FROM ORAL PERFORMANCE TO PICTURE BOOKS: A PERSPECTIVE ON ZULU CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that FROM ORAL PERFORMANCE TO PICTURE BOOKS: A PERSPECTIVE ON ZULU CHILDREN’S LITERATURE is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

........................................... ...........................................
Signature Date
(Cynthia Daphne Ntuli)
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SUMMARY

While over the years stakeholders such as publishers and academics have taken a keen interest in research into writing and publishing, they have been less concerned about research into indigenous children’s literature. In this thesis a comprehensive examination of children’s literature in the indigenous African languages of South Africa and in Zulu in particular, is presented. Qualitative research methods have been applied, using questionnaires and interviews to gain first-hand knowledge of problems and possible solutions to the dearth of original children’s literature in the indigenous languages. The data obtained in this regard has proved invaluable to the researcher and, hopefully, will be so to others in the future.

Oral folktales narrated before the influence of the missionaries qualify as children’s literature. The transition from the oral performance of these folktales to the reading of written children’s texts is discussed in detail. This is achieved by considering the milieu, themes, content, functions and values of this children’s literature. The discussion of *imilolozelo* (lullabies) and *izilandelo/izidlaliso* (game songs) presents the genre of children’s traditional oral poetry as a form of performance based not only on narrative but also on songs and/or chants interspersed with rhythmical movements to relay their message.

Zulu school readers as modern literature for children are also examined by tracing their background and the development of original Zulu children’s written literature since it was first recorded by the missionaries. Contents and themes of these early readers, dating from the 1800s, are examined and compared with a series of graded readers published in 1962 by C.L.S. Nyembezi.

The sixth chapter of the thesis investigates Zulu children’s picture books as contemporary literature. Various types of picture books and their functions are discussed.

Research findings point to an urgent need for the training of African authors in the writing of age-appropriate books in indigenous African languages. Lastly, the study proves that it is feasible to regard traditional oral and modern indigenous texts as children’s literature.

**Key terms:** Children’s literature; traditional oral literature; modern written literature; folktales; performance; audience; children’s poetry; *imilolozelo*; *izilandelo*; *izidlaliso/izangelo*; picture books; illustrations
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I dedicate this work to
my dear mother
Busisiwe Alvairy Masilela (uMaKhumalo)
# CHAPTER 1
## INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

Children’s literature in the indigenous languages of South Africa, particularly contemporary children’s books, is a genre that has been neglected, both by academics and publishers. The latter are known to be reluctant to publish children’s storybooks because there is no market for them among the general public. This is partly because in South Africa, books in African languages have until recently been published almost solely for educational purposes. Children’s literature is therefore regarded as being only for educational purposes. Getting age-appropriate books into the hands of children in South Africa has not been an easy process. Machet (2002: 7-8) appears to view the attitude of publishers as one of reluctance to get involved. She believes they have a positive role to play as far as literacy is concerned but she emphasises that:

The publishing industry is also an integral aspect of the social context of literacy. To encourage literacy, children need to have books available that affirm their language and culture... If there are limited numbers of books published in the indigenous languages which are culturally relevant then it becomes much more difficult for black children to develop and retain literacy.

If there are no books to read for pleasure, it stands to reason that it will be difficult to inculcate a culture of reading either at home or at school. The sad and most worrying part of it is that in the townships there are few libraries, while in many rural communities, libraries are almost nonexistent. At some schools, the libraries there do not function. According to Machet (2002: 6): "In a recent survey carried out by the Education Department, less than 50% of schools have libraries, ... Libraries are found more frequently in the former Model C schools, situated in predominantly white areas, as these were provided by the apartheid government".
Khumalo laments the lack of a culture of reading for pleasure amongst blacks in his article entitled *It’s a fact: darkies just don’t read – we must free ourselves from the slavery of the mind*:

Black people and reading just don’t mix. First things first: before anybody tells me about the strings of degrees they have, I am talking about general (i.e. non-academic) reading. In this country, with almost 50 million people, a book has to sell only 5 000 copies to be regarded as a best seller. That can only mean one thing: South Africans – of whom almost 90% are black and about 95% of those African – just do not read (Khumalo, 2009: 7).

However, his frank statements are accompanied by two reasons that serve as an explanation of the prevailing state of affairs. He points out that:

Firstly, the inferior Bantu education – which most of us were exposed to – never ever encouraged us to read. The last thing the National Party wanted was vast numbers of knowledgeable blacks. Go to any black household and you will find lots of music tapes, LPs, CDs, and DVDs and a handful, if any, of general books. That, by the way, includes blacks in the suburbs. The lack of reading is a black thing, irrespective of where you live. It was way fashionable to have loads of music than to be truly knowledgeable. … The second reason why black people don’t read is, admittedly, because reading is not a basic need. So as long as they have to worry about basic things like where they are going to sleep and where their next meal will come from, the last thing on their minds will be: “What book am I going to read today?” (Khumalo, 2009: 7).

It is apparent that this problem has been left for too long without any drastic steps to curb it. The problem is further exacerbated by time and work constrictions which limit quality time spent with children.

In the past, children experienced the rich oral culture of storytelling. Storytelling was a form of entertainment and teaching. Over the years, as the culture of transmitting knowledge orally from one generation to the next rapidly changed, and all the information was recorded and stored in books. The storyteller was now substituted by teachers at schools or caregivers at crèches. Teachers have to follow the syllabus and the subject matter. This begs the question: do schools
provide enough time and space for children to read? If they are providing the
time, what type of books are children reading? Research has shown that
children whose parents read storybooks to them before they begin formal
education have an added advantage over other children when they start school.
Children’s interest in reading books does not occur naturally but is inspired by
the pleasure of sharing a book with the parent (Bus & Van Ijzendoorn, 1995).
Africans have a storytelling background and for their children reading is a
gospel that must be more widely preached. This is even more the case today
when many children’s leisure time has been taken up by the media and
technology.

The Zulu language boasts the highest number of authors of all indigenous
languages in South Africa. Despite this, the writing of children’s literature has
not been given the attention it deserves by all these Zulu authors. They have
concentrated mainly on the production and reproduction of traditional oral
children’s literature, and school textbooks meant for study purposes. African
authors are ignorant about children’s literature: they are uninformed about the
value of storybooks and few of them know how to write contemporary children’s
literature.

Despite attempts by some authors to write school books, not much effort has
been made to promote the writing of new and original children’s books. In the
past, school children were served mainly a staple diet of folktales from school
readers, some of which were recorded by the missionaries and date back to the
1900s. This sad state of affairs has resulted in African children who are unable
to master their home language, especially in the townships. In some homes, for
instance, children speak two languages, e.g. Sotho (mother’s tongue) and Zulu
(father’s tongue). This is because that they are not fully exposed to language
from a tender age, i.e. at crèches, pre-primary schools or via the media. This
has its own disadvantages because some of these learners never really achieve
a complete command of these languages, unlike those, for instance, who grew
up in a predominantly Zulu-speaking area like KwaZulu-Natal, i.e in the case of
the Zulu student. Machet (2002:9) illustrates this very well using English as an example:

Because of the predominance of education through the medium of English, black learners are exposed to *subtractive bilingualism* at school. This refers to a situation where a child’s first language is not adequately developed or maintained, at the expense of high exposure to a second language in school which, in turn, adversely affects the development of bilingualism.

With the advent of the new political dispensation in South Africa, many African children have been adversely affected by the country’s language developments. Most of these children, especially those who attend previously white schools, do not have a solid foundation or good grasp of their own languages as they were never taught in their mother-tongue at primary school. English has been the medium of instruction from grade 1 and in some homes black parents use English as the home language and code-switch frequently. As a result, children suffer from subtractive bilingualism and become more articulate in English than in their mother-tongue. They cannot read children’s literature in the vernacular because at school they are never exposed to books written in their home languages. This happens perhaps also because there is no such a great demand for such books. This hampers the development of indigenous children’s literature and children who might have a talent for writing may inadvertently be put off writing children’s books in the vernacular. They have not mastered their own languages and thus cannot fully appreciate books written in these languages. People do not become “self-actualised and are unlikely to realise their full potential unless their very basic aesthetic and intellectual needs are met. Unless these needs are satisfied early during their developing years, their craving for knowledge and the beautiful are too often suppressed” (Cianciolo, 1981: 2).

The promotion, publication and teaching of children’s literature in African languages is thus highly desirable. It will not only develop in our children a love for their own languages but will also instil a sense of pride in becoming eloquent
in these languages. In addition, this will lay a foundation for better performance at school and greater success at tertiary level.

1.2 Research problem

Numerous books have been written and research conducted in the field of the history and development of children’s literature in languages such as English, but children’s literature in the indigenous languages of South Africa remains uncharted territory. Huck’s excitement in her book published more than twenty years ago, emphasises this sad state of affairs:

Today, there is an abundance of literature for children that never existed before in the history of the world. Different kinds of books, vastly increased production of books, and widespread distribution techniques make thousands of books available to children. Revolving racks in drug-stores, bus depots, and airports display brightly illustrated books designed to attract young readers. Parents select books as they pile groceries into the cart. Encyclopaedias are found next to frozen food. Children’s paperbacks have become as popular as adult ones. … Thousands of children also visit attractive rooms in public libraries each week where trained librarians give them assistance (Huck, 1987:3).

A scenario such as this should be the ultimate aim of those interested in the development of children’s literature in South Africa. Books written in African languages, especially original ones and not simply translations would be fertile ground for research. Contemporary children’s literature could serve as a springboard for different types of research. As in the case of adult literature, there is plenty that could be examined and analysed in children’s literature. Researchers from various African languages could engage in comparative research, for instance, on the Nguni and Sotho children’s books, African language children’s books and those in English, Afrikaans and so on. The comparison could also be extended to adolescent literature. Studies could be made of themes, translations, the historical development of children’s books, the value of children’s books, bibliographies, how to write children’s books and so on.
However, as far as research into the history and development of indigenous literature in African languages in general is concerned, the situation is rather different. Gérard (1983) and (1994) wrote on the historical development of the indigenous African literatures. Ntuli and Swanepoel (1993), in an attempt to address the void in accounts of historical developments in African literature, wrote a book entitled *Southern African Literature in African Languages*. Furthermore, in 1998 Ntuli and Makhambeni wrote a book entitled *Izimpande* (The roots) with the aim of providing a survey of the development of Zulu literature. In both these books, however, research on contemporary children’s literature is conspicuous by its absence.

In 1998, a bibliography of the Zulu Language up to the year 1998 entitled *Izincwadi Eziqoqiwe Ngoli MiLwesiZulu* (Zulu Bibliography) was compiled by Mokhonoana and Strassner (with an introduction by C.T. Msimang) but to date, there is no bibliography of children’s literature in Zulu. In fact, during this period, besides school readers and books on folklore, there were no original children’s books published in any of South Africa’s African languages. This points to the fact that the study and writing of children’s storybooks in African languages was marginalised and hardly considered worthy of teaching or research at university. Textbooks and folklore were, on the other hand, overemphasised. This leads one to ask where the whole debate leaves children who should, from a tender age, learn to read books in their home language which reflect their experiences, their past, norms, values and culture. It is this question that has prompted this research study.

The researcher questions what the level of language proficiency among South African children might have been had they been exposed to books in their own languages from an early age. Would they have developed a love for reading in their home languages? What research might have been done on contemporary children’s books, the number of children’s books and authors if the missionaries, authors, publishers, government and all stakeholders had prioritised the issue of children’s books in the indigenous languages of South
Africa? One need only think of the upheavals caused by the youth in 1976 when they revolted against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction to realise how a firm stance on issues can turn things around!

1.3 Aim and objectives

The primary aim of this research study is to generate and promote interest in the area of African children’s literature and into the further development of authentic contemporary children’s books written in indigenous South African languages. This will be achieved through tracing the origins and development of children’s literature in Zulu that has been available since the pre-colonial era of oral performance to the period of the conversion of oral art into written text by the missionaries. Picture books will also be analysed as important contemporary children’s literature which is vital in promoting the reading habit.

In an attempt to illustrate that, like adult literature, indigenous children’s literature is important and is a treasure trove of untapped research, the study will investigate subgenres of both traditional verbal art and contemporary indigenous written children’s literature with special reference to children’s literature in Zulu. Cognisance will be taken of the function and value of these subgenres as a form of children’s fiction. In a nutshell, the study aims to raise awareness of the importance of doing research on traditional and contemporary children’s books written in the indigenous African languages, and of writing them.

1.4 Delimitation of scope

Although this is a comprehensive study of children’s literature in Zulu, it does not cover the large number of oral and written modern children’s literature in Zulu available today. It does, however, encompass the contributions of the missionaries, selected children’s stories written in English and translated into Zulu which reflect the people, setting and culture of South Africa, and original
children’s books in Zulu. This analysis will concentrate on specific samples from various age groups. These age groups will range from children under a year old up to 12-year-olds. In the category of traditional oral literature, different types of folktales, lullabies and children’s game songs will be discussed. In the category of contemporary literature, the focus will be on the contents of a number of school readers and various types of picture books.

1.5 Research method

Hofstee (2006: 108) defines method as “the general technique/s that you employ to examine your thesis statement, for example, interviews, a case-study, content analysis or an experiment”. According to him, a thesis statement is the central argument of a person’s work and it “names that argument”. He believes that its role is to allow researchers to accurately define what they will investigate (Hofstee, 2006: 19, 20). In an attempt to show that African children’s literature could also be regarded as a field of research, a qualitative research investigation will be undertaken.

The aim of conducting a qualitative study is to produce findings (De Vos et al., 2002: 339). An overview of the approach to data collection processes, ethical issues and data analysis is discussed below.

The researcher has decided to use qualitative methods because this seems most apt for this type of study. Qualitative research can be defined as follows:

Qualitative research is a field of enquiry applicable to many disciplines and subject matters. Qualitative researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern that behavior. The qualitative method investigates the why and how of decision making, not just what, where, when. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qualitative research)

This definition emphasises the investigation of the why and how of the state of affairs. The analysis of data using these questions will elicit answers to why the
field of children’s literature in African languages has been neglected by authors, publishers and African researchers alike. It will also suggest how to inspire research investigation into children’s books written in African languages.

When defining qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) explain that the word *qualitative* suggests an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured. They add that qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:8).

Ryan and Bernard (2000:769) provide the following examples of data that could be regarded as qualitative data: texts, different types of narratives, newspapers, folktales, films and life histories.

1.5.1 Data collection

A semi-structured approach was used to collect data and the data collection tools used were interviews and questionnaires.

According to De Vos (1998:298), semi-structured interviewing is “social interaction between equals in order to obtain research relevant information. Qualitative researchers direct interviews by means of a definite research agenda in order to gain information on the specific phenomenon under study”. These types of interviews are also described as follows:

Semi-structured interviews focus on a list of key themes or questions that the interviewer wants the respondent to address. The semi-structured interview does allow for the respondent to add new information but they should attempt to keep to the key themes. Interviews of this kind may be a one-off event, but may take place over a period of time, each interview adding depth and richness to the information obtained previously. (http://chsd.uow.edu.au/Publications/2007pubs/care)
Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with Zulu and English authors of children’s literature in order to collect data. Each participant was interviewed in his or her place of choice. As the researcher was awarded funds to assist in the research study, some interviews were conducted in a quiet place at hotels and others at participant’s homes. One participant preferred to be interviewed at the researcher’s workplace. Interviews were conducted in both English and Zulu because Zulu authors preferred to respond in their own language. The interviews were subsequently transcribed by Zulu and English-speaking transcribers.

