[69] ibid. p.337

[70] See for instance the account of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising – Serraillier 1956 p.43 et seq.

[71] Serraillier 1956 p.9

[72] ibid. p.8

[73] ibid. p.38

[74] ibid. p.41

[75] ibid. p.42

[76] ibid. pp.67, 68

[77] Thankyou Wikipedia!

[78] Doctorow 2008, Locs. 196, 1015, 185, 3399

[79] Ibid. Loc. 74

[80] ibid. Loc. 1070

[81] ibid. Loc. 1235