The researcher personally conducted the interviews using a set of questions prepared to steer the interviews in the right direction. Questionnaires were written in English and in Zulu and were sent to Zulu authors, teachers, lecturers and English authors. Participants were free to respond in the language of their choice. Most participants responded in English.

Questionnaires were developed using background information from relevant literature and research on the topic. The literature provided information, analysis and criticism of traditional oral Zulu children’s stories and contemporary children’s literature in general. The researcher chose to follow this route because it is generally regarded as the most convenient and quickest method to gather information within a short space of time. Gergen and Gergen (2000: 1025) believe that the domain of qualitative enquiry offers some of the richest and most rewarding explorations available in contemporary social sciences.

Questionnaires were sent out to relevant stakeholders such as university students, school teachers, academics, authors and publishers. A number of questions were posed regarding various themes and issues pertinent to the study as a whole. The researcher distributed questionnaires and participants were given a period of two weeks to complete and return them in self-addressed envelopes. Some questionnaires were sent by email and others by surface mail while some were personally delivered. Questionnaires were also
distributed in lecture rooms to some level 1, 2 and 3 Zulu students at the University of South Africa, several of whom were qualified teachers. The questionnaires included a covering letter that introduced the researcher and the research topic and briefly explained the aim of the study. As far as the interviews were concerned, interviewees were contacted by telephone or email to schedule dates and venues for the tape-recording of interviews. The research topic and the aim of the study were explained beforehand.

1.5.2 Ethical measures

Christians (2000: 138) provides the following four codes of ethics guidelines to consider when conducting research: informed consent, deception, privacy, confidentiality and accuracy. The principle of informed consent was considered in this study because as participation was voluntary, participants were informed about the nature and aim of the research in which they were involved. No form of deception was exercised because all questions asked were based on literature and participants’ knowledge, experience and profession. Codes of ethics insist on safeguards to protect people’s identities and those of the research locations (Christians, 2000: 139). Anonymity was ensured and it was explained to individuals that writing their names on the questionnaires was optional. Interviewees had no objection to their names being included in the collected data. However, one participant, Niki Daly, requested to see the interview end product prior to the publication of the study (see the interview which he later edited in 6.3).

Christian (2000: 140), when deliberating about accuracy, emphasises that:

Ensuring that data are accurate is a cardinal principle … I. Fabrications, fraudulent materials; omissions and contrivances are both nonscientific and unethical.

To show that data were accurately presented, examples of questionnaires and interview questions are contained in an appendix and the recorded tapes will be
kept safe for a number of years so that they are accessible to other researchers.

1.5.3 Data analysis

According to De Vos et al. (2002: 339), data analysis is “a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data”. Grounded theory will be used to analyse the data in this study. Rubin and Babbie (as cited by Fouché in De Vos et al., 2002: 273) describe grounded theory as “a term used with reference to the creation of theory based (but not exclusively) on observation rather than on deduction”. Ryan and Bernard (2000: 782-783) make the following comments about grounded theory:

Grounded theorists want to understand people’s experiences in as rigorous and detailed a manner as possible. They want to categorise categories and concepts into substantive and formal theories. … Grounded theory is an iterative process by which the analyst becomes more and more “grounded” in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works.

Data will be analysed according to some of De Vos’s five steps of data analysis and interpretation, for instance, collecting and recording data, reading, memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting, etc. (De Vos et al., 2002: 340). Furthermore, methods used in grounded theory, including open coding, axial coding and selective coding, will be employed. Coding describes the manner in which data are broken down, conceptualised and assembled in new ways (De Vos et al., 2002: 346). Open coding involves the naming and categorising of phenomena through data examination. Axial coding is defined as a “set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (De Vos et al., 2002: 348). Strauss and Corbin (2002: 349) define selective coding as “a process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those
relationships and filling in categories that need further refinement and development”.

Zulu transcripts and questionnaires were translated and data was analysed in English.

1.6 Theoretical framework

The term children’s literature was chosen because it is an all inclusive term within the genre of literature for children. Furthermore, it allows one to look at children’s literature holistically because it includes both oral or traditional literature and contemporary children’s literature. Tiedt (1979: 17) defines children’s literature in various ways by using all-encompassing, pertinent, relevant and appropriate words:

Children’s literature is stories – exciting, well-developed, satisfying; pictures – joyful, interpretive, enhancing; films – animating, sensory, perceptive; recordings – voicing – hearing, reacting. Children’s literature is adventurous, informative, and poetic. Literature for children is feeling – hurting, laughing, hoping; experiencing – dramatizing, interacting, socializing; sharing – explaining, questioning, responding. Literature for children is drama, song, and dance.

As far as this definition is concerned, one has to keep in mind the difference that exists between oral stories for children and contemporary written children’s literature. Tiedt seems to have kept this in mind because she explains this by providing more details:

Literature is very much part of every child’s environment. It is not limited to the book nor is it part of the school setting. It includes the jingles of childhood, the rope-jumping songs that children teach each other, and the imaginary play that they invent. It includes stories recorded in books, on films or cassettes (1979: 17).

Hancock (2008: 34) provides a simple, comprehensible and vivid description:
Children's literature can be defined as literature that appeals to the interests, needs and reading preferences of children and captivates children as its major audience. Children's literature may be fictional, poetic, or factual, or a combination of any of these. The format that houses the children's literature may be a picture book in which story blends with compelling illustrations or photographs for a visual and verbal adventure through story or factual content. Or the format may be a chapter book in which quality writing carries the story through a sequential unfolding of fictional plot or information description. Also referred to as trade books (in contrast to textbooks), children's literature provides appealing formats and motivating content to inspire children as they progress as emergent, novice, developing, and master readers.

In contrast to Tiedt's definition, Hancock's definition focuses on printed children's books. This is seen in some of the following concepts that she employs: "factual", "picture books", "illustrations", "photographs" that "inspire children as they progress as emergent, novice, developing, and master readers". These definitions are both important and relevant and will be used to inform this study.

In order to facilitate and reinforce understanding of the study of children's literature, especially children's literature in Zulu, it is imperative to explain and define terms and concepts central to the study. The following are the primary concepts: children's literature, traditional children's literature, folktales, imilolo zelo (lullabies), contemporary children's literature, readers, picture books and contemporary realistic fiction.

Oral children's literature refers to an art form that was used before people could write and it includes folktales and lullabies. Contemporary children's literature takes the form of written texts and often features illustrations. Like traditional children's literature, contemporary children's literature is divided into sub-genres such as picture books, ABC and counting books, readers, etc.

Children's literature is referred to as izincwadi zabantwana in Zulu. Huck (1987:5-6) attempts to characterise children's literature by examining the term from various angles; focussing especially on 'who' and 'what' of children's
books. He defines a child’s book as a book a child is reading as opposed to an adult book which is a book that engages the attention of an adult. When defining the ‘what’ or the content of children’s books, he states that “… the content of children’s literature is limited by the experience and understanding of children” (1987:5). He goes on to say that

The only limitations, then, that seem to be binding on literature for children are those that appropriately reflect the emotions and experiences of children today. Children’s books are books that have the child’s eye at the center (Huck, 1987: 6).

Children’s literature can be categorised in two ways: by genre or by age-group. A genre is a category to which a work of literary art belongs, e.g. prose comprises the literary genres of the novel, short story and essay. So, children’s literature could be further categorised into traditional literature, picture books, poetry, etc. Although adult literature has no age category, children’s literature is sometimes grouped according to age categories: picture books, ages 0-5 for pre-readers, early readers’ books ages 5-7, and chapter books for ages 7-12. Children from 7-9 years of age read short chapter books and those from 9-12 read longer chapter books. Young adult fiction is meant for children of 13 to 18 years.

1.6.1 Traditional oral children’s literature

Tulloch (1994:1654) defines the word “tradition” as a custom, opinion or belief handed down to posterity especially orally or by practice. The various forms (or genres) of oral composition are commonly known by the following terms which carry very similar meanings: oral traditions, oral literature, orature, traditional literature, folk literature, or folklore. “Oral” signifies the mouth but also the face, the expression, the attitude of the whole person and this means that oral literature requires an audience in order to be performed, as the spoken word needs the listener. Oral traditions are forms of verbal art that use language and gesture, according to Canonici (1996: 2-3).
In Zulu, folklore is known as *ubuciko bomlomo* which literally means “oral art”. Zulu folklore or traditional oral art has been in existence since time immemorial. Taylor (2001: 24) describes folklore as “the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other material preserved in words”. An effort to determine the age of this art has proved to be a difficult task mainly because our forefathers were illiterate and there is a lack of accurate records (Ntuli & Swanepoel, 1993:8).

Folklore is very important and it can be regarded as the wealth or treasure chest of the nation. In his definition of oral art, Msimang (1991:1) alludes to the fact that no one can claim to be the composer of folktales:

*Ubuciko bomlomo yinkulumo enobuchwepheshe noma eyingxoxo eyedluliselwa ezizukulwaneni ngezizukulwane ngomlomo. Abadala baye bethi bezwa ngabadala kanti nabo bezwa ngabadala ababengaphambi kwabo … Inkulomo eyingxoxo ivamisa ukuba yizinganekwane ngezinhlobo zazo ezahlukene. Inkulomo engubuchwepheshe yona ibandakanya le mikhakha: iziphicaphicwano, izisho, izaga, nezinkondlo.*

(Folklore is an artistic speech or a narrative that is passed on from generation to generation through word of mouth. Elderly people often say that they got it from their seniors and those got it from the elders who came before them … Narrative prose is normally folktales which are divided into different types. Stylised prose includes the following types: riddles, idioms, proverbs and poetry.)

Ntuli (1993:139), in his article entitled “Zulu Literature”, puts things into perspective in the following remark:

Before contact with western civilisation the Zulu people did not have a sophisticated system of recording their ideas. There was a rudimentary form of communicating feelings which was used by girls who sent messages to their lovers by means of beads of various colours. This method was obviously limited. In spite of many limitations there was dynamic oral literature manifest mainly in prose narratives (*izinganekwane*) and praise poems (*izibongo*).
These observations indicate that, like all other cultures, Zulus had the gift of narration and poetry and of relaying messages in artistic ways, albeit in an unsophisticated manner. In short, this reflects the dynamic nature of verbal art.

1.6.1.1 Oral folktales (izinganekwane): in the beginning there was the word

The importance of the spoken word in the formation of anything visible was first demonstrated by God when He created the universe by using the spoken word. The idea of bringing stories into being by word of mouth is echoed in the lyrics of Gcina Mhlophe, one of South Africa’s most renowned storytellers. This song was first heard in Johannesburg in 2004 by the researcher at the 1st Southern African International Storytelling Conference:

In the beginning,  
There was the word, the word, the word,  
The word gave birth to languages,  
That's how stories were born,  
Through the word, the word, the word.

The term folktales; or izinganekwane in Zulu, is an umbrella term used to cover different types of traditional oral prose narratives for children. Zulu traditional prose narratives are divided into three main types, namely: myths, legends and folktales. This classification stems from Bascom’s (1965) classification. Callaway (1868), who is regarded as the first scholar and collector of Zulu folktales, used the English term “nursery rhymes” to refer to izinganekwane. It is odd that he chose to “baptise” Zulu folktales with a foreign name as the Zulu name was already in existence at the time. Although Msimang (1986) also seems surprised by this he does not criticise him for he says: “In a way, Callaway’s term is correct in that a folktale in its proper Zulu context is never related unless there are children around. But on the other hand, it must be borne in mind that adults may, and often do, form part of the audience” (1986:21). Scheub (1975:3) defines the folktale as “a performing art which has, as its mainspring, a core-cliché, a
song, chant or saying which is, during a performance, developed, expanded, and dramatized before an audience ....”

Vilakazi (1945:142) describes a folktale as a primitive tale and a narrative having some aesthetic value, not necessarily of mythic origin, which forms the most important sub-division of folklore. These are stories or narratives that originated long ago and were passed on by the storyteller from one generation to the next by word of mouth. According to Lickteig (1975: 18):

Early collectors of folk literature found that children were in the audience as the stories were told; oral literature was probably the main, if not exclusive, source of literature for generations of children.

Folktales are fictional and thus feature imaginary elements. The originators of folktales are often unknown. Canonici, in his definition of folktales, includes brief information about their educational value, that is, the “why” and the plot, or the “how”. He believes that folktales are:

...fictional creations for entertainment and relaxation. Their educational function is seen in the fact that they reflect aspects of human life and communicate simple messages, based on homespun wisdom, encoded in the stories. In order to sustain interest and to create suspense, the tales represent some form of conflict that must be resolved (Canonici, 1995:1).

Like Bascom, Canonici (1996:76) agrees that traditional prose narratives are usually divided into myths, legends and folktales and that the term used for these three forms is *folktale*, which signifies a tale which belongs to a particular population or language group, using prosaic or everyday language. This is in keeping with the Zulu tradition which uses *inganekwane* as a general, inclusive term.

Although Zulu folktales are classified into three types, it is also not uncommon to classify them according to themes and characters. In classifying Zulu folktales according to the main characters, Msimang, Wessels & Molefe (1993:
41) mentions the following most common themes: cannibal tales, ogre or monster tales, human tales and animal tales.

Storytelling occurred when children were gathered together in a homestead by the ugogo '(grandmother) or some other older person. During storytelling the ugogo was always a point of focus because she had something to offer to her listeners or audience, just as a reader becomes engrossed when she reads a book. “Kwesukasukela”“Kwasukasukela” or “(Kwathi) ngelinye ilanga”, or less commonly “Kwakukhona”, are introductory phrases equivalent to the English “Once upon a time”. Once the introduction has summoned the audience to attention, the audience responds by saying: “Cosu!” This is an ideophone which means “chipping off in small bits”. The story also has a closing formula: “Cosu! Cosu! Iyaphela-ke!” meaning “Bit by bit the story ends” (Msimang, 1999:21).

1.6.1.2 Children’s poetry: Imilolozelo (lullabies) and izilandelo (game songs)

Children’s traditional songs in Zulu are divided into two categories: imilolozelo, (lullabies) and izilandelo (game songs). Msimang (1991: 5) describes imilolozelo as a short poem or song used to lull a child to sleep. It is usually recited by a child’s mother or nursemaid. An important element of this poem is its song-like rhythm. In his definition of umlothelo, Msimang explains that the umlothelo is almost like an isilandelo and most of them are used to help children to sleep. Fraser (1996: 11) also describes imilolozelo as a kind of lullaby which would be used by a child-minder to relax and pacify a fretful child. Msimang (1987:7) points out that “Isilandelo lesi yinto yokuzijabulisa” (isilandelo is something used to bring joy).

Imilolozelo or lullabies are part of the Zulu heritage. Umlolozelo, also a lullaby, is referred to as isidenduzelo or isithunduzelo which means to “pat, comfort or to lull to sleep”. Some lullabies are almost akin to nursery rhymes in European
languages. Gule, Maphumulo, & Thwala (1993:51) describe *umlolozelo* as follows:

> **Umlolozelo** uyinkondlo ethile yokudlalisa nokuthunduzela umntwana. Uhleleka njengenkondlo nomu isizosha, kephe ulandwa ngezwi elisamculo . . . usangomana yokukhulisa abantwana . . . **Umlolozelo** uyinto eyakhiwe futhe eyaqanjwa abaqambi bakudala. Umlolozelo ungomunye wemidlalo yesiNguni ... wakha ubudlelwano phakathi kwengane nonina.

(A lullaby is a poem that is used to entertain a child or to induce a child to sleep; its structure is that of a poem, but it is voiced in a form of a song ... A lullaby is like a song that is used in the upbringing of children. It is something that originates from people of long ago. **Umlolozelo** is one of the games of the Nguni people... it builds a relationship between mother and child.)

Gule et al. explain the types of *imilolozelo* according to the way in which they are performed:

> **Kukhona umlolozelo oculwayo**, okungathi ushiwo ngezwi elisamculo. **Kukhona umlolozelo oba sankondlo.** Omunye umlolozelo uye ube sazibongo. **Kukhona nalowo mlolozelo oba sasililo, lapha unina wengane uyabalisa.** ... **Kukhona futhe nalokhu esikubiza ngokuthi izidlaliso nomu izangelo.** Kucishe kufane nomlolozelo (1993: 52).

(There are lullabies that are sung, they are uttered in a sing-song voice. There are lullabies that are like a poem. Some lullabies are like praise-poetry. There is also a lullaby that is like a lament, where the mother of a baby is complaining. There are also what we call game songs. These are almost like a lullaby).

This quotation points out that *umlozelo* is a form of poetry and song which can also be regarded as a type of game.

Vilakazi (1945:10) expresses the following viewpoint when he elaborates on the untainted form of *imilolozelo*:

> Nursery songs were rigid in form and bore the stamp of original compositions passed down from generation to generation. Unlike the nursery tales which suffered from personal additions and destructions as
time went on, these nursery songs had the effect of permanent structure, bound up with their musical rhythm and versification.

**Imilolozele** that have been collected and recorded by researchers are found in a number of anthologies of folklore, some of which will be mentioned in chapter five.

1.6.2 **Contemporary written children’s literature**

Contemporary written children’s literature is fiction for children which, upon its conception, is written down by a writer. The story in children’s literature is told mostly by means of pictures which have been drawn by an illustrator and are age-appropriate. Children’s literature published in books is referred to as contemporary when it deals with themes, characters and milieu that portray events of the modern world. Contemporary children’s literature is a genre that comprises various subgenres. It is completely different from traditional oral children’s literature.

In his attempt to answer the question: “What is not a children’s book?” Stewig (1988: 13) poses the following two questions of his own which could serve as guidelines:

1. Does the book deal honestly and forthrightly with children, portraying them candidly and accurately as children?
2. Does the book expect children to make associations or perform mental processes of which they are not capable?

These questions will be discussed in more detail in chapter six which deals with contemporary children’s literature.
1.6.2.1 Readers

A reader is a school textbook or a series of texts that have been prepared for children. Its content comprises folktales, poetry and stories and sometimes reading exercises and lessons that contain messages.

Like the earliest written folktales, the history of readers also goes back to the innovative and tireless work of the missionaries. Canonici (1996) remarks that the first school readers produced by missionary societies contained a large number of folktales, some collected among Africans, but some translated from European sources. This trend has continued in more recent publications, where some tales are typically African, but many are of uncertain origin. Furthermore, modern scholars of folklore have often adapted, or simply translated, tales found in books concerning other African countries, or even material published by African Americans as “African folklore”. It follows that not everything written in Zulu must be considered as “Zulu oral literature” in a strict sense (Canonici, 1996: 77).

1.6.2.2 Picture books

Picture books are children’s books complemented by illustrations. They are divided into different types according to the age of the reader. This study discusses the following types: toy books, alphabet books, counting books, concept books, wordless books, easy-to-read books and storybooks. However, in his chapter entitled “Studying Book illustration: looking with insight”, Stewig (1988: 45)) makes a distinction between picture books, picture storybooks and illustrated books in order to allow the reader to “study the range of illustrations in children’s books as well as the media and methods used by illustrators”.

(a) Picture books
As is the case in all subgenres of children’s literature, picture books are a form of art. They combine both the visual aspect of images and the verbal element because they are first read to young children when they are not yet literate. Picture books constitute literature that communicates and appeals to children which enriches, extends, and expands their background experiences, their literary and aesthetic interests, tastes and preferences by providing a variety of sensory images and vicarious experiences, plots, characters and themes (Cianciolo, 1981: 1).

Cianciolo (1981) believes that stories told in picture books may be classified as modern realistic fiction, here-and-now stories, as historical fiction and as fanciful fiction. Picture books may also include poetry, biography and concepts or information. Stewig (1988:45-46) explains that:

In picture books, the picture carries the entire message. This category includes alphabet books, counting books, and concept books (as well as wordless books …). In these kinds of books, different objects or ideas appear on each page, linked by the artist’s style but not necessarily by a sequential story line.

(b) Picture storybooks

Stewig’s explanation of picture storybooks makes it apparent that whereas picture books rely almost entirely on pictures, the message in picture storybooks does not focus on pictures only but also on action, characters and setting. He makes the following interesting observations which are central to a story:

In picture storybooks, the artist must show characters, settings, and actions in a way that will relate to and advance a plot (1988: 46).

He provides not only definitions but goes further to offer an example taken from a picture storybook which he uses to illustrate his point:
The story is stronger because of the pictures, and in the same way the pictures benefit from the author’s words. The words focus on the objects and events in the picture; the picture then elaborates on the words (Stewig, 1988:46).

On the other hand, Huck (1987:197) differentiates between a picture book and a picture storybook by describing a picture storybook as one that conveys its messages through both the art of illustration and the art of writing and that both the illustrations and the text must have narration.

(c) Illustrated books

According to Stewig (1988), there are fewer illustrations in these types of books than in picture storybooks and these illustrations are printed in limited colours. Unlike picture storybooks, where pictures complement the story, he points out that in illustrated books

The illustrations are extensions of the text and may add to the interpretation of the story but are not necessary for understanding it. These books are intended for children who have developed fluent reading skills (Stewig, 1988:47).

Although children’s literature can be divided into different genres, critics like Stewig (1988:433) believe that trying to group books into genres reveals that many do not fit exactly into one because some authors combine elements of more than one genre in a single book.

1.6.3 Contemporary realistic fiction

Although contemporary realistic fiction also falls under the category of picture books, the researcher has deemed it fit to set it apart from other genres because realistic fiction is known to be the most written about and researched. Contemporary realistic fiction is sometimes referred to as:
imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it was lived in the past or could be lived today. Everything in such a story can conceivably have happened to real people living in our natural physical world, in contrast to fantasy, where impossible happenings are made to appear quite plausible, even though they are not possible (Huck, 1987: 464).

According to Huck, contemporary realistic fiction books are texts about growing up and finding a place in the family, among peers and in modern society. She captures the content of realism for children by noting that “all aspects of coping with problems of the human condition may be found in contemporary literature for children” (1987: 464). In addition, she classifies books that are humorous or those that reflect special mysteries that involve animals, or sports stories and mysteries as realistic literature.

From this classification, it is apparent that the writers of realistic fiction could draw their stories from events that have actually occurred in the past by portraying them in fictional form. In the same vein, Huck (1987) provides the following examples from ordinary, daily occurrences when she points out that stories about orphans, mobile phones, bullies, television, poverty, physically challenged children; different talents and so on could be used in imaginative and innovative ways to inspire contemporary realistic stories. It argued that these types of stories could benefit children from different backgrounds, for instance, children from affluent families who have both parents. Such stories could provide them with new experiences and show them the world in a totally different light. Realistic books are important because they help children to cope with their own lives by showing them that children all over the world are subjected to challenges just like they are.

1.7 The origins and overview of the development of Zulu literature

The writing of Zulu literature seems to have occupied the minds of Zulu authors from the time the missionaries introduced literacy to people such as Magema Fuze, a pioneer who is regarded as one of the first Zulu authors. The groundbreaking contribution of the missionaries to the development of South
African languages was the elevation of the verbal art to the written form. This has given birth to a number of prolific Zulu writers and the Usiba Writers’ Guild.

Zulu children’s literature, within the scope of this thesis, refers to both oral and written children’s literature in Zulu, and English books written by non-mother tongue speakers but translated into Zulu. When it comes to children’s books in the indigenous languages of South Africa, folktales are the most popular genre. Books of folktales have a wide readership because they are prescribed from primary school level right up to university. One reason for their popularity could be ascribed to the fact that they are used by both children and adults.

In the indigenous languages, oral literature has played a dynamic role in serving as a bridge in making the transition to contemporary literature. To African writers, folktales are an oasis in the desert. When they are experiencing a creative drought, they draw creative juice and inspiration from tapping into old and tested folktales. Folktales are very useful to many contemporary authors. Ngungi (1993) realises the dynamic nature of the oral tradition when he refers to them as the “richest and oldest of heritages … it is still very much alive and readily incorporates new elements. It can be extremely simple or very complex depending on the time, place and occasion” (Ngungi, 1993:18).

In the next section a brief survey of some of the pioneers who laid the groundwork in Zulu children’s literature and who were instrumental in setting the future tone, tenor and content of the books written in indigenous languages, is provided. This process of tracking the development of Zulu children’s literature will commence with the role played by missionaries.

1.7.1 The role of the missionaries

Writing in the indigenous languages of South Africa began with the missionaries. During the missionary period, works such as the Bible, grammar books, dictionaries, literary works and readers were published. As some of these non-
fiction works served as a springboard and helped to pave the way for the publication of children’s storybooks, it is not only apt but also imperative to include them in this section. The contribution of the missionaries will then be followed by the earliest contributions by the black pioneer authors in Zulu and finally, the oeuvre of contemporary authors.

Various scholars researching the literary system in Zulu agree that the missionary period was not only instrumental in developing Zulu literature, but also saw the dawn of the first written publication in the Zulu language. Nyembezi (1961:2), in his examination of the contribution made by the missionaries in the nineteenth century, found that they concentrated mainly on the translation of scriptures, preparation of grammars and compilation of dictionaries. It should, however, be noted that missionaries played a major role in the development of all the indigenous languages of South Africa. They also made contributions to the recording of folklore and historical material.

Like many researchers, Nyembezi believes that the missionaries’ paramount aim was to spread God’s word:

> It was necessary to make it possible for the Africans to read the word of God for themselves in their own language. This need brought the missionaries face to face with the problem of reducing the indigenous African languages into writing. Schools were started and the Africans were taught to read and write (Nyembezi, 1961: 2).

The missionaries’ other aim was to teach and educate the Zulus by giving formal classes to their pupils. According to Masubelele (2007:78), in the middle of 1837, missionary Dr Adams and his wife had approximately fifty pupils in their school at Umlazi, including a morning adult class. As black people were not yet qualified to teach at this time, the missionaries and their wives taught in the small primary school. In 1853, the Amanzimtoti Seminary was established. Initially, only young men were accepted, the main aim being to develop a ministry run by black people. Inanda Seminary for Girls was subsequently started by the American Mission in 1869 (cf. Taylor 1911: 31, 35).
The missionaries made yet another valuable contribution to the Zulu literary system by assisting in the development of the Zulu language by writing linguistic materials. Ntuli and Makhambeni (1998:104) note that these innovative works by the missionaries were two-pronged: through grammar books they were teaching people how to write the letters of the alphabet and words in both Zulu and English. The whole endeavour eventually produced students who assisted missionaries in translation and interpreting.

Nyembezi’s view on the intention of the missionaries to educate and train Africans is different in that he believes that the grammars and the dictionaries were not intended solely for Africans. They were also intended to help new missionaries in the field to master the language of the people among whom they were to work as quickly as possible (1961:3). Much as these books had an effect on the development of Zulu literacy, they will not be included here because the focus is on children’s literature.

In the following excerpt, Vilakazi (1945: 274) voices his appreciation for the contribution that was made by Doke to the development of the Nguni languages:

As the study of the language grew, more scientific treatment was accorded … as may be seen in Doke’s “Textbook of Zulu Grammar” first edition (1927) and “The Phonetics of Zulu Language” (1926). These two books have remained the leading authority in these branches of the Nguni languages. … In the matter of grammar and orthography Africans have contributed nothing at all; and this is also the case in the branch of lexicography, where Europeans are still the contributors.

Although very few children’s books were published at this time, it is apparent that the first “baby steps” taken by the missionaries in writing books in Zulu laid a firm foundation for the writing and development of Zulu literature, including children’s literature, and of the Zulu language, per se.
1.7.2 Zulu pioneer authors

The missionaries’ efforts to teach Zulus how to read and write had a positive effect and men such as Magema Fuze, Matu and Langa are among the first Zulus who were taught to read and write. Magema Fuze’s most important and groundbreaking contribution to the history of Zulu literature is regarded as his first independent publication (1922). It was entitled Abantu abamnyama Lapa bavela Ngakona (Black people and where they originated from). Vilakazi (1945: 224) explains that written Zulu literature was influenced by folktales and says that Magema Fuze “writes with an inspiration derived from traditional stories and his Zulu is good, though simple”.

Ntuli and Makhambeni shower Fuze’s pioneering work with praise:

(Fuze is a pioneer who highlighted some points and made them a foundation or a pillar for Zulu literature …firstly; we come across a fact that explains the culture and traditions of the Zulus in a way that depicts love and their importance in humanity. We also encounter traditional poems that have been put together with great expertise. The particular art and expertise found in this book is the manner in which Fuze portrays the Zulu.)

Father T. Langa is recorded as translating German religious stories into Zulu and entitled his book Izindaba Zencwadi Yezincwadi. In 1889 he made another contribution to literature by publishing a booklet entitled Incwadi Yezifundo zesiZulu no.1. Later he compiled church hymns and called them Incwadi Yamagama okuhlabelela abalelwa ukusonta kwabebandla laseRoma (The hymn book for the Roman church).
A.H.S. Mbata and G.C.S. Mdhladhla published a series of tales under the title *uChakijana Bogcololo* (1927). Theodore Langa is also recorded to have published a number of materials with a religious content. In 1897 he is said to have published a children’s book entitled *Izindaba yezincwadi zezincwadi* (Stories from the book of books). In 1927 he published a book with Marianhill Mission Press called *Incwadi Yezifundo zesiZulu: ibhalelwe abantwana abaqala ukufunda incwadi* (A book on Zulu lessons: written for children who are beginning to read a book). In his article entitled “A review of Zulu literature”, Nyembezi defends the modest contribution by Zulus themselves:

The Zulus, quite naturally, could not be expected to make any significant contribution during the early period and the twentieth century was well in before Bantu writers began to take a hand in the development of their literature, and for that we owe them an unrepayable debt (Nyembezi 1961: 3).

Nyembezi remarks on the different types of publications that missionaries continued to produce after 1900, such as dictionaries, grammars, studies in phonetics, etc. He observes with regret that “…important as this work was, what Zulu needed most of all was creative work, and this was the field in which the Zulus themselves had to play a major part. There were difficulties, however” (1961: 4). Some of the difficulties he enumerates were that no Zulus had the necessary training in writing, there were no books available to them in their language which could serve as guides, there was no incentive because there was no Zulu reading public, and so the production of books in Zulu was not an economic proposition.

Nyembezi notes sadly that:

Even today the absence of a large reading public is still a serious handicap. The habit of reading is not yet sufficiently well developed among our people. As a result publishers who are quite happy to produce books for schools are reluctant to touch anything which is not likely to be prescribed for school use. They fear that books will not sell. This makes it difficult to produce books for adults (1961: 4).
This makes it clear that since the early sixties, the status quo in the publication of books written in South African indigenous languages has been maintained, especially in the case of contemporary children’s fiction. The culture of reading books written in the African languages has been neglected for too long. This “serious handicap” occurs because children who do not grow up with the habit of reading for pleasure cannot be expected to suddenly develop a love for books when they are adults. The message is clear: children who learn to read books, including those written in their home language, grow up to become reading adults. Therefore, this version of the Zulu proverb that instructs people to do things while there is still time, ugotshwa usemanzi (the tree is bent while it is still wet), cannot be overemphasised!

1.7.3 Earliest Zulu books on folktales

According Canonici (1996:77), the earliest collections of Zulu folktales were made by Bishop Henry Callaway in 1868, called Zulu Nursery Tales, and by James Stuart, entitled Masixoxele Inganekwane (1926). The latter is unpublished but is available in the Campbell Collection of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Both these researchers are believed to have collected the tales from oral performances and to have rewritten them down in longhand at home.

Violet Dube is regarded as the first Zulu women writer: she made a laudable effort to transform traditional tales into civilised literature, by transforming them from the “primitive co-operative production into original and imaginative work” (Vilakazi 1945: 327). The title of her book is Woza nazo Phoshozwayo (1935).

1.8 Organisation of study

Chapter 1 presents the background to the proposed study. It introduces the study by outlining its aim and rationale, the research problem, theoretical framework and the definition of key concepts in the study. Methodological approaches are outlined.
Chapter 2 presents the literature review. A comprehensive study was made of existing research conducted into children’s literature in general and Zulu children’s literature in particular.

Chapter 3 considers folktales as a form of oral children’s literature. Aspects such as performance, the performer, the audience, mimicry, content and the functions and values of folktales in the development of the child are discussed.

Chapter 4 comprises the study of imilolozelo, izilandelo and izangelo as forms of oral poetry for young children. Their content and contribution to the child’s development is examined.

Chapter 5 examines various readers as a form of modern written literature. Their content, earliest contributions by missionaries and some readers by Sibusiso Nyembezi are discussed, as well as their functions.

Chapter 6 focuses on picture books as another form of contemporary children’s literature. The focus is on the various types such as toy books, concept books, books with no text, picture storybooks, etc. Their significance as a form of children’s literature is discussed.

Chapter 7 provides an analysis of responses obtained from questionnaires and interviews.

Chapter 8 closes the study by recalling the problem statement, the aims and objectives of the research. It discusses the study’s constraints and findings, providing recommendations and pointing to future research.

Appendix I contains Zulu folktales and their transcriptions while Appendix II comprises a sample of questionnaires and interviews.
1.9 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has provided an overview of various issues related to the status of children’s literature in South African indigenous languages, and Zulu children’s literature in particular. It discusses folktales as progenitors of contemporary written children’s literature and the importance of contemporary children’s books. It notes with concern the lack of interest among Zulu authors, publishers and scholars in the writing, publication and research on children’s books written in African languages. The research problems, objectives, scope delimitation, concepts significant to the development of the study, the methodology and data collection are presented. It has also provided a brief survey on the origin and development of Zulu children’s literature. Finally, the structure of the remainder of the dissertation is provided to allow a bird’s-eye view of the content of the whole thesis.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a review of the literature on the oral tradition and contemporary Zulu children’s literature. Its main aim is to give a general idea of the type of literature and scholarly research that exists. This will be used to inform the study as a whole. The reviewed material was drawn from articles, books, dissertations, theses and works of scholars who have dealt with subjects similar to the one under investigation.

2.2 Review of traditional and contemporary children’s literature

Much as the researcher would have liked to have included a review of oral and contemporary written children’s literature in all indigenous languages of South Africa, this was not possible. This is because very little research had been done on this subject. Although various authors have written books on folklore and published articles on folktales in Zulu and other indigenous African languages in this country, they have not analysed folktales and oral poetry or songs as a genre suitable for children. Kunene (1961: ii) agrees with this assertion and comments on the scarcity of research undertaken on oral poetry:

Research is handicapped by the fact that there are few or no books on the subject. Most of the information on oral poetry is contained in anthropological works and, as would be expected, has an anthropological bias.

When it comes to the value of folktales, they mainly play an entertainment and moralising role. The oral and the performance aspects of narrative prose are seldom considered. Emphasis in these publications is largely on folktales as literature written for young children, youth and adults alike. The line of demarcation is blurred, hence the dearth of reviews of children’s literature in
both traditional and contemporary children’s literature in indigenous African languages.

2.2.1 Resources pertaining to oral traditional Zulu children’s literature

The oral tradition is one of the oldest forms of culture which was used to store and impart knowledge from generation to generation. Education was informal and practical; it occurred by word of mouth and it happened in a planned way. Children were taught by adults from an early age through lullabies, folktales and riddles. In storytelling, this could be seen through performance, where the performer, via the spoken word and physical gestures, taught children about the norms and values of their society. The language taught was rich in proverbs and idioms. Repetition and song played a vital role in assisting children to grasp and retain knowledge.

In traditional societies, including Zulu oral society, folktales rather than other types of oral literature appear to have been used as the most important vehicle for teaching, although folktales are sometimes seen as a form of entertainment suitable mainly for children and with very little other value. Folktales were and still are used to educate children. In the past, according to Zulu culture, the function of educating the young about the value systems and organisation of their society was placed mainly on the shoulders of the grandmother.

Canonici (1995), like other researchers before him, views folktales as storehouses of knowledge and wisdom which were used in oral cultures before people could read and write. In his article “Performance as an educational experience” he makes an effort to show that the performance of folktales is part and parcel of children’s literature. He highlights the fact that “the folktale performance is a life school, not one based on a detached and cold syllabus, but on the total involvement of the child in the life of family and community (1995: 21) (researcher’s emphasis). Although he unfortunately does not provide any relevant examples from Zulu folktales to illustrate his point, the
deliberations in his critique shed light on this. In his paper he raises some questions that are used in this study to guide the researcher in identifying the educational aspects of Zulu folktales. The following are two examples of these questions:

(i) **Does the story challenge the children’s imagination?**

Firstly, the use of the word “children” immediately reminds us that in Zulu oral and written literature children are the audience or readers. Secondly, in order for a story to challenge the children’s imagination it should amongst other things be age-appropriate and transport them to a new and unknown fictitious world containing things like talking animals. The language and content should be easily understood by the children. Lastly, one notes that besides entertaining children they should also be indirectly taught how to tell or perform a story. The same will happen to a child who reads storybooks or one who is read to from a tender age. Such a child will gradually develop a culture of reading and perhaps eventually learn how to write – and tell stories.

(ii) **Does one find statements of practical wisdom (proverbs, family life, and preventive education) in trickster tales, etc.?**

Since children’s minds are still developing and not aware of some of the obvious things that might be happening around them, the types of stories they hear have a certain effect and impact on their lives. For instance, when used in stories, proverbs have a way of indirectly revealing the hidden meaning or the moral of the story that could influence a child in one way or another. The Zulu proverb *Isalakutshelwa sibona ngomapho* (a person who does not heed advice learns the hard way, *ngomapho* meaning “by oozing blood”). This is in a way “preventive education” because children will remember the proverb when they see someone who has landed in trouble as a result of disobedience.
In answering the questions posed by Canonici, the researcher will use a variety of Zulu tales as illustrations of the value of oral folktales in the life of the child. This will complement Canonici’s article and at the same time provide a holistic response to his important observations:

In societies where formal schooling was either rare or non-existent, dramatic representations were the main means to teach a nation or a group how to think and what to think. ... The wisdom of the past was externalized through the folktale images, their characters and their actions, and the outcome of their adventures. In fact, in oral societies, education is by “being” rather than by “saying”. Values are transmitted through a series of stereotyped actions, regularly repeated: rites accompanied by stories, songs, (sic) proverbs (Canonici 1995: 20: 21).

In addition, Canonici’s research is relevant to this study because it not only stresses the importance of oral literature but also focuses on the ugogo or grandmother as the performer, the “educator”, and children as the audience or “learners”. In addition, it considers the linguistic value and the wisdom derived from these prose narratives. This research places the researcher in a position to draw parallels between traditional oral children’s fiction and contemporary written children’s literature.

Canonici (1985), in his thesis entitled C.L.S. Nyembezi’s Use of Traditional Zulu Folktales in his Igoda Series of School Readers, examines Nyembezi’s collections of folktales. The series of readers runs from Sub A to Grade 6. Canonici’s stance is that folktales as an oral art form should be performed and, to a certain extent, he criticises Nyembezi’s act of reducing folktales to writing when he observes that:

By re-recreating this art in writing, Nyembezi has stifled a part of its life, because he has had to curtail references to the atmosphere and the environment which make performance of a folktale a natural event (Canonici 1985: 2).

Although this is partially true, Nyembezi’s work is a great contribution to Zulu written literature because by “re-creating this art in writing” he has moved with
the times and has shown that life is not static. Life is dynamic just like the
crafttales that have metamorphosed over the years. Secondly, Nyembezi has not
only passed on the knowledge and wisdom of our forebearers found in the Zulu
crafttales but he has preserved it for mankind because they have been
translated into English and other languages. Here Canonici (1985) examines
Zulu written folktales as children literature. This research complements the
present study as it investigates various issues such as Nyembezi’s life as an
author of *igoda* “the rope” series of school readers. Canonici assesses folktales
as part of folklore and their use as children’s literature. In addition, he discusses
themes used by Nyembezi that cater for both the rural and the urban child.
Furthermore, he discusses the folktales according to their content, age
appropriateness and educational value to schoolchildren. The contents of *Igoda*
Sub A to Grade 3 are briefly summarised:

*Isigaba* A (Sub A) is a spelling book which presents the sounds of the
Zulu alphabet; *Isigaba* B for Sub B pupils. (Grade 2) is the first simple
reading book... The second part is an attempt to bridge the gap
between country and town life. *IGod, Ibanga 1* (Grade one)... The
vocabulary (which is graded and effectively reinforced by constant
repetition) is that of games, illness in the family, pets and domesticated
animals, house tasks for girls and the herding of cattle for boys... all
well within the range of experience of an eight or nine-year-old child. A
few poems are introduced at regular intervals. Grammatical structures
are also graded (Canonici 1985: 18).

The contents of the Grade 2 reader cover the school situation and family life.
Themes include school, recreational and shopping activities, including
interactions with friends and neighbours. The reader contains six poems and
twenty-six folktales. “There is a crescendo in the complexity of the structure of
the stories as well as in the structure of the language used” (Canonici 1985: 20).

This thesis has been most informative, particularly in chapter five where the
researcher analyses folktales as a written form of children’s literature. In
addition, Canonici’s contribution informs the researcher in the discussion of the
relevance of old readers to the modern child. This is particularly evident in the
discussion of the contents, language, and children’s poetry found in Nyembezi’s readers.

Taylor (2000), in his book Using folktales, explores, discusses and explains why folktales are useful in language teaching. He provides a number of stories and activities that help to address language needs. The book is divided into two sections: Part one deals with the theoretical background and consists of three chapters. Their titles are respectively What makes folktales so good for language teaching?, Some tips for the classroom and Folktales in the multilevel classroom. Part two concentrates on activities and contains eleven chapters. Some of these chapters are Focus on listening, Focus on speaking, Focus on reading, Focus on writing, Folktales and language games, Folktales and drama, and Developing analytical skills. In the present study, the researcher has used chapter one in particular as it is the most relevant to primary school children who are still learning to read. The researcher draws widely from the section that deals with characteristics that contribute to easy reading and listening and discusses some characteristics that make folktales appropriate for use in class. These are: time-ordered story structure, repetition and redundancy, predictability, simple grammar and concrete vocabulary.

Canonici (1990), in an article entitled “Trickery or trickster as the hallmark of comedy in Zulu folk-tales”, maintains that trickery is a distinctive feature of comedy in the Zulu folktale. In this article Canonici defines trickery and comedy and describes the types of tricksters found in Zulu folktales, together with their characteristics. The Zulu trickster figures are compared with those of other cultures. He identifies the following traditional tricksters in Zulu folktales: Hlakanyana, the semi-human dwarf, Nogwaja, the hare, Chakijana, the mongoose and Mpisi, the hyena. Canonici maintains that trickery is present in most Zulu folktales.

In the same vein, De Bruin (2002), in her investigation in The Role of Children in Zulu Folktales, takes a brief look at the role of girls and boys as characters in
the Zulu folktale. She starts from the premise that in traditional Zulu society girls are taught to play a submissive role and to accept that their eventual goal should be to grow to be good wives and produce and raise children. When comparing the socialisation process of the two sexes she notes that

The burdens of responsibility and honour are laid upon the shoulders of a Zulu boy from early in his life. Whereas girls are in some ways suffering in this chauvinistic society, they are also protected from decision making, and having to provide the physical means for the family to survive on (De Bruin 2002: 120-121).

Consequently, the current study will be enhanced by both Canonici’s and De Bruin’s contributions. The role of different folktale characters, including tricksters, in Zulu children’s tales will be examined, as well as the degree to which various characters are instrumental in relaying the lessons of the stories. Parallels will also be drawn with characters in contemporary children’s literature.

In his *Folktales’ Influence on the Zulu Novel*, Msimang (1986) examines the extent to which folktales have influenced the Zulu novel and his assessments will be of great benefit to this study. Among other issues, he assesses Zulu folktales as a performing art and a communal phenomenon. Moreover, he discusses motifs that occur in folktales and which, to a certain degree, indicate that both the oral and written Zulu tales are suitable for children. The following are some distinctive features of the folktale that he touches upon: the plot, setting, popular characters, style and theme. Regarding characterisation, for instance, Msimang discusses various types of characters: round characters and flat characters, characters with supernatural powers, faceless and nameless characters. Chapter five of this study will discuss the relevance of Zulu folktale characters to fiction for children.

In his section on “Folktale as a performing art”, Msimang explains and illustrates how mimicry can play an important role in portraying characters:

It lends humour and vividness to the whole tale. It highlights the emotions of the characters be they sarcastic, humorous, saddened or
excited. By mimicking the hoarse voice of a cannibal the performer already projects it as a character. The gruffness of its voice is suggestive of its despicable nature. The irony and sarcasm which speaks volumes about Chakijana’s personality will assume a clearer and deeper meaning when the performer mimics this character as it stands near the doorway after having killed the woman’s ten children in *Wangiweza phela* (Msimang 1986: 128).

These features of folktales and their illustrations have been invaluable in steering the researcher in the right direction in the discussion of performance in Zulu folktale.

Secondly, in his endeavour to illustrate the importance of mimicry, Msimang notes that when compared to their written counterparts, the performance of primitive oral tales leaves no room for ambiguity. In order to drive the point home, he provides the following illustration in *UGubudela*, when Gubudela is about to throw the cannibal into the fire:


(When he was near he called Nobamba, saying, “Burn that house down.” Nobamba set fire to the house. He threw [the cannibal] into the burning house and said: “Eat, there is your meat” (Msimang 1986: 128-129).

When explaining how mimicry eliminates any possibility of, confusion, Msimang says that in its written mode it is the context only that informs us that the *wa-* (he) in *Wayishisa* (He set fire) refers to Nobamba but that the *wa-* (he) in *Wathi* (and said) refers to Gubudela. “But when performed it is the context as well as Gubudela’s voice mimicked by the performer which distinguishes the subjects of the two acts” (Msimang 1986: 129).

In his dissertation, Marivate (1973) discusses the form, content and the delivery of Tsonga folktales. He commences his discussion by pointing out the time of day) of the delivery of folktales. He comments on the audience, the narrator of
tales and the different types of formulae employed during various stages of delivering. He goes on to mention that every tale told at a particular moment is unique and thus there is no “correct version” of a folktale. Although Marivate indicates that children’s tales are mainly told in order to amuse children, he has not made any attempt to examine their suitability as a form of literature for children. Nevertheless, he does explain the role played by the audience in the story, remarking that the listeners are not passive but:

...show their appreciation by their attentiveness, laughter, gestures and active response to the teller’s performance. By becoming directly involved, the audience actually helps in the actualisation and the creation of the story at the particular moment of narration. The reaction of the audience can greatly affect presentation. If the audience is dull and shows a lack of interest, the storyteller loses her zest. She becomes listless. Usually she threatens to stop the narration if the audience continues to be irresponsible and dull. ... On the other hand, the audience can also protest if the narrator is dull or hesitant with regard to the sequence of events, or if she bungles generally (Marivate, 1973: 25-26).

Marivate conveys an important point here about the style of the performer. He shows that folktale performance is like a two-way street: its manoeuvres and successes are dependent on the ability of the performer, who is expected to drive the story forward in a creative and interesting manner. But the audience as active and attentive participants influences the performance, depending on the style and deliverance of the performer. The audience can thus be regarded as an additional ingredient of the whole folktale performance.

Furthermore, in his discussion of the formulae used in Tsonga storytelling, Marivate deliberates on songs as an internal formula. He says that songs are not exclusive to Tsonga folktales but are found in all African languages and are part and parcel thereof. Marivate’s discussion of these folktales is a general one and does not shed much light on the value of folktales as children’s literature. Nonetheless, his comments, explanations and observations have been taken into consideration in the analysis in this study of Zulu folktales as children’s literature.
Okoh (2004) discusses the influence of the oral tradition on children’s literature in Nigeria and how it could be exploited to encourage a culture of reading in Africa. He moves from the influence of African scholars, such as Chinua Achebe, labelling of children storybooks imported into this continent as “beautifully packaged poison”. On comparing the contents, themes and moral messages and narrative techniques of contemporary children’s fiction in Nigeria, Okoh found large amounts of borrowing from the oral tradition of the people of Nigeria. He illustrates this by comparing aetiological tales, that is, tales that explain the existence of something, with contemporary children’s literature.

When discussing themes and moral messages, he explains some of the values that are held in high esteem by Nigerians, values like honesty, hard work leading to success, courage and respect for elders. These values are juxtaposed with those revealed in oral narratives such as greed, laziness and gluttony and they are also compared with contemporary children’s literature. Still on the subject of themes, Norton (1983: 204) mentions the following universal themes that appear in folktales: themes that reflect the highest human hopes as well as moral and material gain, good being triumphant over evil, the conquering of unselfish love, the rewarding of kindness, intelligence winning over physical strength, and the rewards of diligence and hard work.

On the subject of narrative techniques, Okoh (2004) deliberates on the use of formulae in some contemporary books, as in folktales, as a device to grasp the audience’s or the reader’s attention. He illustrates a technique used by one author to create the atmosphere of oral narration: a narrator is made to tell the story while the audience represents listening children to reproduce the atmosphere of a traditional African storytelling session (Okoh 2004: 5). Lastly, he discusses song as a technique used in Nigerian contemporary children’s literature to encourage participation.
In his attempt to reveal the impact of the oral tradition on contemporary literature, Okoh also describes how this tradition can be used to stimulate reading in African children. In his English classes he used narrative techniques such as the opening formula, songs and mimicry to encourage the habit of reading. His venture was successful after two weeks, when 98% of the learners had read the book. Other storybooks yielded the same results and more than one student brought five new storybooks for the teacher to read to them. This is evidence that the technique of telling the story first can be used to trigger interest in the book (Okoh 2004: 6).

Kuykendal and Sturm (2007:38) believe that folktales, fairy tales and fables are a basic part of stories and propagate the norms of the culture in which the child lives. They go even further, saying that these norms play a role in the socialisation processes because they contain common beliefs about gender roles held by the child’s society. According to these authors, literature and especially fairy tales gender children because they shape the life that has to be lived by a child within a child’s culture according to gender role stereotypes. They lament that these stories portray women as weak and submissive and men as powerful and dominant. When it comes to definition, women are portrayed as powerless, beautiful objects who cannot change their lives as do their male counterparts.

Yenika-Agbaw (2008), in her introduction, views the manner in which popular media in the West portray Africa in children’s literature and laments the fact that Africans are perceived as children who always need to be told what to do. She is exasperated by the fact that although we are in the twenty-first century things has not changed:

Our political survival depends on the whims of the West; our educational system is tailored after the Europeans’. Even our art form has evolved to the point where it is hard to tell what authentic (African) is anymore. ... This would not have mattered much if African children were spared this cultural confusion ... They are not only part of different cultural communities, but they are now members of a global culture
susceptible to cultural images from media and other sources, including literature that undermines their heritage in blatant or subtle ways (Yenika-Agbaw 2008: xvi).

Yenika-Agbaw examines the images of Africa found in books. In the first chapter of her book she discusses books written after 1960 and examines the settings and characters, paying special attention to the socio-economic habits of the characters, the age, gender, themes and dialogue. In chapter two she looks at illustrations and the messages conveyed by picture books. Chapter three comprises a discussion of what she calls “typical” West African Village stories. She analyses folklore, illustrated stories and picture books.

Part two of her book re-examines gender issues. The title of chapter four is “Religion and childhood in two African communities: Ogot’s The rain came and Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus”. Yenika-Agbaw examines the culture of sacrificing children or ritual killing associated with traditional African religion in these two stories. This is juxtaposed with the killing of a girl caught in the conflict between Christian and traditional African beliefs. Part three covers West African culture and focuses on the question of literacy and the survival of culture in children’s books.

Yenika-Agbaw’s book has been useful to this study because it discusses the manner in which African children are portrayed in literature. What makes it more important is that most of the topics under discussion are similar to those examined in this study. Furthermore, although the author concentrates on examples drawn from West African literature and culture while this study focuses on Zulu, one of the indigenous languages of South Africa, African experiences and cultures are fundamentally similar.

Fraser (1996), in her dissertation Imilolozelo, Zulu Children’s Literature in Performance, explores the genre of oral children’s poetry in Zulu. She assesses the techniques used in composing imilolozelo (lullabies/children’s songs. Furthermore, she examines the origin of imilolozelo, places of learning, choice
of meaning of content of *imilolozelo*, and the role of *imilolozelo* in the holistic development of the child. Norton (1983) touches on the values of poetry for children, including enjoyment and the acquisition of knowledge about concepts in the world around them. Poetry is a way of expressing a mood and through it children gain insight into the “self” and the “other”. These benefits will be used as a yardstick to evaluate some children’s poetry in this study. Regarding poetry, Norton also discusses the meaning of the word “poetry”, especially children’s poetry, and the characteristics of poems preferred by children and the criteria for selecting children’s poetry. The two last points will be used as a frame of reference in this study as there is no book available in Zulu that discusses the characteristics of children’s poetry in depth.

Vilakazi (1945), in his thesis entitled *The Oral and Written Literature in Nguni*, has divided his work into two sections, oral literature and written literature. In section one on oral literature he examines poetry. He analyses poetry about women, “primitive Nguni poetry” i.e. *izibongo*, praise poetry, and *imilolozelo*, lullabies or children’s songs, or *imindunduzelo* as Vilakazi prefers to call them.

In his introductory chapter, “Expression and Communication”, Vilakazi (1945: 1) accentuates the point that in studying Zulu nursery songs one must briefly trace the history of the Zulu nation and its influences on the wider settlement of the southern continent. He makes a brief comparison between the various versions of Nguni songs. He also makes the observation that “nursery songs were rigid in form and bore the stamp of original compositions passed down from generation to generation” (Vilakazi prosodic 1945: 10). Surprisingly enough, in chapter IV, entitled “Poetic genres”, Vilakazi does not elaborate on Nguni children’s songs nor does he provide suitable examples of lullabies. Instead, he digresses and comments on how drama has evolved and how it is found in baby plays:

Before the drama reached its present literary standard it underwent assiduous variation and improvement. Primitive and civilised elements have both contributed to its present form. The raw material of Nguni
drama today is to be found in simple baby plays, where a mixture of dramatic movements is interspersed with a short monotonous chorus. These simple forms are reminiscent of Greek choral dancing (Vilakazi 1945: 71).

Vilakazi provides examples of two children’s musical games which were enjoyed during the day and which were used to while away the time. He paints the following picture of these songs:

They are to be heard sung and danced by infant groups throughout the day and the early part of the evening. In the old Nguni society, children of both sexes slept in the hut of their grandmother’s who told them many fables and folktales. She would leave them to rock themselves to sleep with musical dialogues sung between the girl’s group, who slept on one side of the hearth, and the boys’ group who slept on the other side (Vilakazi 1945: 75).

In chapter four of this thesis, the researcher will assess the value of Zulu children’s songs, even though Vilakazi has said little about lullabies in Zulu oral literature. As women’s poetry and praise poetry does not form part of children’s literature, they will not form part of the literature review.

In section two, Vilakazi (1945: 142) examines prose which he divides into mythology, the folktale, legend, proverbs, sayings and riddles. He starts by providing definitions of the various forms of narrative prose:

Mythology: Mythology is the science of myth which deals with the stories of creation of the world, of gods and religious beliefs, and attempts to explain the relationship of man to his environment as indicated by animism; it studies primitive forms of religion as practised in early society.

Folktale: Folk-tale, perhaps the most important subdivision of folk-lore is a primitive tale, not necessarily of mythic origin, but a narrative having some aesthetic value. Under this heading shall be included all fables about human beings, their institutions and animal stories.
Under *Legend* are included all stories which deal with the deeds of actual heroes or with real places or incidents which have been handed down by tradition.

Vilakazi’s definitions of myths, folktales and legends will be used as a yardstick to test the contents of some Zulu folktales.

Section III of Vilakazi’s book deals with written literature, but has no bearing on children’s literature because it deals with the forerunners of Nguni literature and Nguni writers. Notwithstanding, the researcher felt it imperative to make some comments so that future researchers could peruse Vilakazi’s work which is rich in information concerning the analysis of primitive folktales and includes information about Zulu culture.

Kunene (1961) has made an analytical study of traditional and modern Zulu poetry. In his introduction he explains that the two types of Zulu poetry differ: traditional poetry is not influenced by western forms of poetry and is found amongst the most pre-literate people. In his study he discusses different types of traditional poetry such as eulogies, dramatic poetry, songs of birds and lullabies. Focus will, however, be placed solely on his deliberations on lullabies. Kunene uses the term “nursery rhymes” to translate *imilolozele* (lullabies) and divides them into “simple lullabies” and “complex lullabies”. He notes that the first are highly rhythmical and meaning is secondary, while in the latter meaning is of primary importance and they are regarded as having greater value (Kunene, 1961:38). He believes that nursery rhymes often have a hidden meaning and notes that some of them contain humour. He makes the following comments about the delivery of complex lullabies:

This type is characterised by the exchange of words between the “voice” and the “chorus”. In this case the chorus responds to the voice either in the form of an answer to the question, or a statement in relation to what has been said by the voice. The question and answer method carries the idea forward (Kunene, 1961: 38-39).
Kunene’s resolve to translate and call *imilolozele* nursery rhymes, and to divide them into simple and complex lullabies will discussed in the present study.

Weinberg (1979) made an ethno-musicological study of Zulu children’s songs in his M.A. dissertation. These songs were collected from children between the ages of three and 13 years. His themes touched on some of the following important aspects: background to songs in traditional society, important ceremonies and customs in traditional society, and the social function of children’s songs in Zulu society. Songs are also classified into different categories such as cradle songs, action songs, game songs, etc. Cradle songs fall under the subgenre of lullabies. Weinberg’s chapter on the historical, traditional and sociological background to Zulu songs will add particular value to this study. Even though all the songs have been transcribed into English, only a few will be referred to in this study.

2.2.2 Resources relevant to Zulu contemporary children’s literature

In her study, Van Vuuren (1994) deliberates on matters that pertain to the subject of children’s literature in South Africa. She looks at processes used to distribute children’s literature, international theories related to indigenous children’s literature, and people’s attitudes to and about it, amongst others.

She says that, to a certain degree, children’s literature reveal aspects of a society on two levels and this notion she supports by explaining that:

… at one level, children’s literature can be said to reflect and project the ideals of a society, as well as a notion of what the society itself would be like under ideal circumstances; at a second and subconscious level, children’s literature when critically examined reveals the “darker” aspects of society. … Attitudes towards children’s literature reveal how important children and education are perceived to be, and a consideration of distribution practices reveals much about the class and social structure of a society (Van Vuuren, 1994: 1).
In the chapter in which she examines attitudes towards indigenous children’s literature she commences by considering the people and the type of critics who are involved in the field of South African children’s literature. In her study she found that the indigenous texts were mostly in Afrikaans rather than in English. Despite the fact that Van Vuuren’s research concerns mainly English and Afrikaans children’s literature, it does provide some insight into how African indigenous children’s literature has been marginalised by all stakeholders. In her chapter on the publishing of indigenous literature in South Africa she relates how she conducted interviews with various publishers. In order to throw some light on their reluctance to publish children’s books in the vernacular, a response from one of the publishers is quoted below:

Alida Potgieter of Human & Rousseau (1993: interview)

Human & Rousseau has been publishing children’s literature in South Africa since the late 1960s. Initially, in keeping with the National’s Party’s desire to promote Afrikaans, Human & Rousseau published exclusively Afrikaans, but since the 1980s the publishing house has been publishing children’s literature in the English language. The decision to begin with English books was the result of there being a “gap in the market” for indigenous English children’s books. ... Human & Rousseau does not publish children’s literature in any black languages and cannot see itself doing so in the future … (Van Vuuren, 1994:51).

Potgieter’s comments resonate with Van Vuuren’s statement about the ideals of, attitudes and class and social structure of a society. In another interview that was conducted with E.R. Arnold of Via Africa Publishers, Van Vuuren obtained information that was different, albeit less comforting. Arnold told her that Via Afrika was founded in 1947 and has been engaged in the publishing of children’s books written in the black languages since 1953. In the Nasionale Pers brochure Van Vuuren found the following “interesting” reason for their publishing in the vernacular:

Via Afrika was founded to provide for the individual needs of the black educational market. Till now the emphasis has been on publication for primary, secondary and tertiary education. More attention is already being given to special needs such as literacy programmes specially
also for adults, and as a new education policy for the dispensation becomes clearer; products will be created to supply the new needs. (Naspers quoted in Van Vuuren, 1994: 52)

In response to this, the researcher agrees with Van Vuuren that Via Afrika’s programme of focusing on educational material “enabled the Nationalist government to supervise the types of books being produced for and fed into black schools and colleges, serving to further the aims of ‘Bantu Education’ in the years of Nationalist supremacy” (Van Vuuren, 1994: 52). Van Vuuren’s thesis is vital as it supports some of the information contained in the introductory chapter of the present dissertation. Secondly, in line with the aim of the study, it could serve to inspire both African authors and scholars to embark on research similar to Van Vuuren’s but with an emphasis on the vernacular languages of South Africa.

Swanepoel (1995: 34) discusses stories for children, especially South African children’s literature, as an instrument for communicating values and beliefs of a specific society during a specific period. He notices that for many years they have been written by Whites for Whites with little attention being paid to the needs of black children in South Africa. He bemoans the fact that literature for black children is still disregarded and on the periphery of all the literary systems of South Africa. He observes that most research in children’s literature was derived from other disciplines with the focus on children’s literature being to reach certain goals. He urges scholars in African languages to follow Groenewald (1986) who believes that literature in South Africa should not be seen as a collection of authors and books from only one part of our society, but as a multifaceted, determined process. By way of giving advice, Swanepoel maintains that: “In the case of children’s literature ...we must be ready to accept it as a legitimate field of research and as a genuine part of our literary system” (Swanepoel, 1995: 37).

When discussing the way black characters are portrayed in children’s literature in South Africa, Swanepoel sees them as passive, playing subordinate roles
and always on the receiving end as opposed to their white counterparts who are seen as generous and in control.

This research opens a new window to observe how authors portray their characters in Zulu children’s stories. Also, it will reveal the ideologies remarked by Swanepoel:

In practice this means that most of the white children are exposed to reading material to uphold apartheid ideology in a very subtle way (1995:38).

These assertions open the way to a comparative study in which South African English and Afrikaans youth literature could be compared to children’s literature written in the indigenous languages.

Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1998) examine factors that have affected and influenced the development of children’s literature in America. The article considers the role played by society, government and librarianship in hindering or developing the genre. The study takes a historical approach from the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, that is, the 1970s to 1998. They note that the purpose of children’s books from the 17th to the early 19th centuries was “mostly didactic and moralistic, a reflection of societies general view that children should be quiet, hardworking, and intent on learning to be good” (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1998: 229). During this period, school readers were used as material for early reading instruction. Readers seem to have been received with criticism because of their lack of literary quality. The authors also remark that in 1891, Charles W. Elliot proposed the removal of readers from schools and their substitution with literature. These authors quote the following reasons for the exclusion of readers, as cited by Elliot:

I object to them because they are not real literature: they are but mere scraps of literature, even when the single lessons or material of which they are composed are taken from literature. But there are a great many readers that seem to have been composed especially for the use of children. They are not made up of a selection from recognized
literature, and as a rule, this class is simply ineffable trash. They are entirely unfit material to use in the training of our children. The object of reading is to convey to them the ideals of the human race; our readers do not do that and are thoroughly unfitted to do it. I believe that we should substitute in all our schools real literature for readers. (cf. Smith: 120).

Regardless of Elliot’s scathing attack on readers, according to Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1998), readers have staying power because “… basal readers remained firmly entrenched in the educational establishment, and they came to even greater prominence in the 20th century”. This reflects the resilience of readers because the same trend can be observed in the development of Zulu children’s literature. Old Zulu readers are still used in schools today. Elliot’s words are valuable to this study and will be used as a yardstick in the analysis of Zulu readers, firstly, to determine why, after so many years, they are still being used at schools and secondly, to determine whether they too are indeed “indescribable, unfit trash” which has outlasted its sell-by date.

The authors of the article see 1900 to 1945 as the period of the establishment of the genre of children’s and young adults’ literature in America. Amongst others, they cite the formation of professional associations and professional journals and some libraries beginning to offer courses. This is regarded as an auspicious era because in 1945 an organisation called the Children’s Book Council was established with the aim of promoting and disseminating information about children’s books. When it came to the depiction of adults and parents they were portrayed positively as people who cared and who were protective of children. In the light of this, the portrayal of characters in folktales and contemporary children’s literature will be scrutinised. A significant phenomenon during this era was the advent of television and its effect on change, including educational changes. The following is one of the results of the arrival of television:

One outcome was a move away from regional values towards more commonly held national values. The portrayal of affluent lifestyles set up new expectations among young people. For preschool-age children,
some educational programs offered great language exposure and learning. However, many children were exposed to violence and strong language earlier than ever before. Despite some of those drawbacks, many adults and school-age children began to seek their leisure entertainment through substantial television viewing, often to the detriment of time spent in leisure reading (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1998: 232).

Although this points to both the good and the harmful effect that television can have on young minds, this section is not relevant to this study as it will not consider the effects of time children spend watching television. However, this has inspired the researcher to compare the standard, the value, the benefits and the relevance of the language used in Zulu children’s literature, from folktales to children’s fiction. This will be discussed against the background of South Africa as a multicultural and multilingual society.

Other new developments that occurred during this period, known as the “post-war” era, were an awareness of the need to promote international understanding and awareness of peace. This culminated in the publishing of translated children’s books, the establishment of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), the founding of the international organisation for the promotion and advancement of children’s literature, the founding of the international Board on Books for the Young, the establishment of the first international award programme to honour authors of children’s books and a companion award for illustrators of children’s books. In addition to this, IBBY founded a quarterly journal, entitled Bookbird. This journal was intended for international scholars to exchange ideas on issues pertaining to children’s books. Lastly, the ALA award was established to honour the “U.S. publisher of the most distinguished translated children’s book”. The aim of this award was to encourage translation and publication of international children’s books in the United States.

Efforts made by the Americans to encourage the writing, translation, illustration and publication of children’s books will assist the researcher in determining the
role played by various South African stakeholders in the promotion and awareness raising of the importance of children’s literature in the African languages. The period from the 1970s to 1998 is said to have culminated in the growth of a trend of realism in children’s literature which portrayed the culture of the times and discussed taboo subjects such as sexuality, divorce and racism. Furthermore, this era is said to have shown an increase in poetry. *The excellence in Poetry for Children Award* was established and children’s books about people of different races were published. Several changes occurred in the publishing industry during this period.

In their conclusion, Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson (1998: 232) suggest some answers to the following question: *Children’s literature: is there a future?* They believe that books for children definitely have a future “in that parents will continue to view bedtime stories as an important part of family life and the education of their children” (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1998: 243). As far as basal textbooks are concerned, they see them as a “predominant feature in schools”. Furthermore, they maintain that the role of literature will continue to be the subject of discussion and debate among reading educators. They also predict that trade books, i.e. books published by the publisher for general consumption, will have prominence in most elementary schools. From the discussion above it appears that their predictions may indeed be proved right, but this begs the following questions: what is happening in schools in South Africa, particularly those catering for mostly black children? Is there a culture of bedtime stories among black parents? If not, why not, and what do they have as a substitute? Do trade books form an important part of learning at schools? Answers to such questions could form the bedrock of children’s literature-related research by scholars of indigenous languages.

The book by Ellis (1973) entitled *How to find about children’s literature* is most illuminating and serves as a good starting point for someone who wants to venture into the field of children’s literature. Its numerous chapters, seventeen in total, assist in laying a foundation for the researcher of an approach to
various themes in children’s literature. For instance, chapter one discusses various factors that have led to the growing interest in literature for children. Amongst others, Ellis (1973:1) mentions the role played by the British Department of Education and Science in encouraging and raising awareness in schools and colleges of education about the importance of books. He also points to the fact that the development of model school libraries with 7 500 books was a distinctive part of the role of colleges of education. The Department of Education also issued pamphlets to guide teachers in maximising the use of books in schools. This is in stark contrast to South Africa, where children’s literature is not catered for in the teachers’ training colleges. Secondly, many black authors still have to be taught about the importance of children’s literature and to be given the skills that will allow them to write for children.

Some chapters will be useful to this study: in chapter six, “Guidance from Histories and Criticism of Children’s Literature”, Ellis has included a list of books on the history of children’s literature, illustrations, authors and criticism. Chapter eight, “A History of Children’s Literature to 1900”, contains information which will inform this thesis’ introductory chapter. Chapter ten is entitled “Poetry and Prose”. According to Ellis (1973: 144), “the first introduction of the child to poetry is through the nursery rhyme”. *Imilolozelo*, which are discussed in chapter four of this study, will be analysed to test the truth of Ellis’s statement. Chapter fourteen deals with translations. From the ground-breaking work done by the missionaries in the development of literacy among the Blacks until the present, the translation of children’s books into indigenous South African languages seems to be the norm. An in-depth analysis of some translated works is provided to determine whether this has enriched or disadvantaged the development of the Zulu language.

Cianciolo (1981), in the preface to her book entitled *Picture Books for Children*, starts by making clear that the purpose of her book is:
to serve as a resource and guide for teachers of children from nursery school through junior high school, for day-care personnel, for librarians in schools and public libraries, for parents, and for any other adults concerned with the selection of well-written, imaginatively illustrated picture books that are of interest to children of all ages and backgrounds. This bibliography is designed as well to be used as a reference tool for undergraduate and graduate courses in children’s and adolescent literature offered by departments of English, by schools of library science and of education (Cianciolo, 1981: xiv).

To a certain degree, Cianciolo’s purpose can be aligned with the aim of this study, in that the latter aims to kindle interest in the writing of books and the conducting of research into indigenous children’s literature. Cianciolo’s bibliography will provide examples of how research of this nature can be undertaken. In the preface, the author informs the reader that the purpose of her book is to identify and describe picture books which will provide children with enjoyable, informative and discriminating literary experiences, foster the habit of reading and initiate an appreciation for and understanding of the beautiful and creative graphic arts (Cianciolo, 1981: xiv). This researcher will seek to put into action these acquired skills in her analysis of Zulu picture books.

According to Cianciolo (1981), stories told in picture books could be classified as modern realistic fiction, as here-and-now stories, as historical fiction, and as fanciful fiction. She adds that they may also include poetry, biography, as well as concepts and information. She also discusses children’s picture books according to subject categories. In each category, she provides some examples by providing titles of relevant stories, the plot of each story and its moral. Examples of her subject categories are *Me and My Family, Other People, The World I Live In* and *The Imaginative World*. Under the subject *Me and My Family*, the text and illustrations may be used to help the reader to find the answers to “Who am I?” or “Why am I like I am?” “Picture books can instil in the reader an appreciation for the challenge and exhilaration of being different from other human beings, and at the same time provide comfort and a feeling of unity with everyone else who is part of our pluralistic society” (Cianciolo, 1981: 15).
In relation to universal experiences, picture books can be used to assist children of all ages to realise that their wishes and actions are a part of growing up. In an attempt to help the reader to comprehend how the children’s wishes and actions can be portrayed in a book, Cianciolo provides the following two illustrations taken from McCloskey’s and Deveaux’s books respectively:

A story that brings understanding and an element of joy and excitement to everyday living and to just growing up is Robert McCloskey’s classic *One Morning in Maine*. The story line and beautiful, dark blue, double-page spreads of perspective drawings enable the young reader to realize that a loose tooth means that one is growing up and that it is a wonderfully important occasion (Cianciolo, 1981: 16).

The moral of the story shows that *One Morning in Maine* is indeed a universal story because children from all cultures and nationalities experience the loss of their teeth. The next illustration concerns a unique experience that depicts “individuals from diverse cultures participating and functioning as all people do, regardless of their cultural background” (Cianciolo, 1981: 16). When portraying individuals who are involved in universal experiences, she tells the reader concisely about the author of the story, the content, the moral of the story and the functions of the illustrations. She says:

For another kind of understanding – that sometimes circumstances beyond the control of a child’s family turn joyful anticipations into bitter disappointments – is *Na-ni*. In it Alexis Deveaux, a black poet, playwright, and artist, has made surrealistic ink drawings to illustrate her moving, very realistic account of the day of a little girl who did not get her much-longed for bicycle because a black “brother” had stolen “momma’s” welfare check from the mailbox. Deveaux’s highly stylized drawings are a perfect match for her literary protest about people’s cruelty to each other, shattered dreams, and the dehumanizing, hostile environment in which Na-ni lives (Cianciolo, 1981: 16-17).

In *Other people*, children can be introduced to the diversities of humankind in stories, poetry and factual accounts of the events and accomplishments that occurred in years past or which are happening presently, but in distant, foreign
lands (Cianciolo, 1981). On the subject The world I live in Cianciolo (1981: 23-24) mentions some of the values that could be provided by literature when she declares that:

   Literature can alert children to their immediate world and can also serve as a vehicle to new and more expansive environments. Thus, picture books may explain in terms young readers can understand and identify with what is happening in their world – why and how and when it happens.

The category The Imaginative world includes folktales, myths and legends. This is children’s fiction that helps to nourish the child’s imagination. Fanciful fiction affords the reader a temporary but actual escape from the tedium and pressures which are frequently faced. Fantasy also provides excitement and exhilaration (Cianciolo, 1981: 25-26). In this study, the researcher has adopted Cianciolo’s approach to writing about and analysing both Zulu picture books and storybooks because it offers a holistic approach to the criticism of children’s literature.

In her keynote address presented at the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) conference, Fayose (2004) provides an overview of the development of creative writing for children in Africa. In addition, she promotes the publication of more relevant and interesting books for African children and raises awareness about the value of reading. She starts by giving a brief history of the publishing of children’s books in Africa. She says that publishing in Africa started with the missionaries who showed an interest in “providing religious tracts and related Christian literature for the new converts” (2004:2). She gives credit to the missionaries’ contribution to committing many African languages to writing and by so doing, providing orthographies for the languages. She also mentions the missionaries’ work which resulted in the increase of wordbooks and multilingual dictionaries.

However, she criticises the importation without modification of books used in European schools into Africa. These books she regards as irrelevant to the
needs of African children. This comment is particularly relevant to this study because books translated into Zulu are scrutinised to determine the relevance of the milieu, images and illustrations to the South African context. Fayose cites the unfamiliar setting and images as aspects that are irrelevant to African children. In this paper, Fayose explains the variety and forms of children's books. She claims that anthologies of folk stories form the bulk of the total output of creative writing published for African children. As far as she is concerned, the rationale behind this is that “when a society turns from an oral to a reading or literary society, there is a strong tendency for the folktale not only to be a model for the written stories but the tales themselves to be collected and translated or transcribed in the lingua franca of the countries and other languages” (Fayose 2004: 4).

In her paper, Fayose further provides titles of anthologies of folktales for African children that were published from 1960 to 1978. Modern realistic stories are the second genre that is mentioned and these are described as the bulk of stories published for African children today. These stories are said to reflect real life as it is lived in the societies in which the stories are set, e.g. stories about home and school life. Examples of relevant books with the names of their authors and their themes are briefly summarised. This is commendable because it gives any reader of the paper an idea of how to identify various genres of children’s books and how to learn to group books that have the same motif, e.g. different individual’s experiences about their first day at school. This will be of assistance when one is doing book reviews and could also give critics and authors ideas for future studies.

In her section on “Other genres of African children stories”, Fayose commends what she calls “career stories” and supports the need for such stories by stating that “career stories are very useful for teenage boys and girls whose parents may not be knowledgeable enough to advise them on job prospects” (2004:9).
On the issue of developing the reading habits of African children, she delves into factors that hinder a culture of reading among African children and identifies some of the important ones: teachers should not be the only ones who make an effort to bring books to children; librarians and parents should also play a role. There is a lack of cultural support for children reading books for enjoyment - reading seems to be done solely for examination purposes. In many homes where the present generation are the first generation of readers, older members do not know the value of reading and thus cannot appreciate nor encourage the reading habit. In homes where parents and other adults are not literate, reading is not regarded as a “leisure occupation”. Lastly, she mentions economic reasons such as child labour, house chores, overcrowding, etc.

Fayose (2004:12) offers the following remedies for those factors that may inhibit a child from developing a culture of reading: children should be given time and a quiet area to read without any disturbance; parents should be role models when it comes to reading; parents should buy books for their children; schools should inculcate a culture of reading; teachers and school librarians should work together; teachers and parents ought to know about current publications and available reading material through publishers’ catalogues; journals; and book lists should be age-appropriate.

Fayose concludes by advocating that:

All teacher training institutions, both colleges and University Departments of Education, should introduce courses in children’s literature, reading promotion and school librarianship in all teacher training programmes. This will go a long way to creating an awareness of the value of wide reading in teachers who in turn will develop children who will love books and reading (Fayose 2004:12).

McConaghy (1990), a teacher, in her book entitled *Children learning through Literature*, portrays the relationship that exists between the literary experiences acquired by children through storybooks and early literacy. The theme here is how literature enhances literacy. She shows this by demonstrating to the reader
how in her classrooms, she started by creating a literature programme that focussed mainly on reading, writing and talking. For instance, she would read a book about a birthday party and thereafter allow a learner to tell a story about his or her own birthday party. Differences and parallels between stories would emerge and these would be followed by questions. Learners were also asked to write their own stories independently. Concerning one of her students, (McConaghy 1990) observes that:

Jason had become aware that many of his ideas for writing were rooted in the literature that he read independently and that we read together.

From Jason’s actions and responses to some of the questions that were posed, McConaghy noticed that he was becoming both a writer and a reader. As McConaghy provides some examples of the writing by these children, the incorporation of information drawn from this book has provided the researcher with insights on how to comment on the value of reading literature.

In his book Literature for Children, Davies (1973) presents three important topics: the value of reading literature, a definition of children’s literature and the role of the teacher. In his attempt to answer the question, what is the value of reading literature? he provides a list drawn from two different sources. Some of the points he cites from Russell (1961) are: the extension and enrichment of the child’s experience of the complex ways of life, giving opportunities to relieve and re-experience the adventures and ideas of others, gaining insight onto one’s own personality and problems, providing opportunities for fun and escape and the development of worthwhile tastes and a permanent interest in good literature.

Next, he includes responses extracted from teachers who agreed that literature was an important part of the curriculum. Reasons given included the belief that literature develops the child’s own use of language, that it aids reading ability, stimulates the child’s imagination thus enriching activities in other fields, helps the child to appreciate and understand himself through comparison of his own
problems with those of literary characters, widens the child’s horizons, helps the child to relive the experiences of others, and offers the child enjoyment.

These reasons are used in this study as some of the criteria to assess Zulu literature.

When asked the question: What is literature for children? Davies answers that children’s librarians always stress the following two criteria: firstly, whether the heroes are children or teenagers and, secondly, whether the ideas and relationships are simple or complex. But to him simplicity of theme is the paramount criterion. Regarding the role of the teacher, Davies (1973: 34) sees it as the role of choosing suitable storybooks for children and encouraging reading through different genres like drama and creative writing. His idea of writing and reading corresponds with that of McConaghy above. On choosing stories that are age-appropriate and interesting to children, the following ideas are suggested for children up to the age of four or five:

...stories about animals, toys, pets, parents, grandparents, children like themselves who get cross, play, play up, get up, go shopping; and who are fed and scolded, loved, taken out and put to bed. From this delight in the familiar, children move on to the kind of story which opens up in the familiar world a wider range of possibilities than they normally exploit (Davies, 1973:35-36).

When it comes to folktales, Davies believes that children between the ages of six and nine or ten enjoy them. He provides examples of some well known English stories such as “The Three Little Bears” and “Little Red Riding Hood”. He suggests that such stories are enjoyed by this age group because:

They give the child a sense of security as he finds that they belong to the life of the different environments that he has to adapt to: his mother tells him these stories at home, and then when he goes to school he finds his teacher tells them too. ... Between the ages of eight/nine and eleven, allegorical stories of the type of Pilgrim’s Progress, King of the Golden River and The Soldier and Death – often tales of moral struggle,
following the task of an arduous journey – can take hold on the imagination (Davies, 1973: 35-36).

Still on the subject of folktales, Davies discusses myths and legends, believing that interest in them can range between children who are seven to twelve years old. From folktales his discussion shifts to stories which he calls “real-Life situations”. He says these stories are for children who are nine and older and:

…in a more fully developed naturalistic setting – in the past, in other lands, in the family, on holiday, at school, in the gang, about the street (Davies, 1973:37).

This discussion is important in as far as the different types of children’s stories and themes are concerned. Davies not only provides examples and discusses relevant English stories; he also mentions the value of stories for children of different age-groups. The researcher will determine whether the content in Zulu stories complies with these criteria of age-appropriateness or not. This could give rise to future comparative research.

Stewig (1988) provides an extensive and analytical review of the field of children’s literature. In chapter one he explains the what, why and how of children’s literature. In discussing variety in the genre, he differentiates between historical and modern fiction. The study uses the terminology oral or traditional literature and contemporary written literature. Poetry and folktales are also included in Stewig’s discussion of a variety of genres in children’s literature. Both traditional and modern forms of poetry are discussed.

Finally, Stewig includes picture books and informative books as another variety of children’s literature. This study does not include the latter. As far as the differences in picture books are concerned the author considers size, i.e. from miniature to large books. This includes the various shapes of books. The style of illustration is also discussed in terms of colour, colour combinations or absence of colour, and stories with text and those without. Some books tell a story through photographs. Although this study will not discuss variety in format,
illustrations and colour will be examined to determine how they help to convey the message.

When it comes to variety in subjects, Stewig discusses topics dealt with in children’s books. These include topics such as birth, a sibling who is different, death, family problems, single-parent households and many more. When discussing realism in children’s literature, Tiedt (1979) believes that the trend of presenting topics such as drugs, death and sex in realistic literature makes some people feel uncomfortable. However, he defends this by saying that children today are living in a world where they are aware of personal relationships like divorce in their homes. Nevertheless, Tiedt (1979) realises that it does take a skilful author to meet the challenge of handling a topic like death. These topics are discussed in many children’s books, irrespective of colour or creed of the author, but this study will investigate how the issue of death, as an example, is portrayed in children’s books aimed at the Zulu culture. Secondly, single-parent households are universal, but books in South African indigenous languages may take a different angle as families headed by children or grandparents are becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in this country.

Norton (1983), in her chapter entitled “Contemporary realistic fiction”, gives an in-depth discussion of the sub-genre of realistic fiction. Besides defining it, she discusses how it has changed over the years, the criteria for its evaluation and the value of realistic fiction for children. When evaluating realistic animal stories, in contrast to traditional animal stories for instance, where animals act like people or have magical powers, Norton (1983: 398) advises that the following criteria be taken into consideration:

1. Does the author portray animals objectively without giving them human thoughts or motives?
2. Does the behaviour of the animal characters correspond with information provided by knowledgeable observers and authorities on animal behaviour?

3. Does the book encourage children to respond to the needs of animals or the importance of people loving animals without being too sentimental or melodramatic? (Norton 1983:398).

In African culture, some animals are perceived somewhat differently than in Western culture so the examination of the portrayal of animals by black authors and characters and the sensitivity to their needs may prove to be not only an interesting issue but a controversial one.

Chapter two of Stewig’s book deals with illustrations. Various kinds of illustrations are explained. The author’s purpose in writing this chapter was to:

…emphasize the possibility of studying illustration as an independent visual artefact. The outcome of such conscious study is the development of children’s visual sensitivity so they can be knowledgeable consumers of illustrative art in books (Stewig 1988:77).

This chapter will contribute to the study because well illustrated books could foster the development of a love for reading.

In chapter three Stewig deals with alphabet books as a subgenre of contemporary children’s literature and uses subheadings to explain them. He believes that the purpose of alphabet books is to teach letter sequences, letter form, letter style, and sound symbol correspondence (Stewig, 1988: 93). Furthermore, he differentiates between three types of alphabet books: related-topic books, potpourri books and sequential story books. He also suggests how these books should be evaluated. Norton (1983) categorises picture books in much the same way as Stewig, but her categories are broader and she includes comments on their value. For instance, in her discussion of toy books, e.g. board, pop-up, flap, cloth and plastic books, she notes that these books
encourage a child to develop vocabulary, count, identify colours, and so on. Alphabet books can stimulate vocabulary development and item identification, counting books could be used “to develop young children’s concepts of one-to-one correspondence and to develop the ability to count sequentially from one to ten …” (Norton, 1983:147).

As far as concept books are concerned, Norton believes that these stimulate the child’s cognitive development, e.g. concepts such as red, yellow, triangle, square, etc. Wordless picture books promote oral and literal language development. Norton regards easy-to-read books as those which contain many pictures which create the story line, suitable for children with beginning reading skills (Norton, 1983:155).

Chapter four of Stewig’s book deals with picture books. The physical format of picture books such as shape, binding and paper, are discussed. Instead of deliberating on the physical format of the book, this study will concentrate on what is inside the book – the content. The section on the language of words and pictures, though briefly presented, will assist the researcher in evaluating the effectiveness of balancing text and pictures. Chapter five discusses wordless books or pictures without text. According to Stewig (1988:167), the idea of telling a story without words is not a new one because primitive people living in caves used drawings to depict events in their daily lives. Stewig (1988:167) cites Herman (1976) in providing reasons why wordless books later became less popular:

With the advent of printed books and rising literacy, wordless storytelling diminished, becoming less important to maintaining society. Words in books became the accepted norm.

It seems this change did not last too long because the number of picture books began to grow again. According to Stewig (1988): “Rarely seen even twenty years ago, wordless books now form, in the United States at least, a sturdy new genre, well represented in many classrooms and other learning environments”. 
The researcher will determine whether such books exist in Zulu children’s literature given the apparent dearth of African illustrators.

Chapter six deals with traditional literature and discusses various kinds of folk literature such as nursery rhymes, fables, and French, German, Eastern European, Oriental, American, African and Northern European folktales. As this study is not a comparative study, the researcher will not provide a detailed discussion of the various types of folktale found in Zulu because a great deal of research has already been done in this area, mostly by Zulu scholars.

Pinchuck (2008) describes the history and background of the Association of Jewish Libraries and the role it had played in recognising quality Jewish literature for forty years through the Sydney Taylor Book Award. According to Pinchuck (2008:28), the mission of the award is “to encourage the publication of outstanding books of Jewish content for children and teens, books that exemplify the highest literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience”.

The author relates how the award was established and the manner in which the winner was selected. At its inception, a single winner was selected for books for children between 8-14 years; a few years later the committee included books for younger readers up to the age of eight. The author explains other categories that were included over time and the criteria used to evaluate books in these categories. The selection team considers books according to the following criteria: a book must have literary merit; it must be positive or authentic; contain Jewish religious or cultural content; be appropriate to the intended grade level in style, vocabulary, illustrations etc. On the topic of themes, Pinchuck notes that Jewish themes predominate and she provides examples such as the Holocaust; Israel; Bible stories; families; Jewish folktales and legends; Jewish customs and rituals; how Jews relate to non-Jews and define themselves, and so on.
Although the article concerns Jewish children’s literature, it adds to this study in the following ways: the researcher will investigate the history and role of the Usiba guild of writers in the promotion of the writing of Zulu children’s books, the type of awards they offer, the themes covered and the titles of books and authors who have received the awards.

In the same way that adult literature is analysed critically, children’s literature is also subject to serious criticism. White (1976), in her book entitled *Children’s Literature: Criticism and Response*, suggests four types of criticism used in adult literature that could also be used to analyse and respond to children’s literature. She discusses psychological, sociological, archetypal and structural criticism. These four critical approaches make up four of the five chapters in her book. The fifth and last chapter concerns helping children to respond to literature. Firstly, White (1976: 5; 8) defines the four approaches to criticism. Psychological criticism deals with:

An analysis of the emotions related to the literature. It takes the form of the biographical studies of the author and analyses of the character within the fiction itself. … Methods of analysis adapted from the area of psychology and psychoanalytic theory have been used to find explanations in authors’ lives for their use of certain literary allusions. These same analytic techniques have been applied to the study of characters within the literary work and to the responses that the literary work evokes on the part of the reader.

White also makes the reader aware of the attacks that have been launched against psychological critique by stating some of its weaknesses. For instance, she states that when someone reads works based on psychoanalysis of the literary work, the ideas offered to the reader do not reflect the author’s meaning, per se, but could be extending the personal meaning found within the work. Amongst other weaknesses, she remarks on the tendency of this critical approach to concentrate too much on the artist’s work.

Secondly, according to White (1976: 52):
Sociological criticism is concerned with the view of society that is reflected in literature. It explains literature in terms of social, economic and political views of the time.

White also pinpoints the pros and cons of this criticism and says that its value lies in the fact that it allows the reader to see the literary work in its written context. But it has been criticised for placing all the emphasis on the social environment and ignoring the aesthetic aspect. Thirdly, she describes archetypal criticism as viewing the literary work from the point of view of its theme. White (1976: 108) suggests that myth criticism is a term that may be used interchangeably with archetypal criticism and it concerns myth that:

...contains universal symbols of a person’s most fundamental relationships with themselves, other people and the universe, encompassing past, present, and future time ... views literary work from the standpoint of its theme.

She elucidates further:

The themes or motifs studied have symbols that occur in all great literature over time and space. Myth criticism, a term sometimes used interchangeably with archetypal criticism, concerns myths that contain universal symbols of a person’s most fundamental relationships with themselves, other people, and the universe, encompassing past, present and future time. Certain themes in myths also have universal symbolism; these are called archetypes (1976:108).

This type of criticism has its own advantages and disadvantages. Structural criticism is the last topic under discussion and deals with the form of the literary work “…it uses an analysis of the structure of the work in order to understand the meaning of the work “(White 1976:159).

Although the abovementioned forms of criticism are prevalent in adult literature, discussions of these approaches, supplemented by different types of readings will give the researcher insight into how to go about critiquing Zulu children’s fiction. It should be noted that these critical approaches will not constitute the underlying theory of the study but will be an important tool when responding to children’s literature.
Trousdale and McMillan (2003) examine a young girl’s response to feminist and patriarchal folktales. The results of the study emanated from data collected from interviews conducted with participants between eight and 12 years of age. They start by giving the reader a bird’s-eye view of the functions of some of the stories that were written for children over the decades. These viewpoints are drawn from comments and analyses made by various folklorists and researchers. The following are some of the remarks made about the tales and their functions: tales were intended to entertain and to instruct; frightful elements in the tales were regarded as useful for disciplining children; concerns raised on weak, silent and passive females; females who are regarded because of their physical beauty. Sources used by various scholars will expedite the search for relevant information from children’s books for use in specific chapters of the study. For instance, Trousdale and McMillan (2003: 3) draw from Gilbert to emphasise that it is not stories alone that determine children’s perceptions of gender but other societal influences like television, advertisements and popular music, which send strong messages of gender norms and ideals. Yet, these stories have a powerful and often subtle effect, and they quote from Gilbert as follows:

By entering into story worlds, and by being inserted into the storylines of their culture, students come to know what counts as being a woman, or being a man, in the culture to which the stories belong. They come to know of cultural possibilities available for femininity and masculinity – and the limits to that range. …Through constant repetition and layering, story patterns and logic become almost “naturalized” as truth and common sense.

Taking this quotation into consideration, the researcher will investigate subtle messages and types of socialisation Zulu children’s stories instil, directly and indirectly, in the minds of young boys and girls.
2.3 Conclusion

The chapter provided an overview of the most important literary material that will inform the study in its entirety. The literature review commenced by examining books, articles, dissertations and theses that were pertinent to a study of traditional children’s literature. Information on contemporary children’s literature was derived from various relevant sources. A wide-ranging literary review of Zulu children’s literature was not, however, possible because of a lack of scholarly research on the subject of children’s literature in the African languages.
CHAPTER 3

ORAL FOLKTALES AS CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

3.1 Introduction

Oral stories have been in existence since long before their written counterparts emerged and were, in a way, used as an educative tool system. In the traditional setting, people used the spoken word to teach about life, to pass on history and culture, to teach the language and to give moral advice to their children. Home teaching was achieved through the performance of folktales where in the narration of the story, the performer would reveal the setting and demonstrate events through the actions of the characters. Folktales were used mostly as the tool or vehicle to achieve this. “The earliest instance of such folktales occurred even before the civilisation of man began. His language was an accomplished fact, and the history of literature in any language really begins before man learned to write. It must have begun with the home education of children when mothers sang lullabies and handed them down, words and music, to the nurses who in turn taught them to their own nursing groups” (Vilakazi, 1945:1).

Like all forms of oral literature, Zulu folktales originated from the Zulu-speaking people. They are a fountain of knowledge of days gone by. They are the treasure of the nation, not recorded but passed down from one generation to the next by one means only: the spoken word.

Before people could read or write, the grandmother, as a performer, “had the function of introducing children to the value system and the organisation of their society” (Canonici, 1995:14). She used the folktale as a powerful and effective mechanism to teach people, especially children, how to conduct themselves in life. Children learned a great deal at this “informal school”, without being conscious that they were being instructed (Canonici, 1995: 14).
Folktales form a large part of African folklore and they are an essential sub-genre of African traditional children’s literature. Folktales are regarded as narrative fiction because they tell a story which is not real but understood as something that took place in the remote past. The story is narrated in ordinary, everyday language, in a sequence of events, and it features characters that are used to develop the storyline. For a folktale to be regarded as a story there should be a narrator or a performer who narrates it, an audience or listeners, a theme, setting and characters.

Storytelling took place when children were gathered together in a homestead, performed usually by the *ugogo* “grandmother” or some elderly person. During storytelling the *ugogo* was the point of focus because she had something to offer her listeners or audience, just as today a reader becomes engrossed when quietly reading a book. The Zulu folktale was always introduced by an introductory phrase such as *Kwesukasukela / Kwasukasukela, (Kwathi) ngelinye ilanga* or *Kwakukhona* (once upon a time).

The ability of folktales to stand the test of time depended on the capacity of the brain of the human being to remember, to retain and to store information. Canonici (1996:5) refers to this as “collective memories” and he explains it in this manner:

> Oral literature gives expression to the collective memories of a group, amassed over a long period of time, and reflecting the ways people have come to think about themselves, their life, their religious beliefs. Being stored in the memory, it needs ways to shelve it properly and to bring it back to the surface: retention and recall skills.

In 2009, in an interview conducted with two Zulu authors, DBZ Ntuli and OEH Nxumalo, answers were provided to the following question on the apparent resilience of African folktales:
For centuries, folktales have been the textbook for African education. What was the reason for this and do you think they still have a place in the life of the modern child?

Ntuli’s comments focussed on these tales being part of the heritage of all nations, including the Zulus:

*Inganekwane phela ubuciko bomlomo bomdabu obutholakala ngisho kuzona zonke izizwe, ngakho-ke kuyakhuthazwa ukuthi noma ngabe yizindaba ezindala kuhle nabantwana banamhlanje bazazi ngoba yizindaba eziyisisekelo sezizwe ezehlukeneyo.*

*AmaZulu nje, ayazinda izinganekwane zawkokhokho ukuba bazi ukuthi yikuphi okwakuphilisa okhokho kuqala nokuthi futhi yikuphi okwakubathokozisa, noma kunezifundo nokuthi izinganekwane zibuye zibe yizinto ezibathokozisayo abantu ngakho-ke namanje kusatanele kuqhubeka kuxoxwe ukuze kucebise imiqondo yabantwana.*

(A folktale is traditional folklore that is found in all nations. Because folktales are the foundation of different nations, it is recommended and encouraged that, in spite of them being old stories, the modern day child should learn them because they are the foundation of different nations.

The Zulu need the folktales of our ancestors to know about things that sustained them and their source of entertainment in the past. Although moral lessons can be found in the stories, folktale brings delight to people and it is imperative to continue narrating them so as to enrich children’s minds.)

Ntuli’s response highlights the fact that folktales are an African oral art which embraces all nations. As part of our heritage, it is essential that they are preserved for all generations.

Likewise, Nxumalo commented on the importance and role of folktakes in the life of a child:

It is true; I think that it is still important that folktales or stories that are about the origin of our culture should still be there. What is significant is that the modern child should know tales that have to do with his/ her nation. Just as in other nations where stories are told about fairytale stories and other things, with us too, it is of the essence that our children
should know stories about *Chakijana Bogcololo* and *imbulu*. The most essential thing is the fact that when we speak about a written story, we are in fact drawing from the story that was told orally.

It is important that when such things are taught to children, a teacher should be found who will have an idea about the written story so that it will be interesting and received with enthusiasm by the child. Another thing is that when a child is still young, s/he likes to know that there are fictional things that have some childishness in them but which are unbelievable, for instance, *Alice in Wonderland*. For instance, in [a Zulu] story, Chakijana says “*Mama, sengicela ungizale nansi inkomo kababa igugela esibayeni*” (Mother, please give birth to me because our father’s cattle are growing old in the kraal) [i.e. because there is no one to herd the cattle].

Additionally, he hinted at the dynamic nature of oral folktales when he mentioned the transition from performed stories to those taught in the classroom. His suggestion that written tales should be taught enthusiastically also suggests that in the classroom, an element of performance should form part of the teaching. This is an important remark because in this way, children will not view these tales as boring, outdated or useless.

The aim of this chapter is to analyse folktales as children’s literature and as a form of entertainment that also imbues the child with both intellectual and cultural wisdom. The chapter introduces folktales as a part of Zulu traditional literature or folklore or verbal art that, from time immemorial, has been used as a means of educating children. The performance of folktales is presented as a vehicle that imparts an informal but holistic education to the child. Msimang sees the folktale as important because:

*Okokuqala wukuthi ikhombisa injululwazi yawokhokho. Okwesibili iyindlela emangalisayo yokufundisa omdala nomncane ngomhlaba esiphila kuwo; nabantu esiphila phakathi kwabo; nempilo esiyiphilayo* (Msimang, 1987: 1).

(Firstly, it shows the wisdom of our forefathers. Secondly, it is an amazing way of teaching both young and old about the world in which we live, the people with whom we live and the life that we live.)
By placing folktales in their context, they will be seen as “a traditional oral art which reflects certain cultural aspects of Zulu society” (Canonici, 1985: 77). Unlike contemporary children’s literature which is regarded as an individual effort, storytelling has always been a vibrant communal experience for the Zulu. Its liveliness is said to be dependent on the performer and the active participation of the audience. Owing to its oral nature, traditional literature only comes to life in the fleeting moment of its performance, as the performer is able and willing to formulate it according to the occasion (Canonici, 1985: 77). In the next section, the discussion of folktales as children’s literature will include the performance, functions and value of folktales.

3.2 Folktale performance

Long ago the performance of folktales did not take place randomly. Time and place were respected. Similarly to school or church, the performance of folktales took place at a specific time and place because it had a specific function to fulfill and a message to deliver to a certain group of people, especially to children. In an original cultural setting of storytelling there is a live active storyteller and a live audience communicating in their own native language. The conclusion is thus that folktale performance is a form of communication. Orality is a communication technique which is of necessity directed at a group. Without the group there is no communication, and without communication no community can be created (Canonici, 1995: 16). Finnegan (1991: 41) defines performance as “the delivery skills of the performer and how they are used, the significance of the occasion, and the interactions with the audience”. The elements of performance are not merely contingent and marginal but they are necessary for the realisation of oral literary forms and an essence of it (Finnegan, 1991: 41).

Performance thus elicits the creative and aesthetic aspect of an individual which is part of human nature. When analysing folktale performance, Bascom (1965) suggests that the time and place of a performance, the performer, composition
and audience participation be taken into consideration. In addition to the above, the content and function of folktales will be analysed in this study. It is important to discuss the external cultural elements of folktales, such as time and place of narration, because without these factors, the nature of oral literature would be incomplete.

3.2.1 Time and place of folktale performance

Performance of folktales usually took place in the evening, around the fire and after the daily chores had been completed. Vilakazi (1945: 191) explains that while during the day the elders were occupied with handicraft and the children were busy with clay work, in the evening both sections would gather into houses where folktales were recited. The evening was also the ideal time to entertain children by narrating stories because there was the belief that telling stories during day time would make children grow horns. Vilakazi (1945: 192) writes that: “It was not customary among the Nguni to narrate folktales during the day, for people who did this were said to ‘grow horns’ (ukumila izimpondo) as a punishment (isishawo)”. He adds that although it seems uncertain who the bringer of this punishment was, some people believed that it was either God or the ancestors who were capable of doing so. According to Mahonga, Makhambeni and Ntuli (1996) a tale could be narrated during the day but in order to avoid growing horns, the narrator had to take a small stick and fix it onto his or her head. This ritual is explained as follows:


(The thing that could be of assistance was the folktale stick. This stick was as small as a blade of grass that is cut and stuck into the hair on the head and the horns would be told that: “Horns do not grow here, it is a rock. If you want to grow, you have to grow on the earth where it is soft.)
Mahonga et al. (1996) make an interesting comment regarding the growing of horns. They see the performance of this ritual as a ploy to dissuade children from getting into the habit of listening to stories during the day as this would be disruptive to their daily chores. From the researcher’s point of view, this seems true because stories are still narrated by teachers at crèches and schools but nothing has ever been reported to have happened to the narrators or audience. Performers like Gcina Mhlophe have also told stories on TV and in different parts of the world without any negative effects.

3.2.2 The performer

The performer (*umdlali*) is one of the most important elements in Zulu oral art. She is like a creative and gifted author who uses language and imagery to infuse life into the pages of a book. In the true sense of “oral art”, the performer is the artist who brings life and meaning to folktales through the spoken word directed at the audience. Oral performance involves the use of words which have been spoken by the performer and heard by the audience (Canonici, 1993:53). Her performance appeals mostly to her audience through the senses of hearing and sight. During her interaction with them they see and hear her as she presents her story through the varying degrees of tone of voice and mimicry. According to Canonici (1995: 18), an oral composition:

…is characterized by three main elements: word, music and dance. The word is made by means of striking images expressed in careful and traditional language which is often couched in rhythmic patterns that lead to hand-clapping, dance and music. These aspects involve the whole being, from the intelligence to the senses. The child is emotionally involved in all aspects of the performance, which instills such feelings as will shape his emotional make-up.

A performer is comparable to words that give meaning to a book through carefully selected idioms, ideophones and metaphors that are infused with layers of meanings. The difference between a book and a performer is that a performer can be referred to as “art in motion”. The performer is the key to oral folktales. Without the tale’s narrator there would be no traditional oral folktale:
Oral literature is dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion – there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product ... without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot be said to have any continued or independent existence (Finnegan 1984: 4).

This is true because folktale performance serves as one of the vehicles or means through which culture is passed on from one generation to the next.

Among the Zulu, the *ugogo* (grandmother) is usually the storyteller or the performer, as has been mentioned above. This type of prose was developed by older men and women, no longer fit for strenuous occupations such as field work, grinding and providing food, or military service (Vilakazi, 1945: 191). In fact, anyone who has experience in storytelling can narrate a folktale. This could be a mother, an aunt or any other relative. Storytelling is a family and a community affair, and children are trained to learn and share the stories they have heard. Sometimes the mother or grandmother will help the little one and point out her shortcomings, or encourage her to tell more, especially if the child reveals special acting talent (Canonici, 1996: 58). Mahonga et al. (1996) describe the manner in which an expert performer attempts to capture her audience or listeners’ attention:


(She has to demonstrate artistic abilities through the use of the voice and emotions, and to exemplify some body movements. Therefore, if the story is about a huge fearful animal whose roaring echoes throughout the forest, all these should be vividly portrayed. An expert narrator does simply narrate events in the story; she plays with the voice to mimic different characters. She tells the story and also sings
where a song must be sung. An expert narrator is no different from a stage actress/actor.)

This emphasises the fact that an expert folktale performer is more than an ordinary narrator. A performer must be endowed with a multifaceted nature, expertise and multiple skills in order to keep the audience awake and entertained. “As is done in the dance, so in these stories both narrator and listeners take part, to heighten the performance and keep the interest alive” (Vilakazi 1945: 200).

Canonici (1996) mentions the following aspects of a good performer and a good storyteller. A performer is not someone who simply repeats something she has learned by heart; instead, she

- is an artist and a creator, teacher, social commentator and an entertainer;
- will explain difficult words when performing for children and also take time to teach the theme, the refrain or the song, if there is one;
- will also use devices that encourage laughter in the audience, such as the imitation of animal calls;
- is interested in the culture of her people and is proud of it. This emerges not only in the use of idiomatic language but in the presentation of Zulu customs in the tale setting;
- observes modern social trends as well as the past of the people and is able to use her stories as a commentary, giving advice to her young charges on what to do and what to be careful of. She is thus a storehouse of culture, a bridge between yesterday and tomorrow;
- is an open-minded person and not shy or timid in the use of expressions or words that are taboo in normal conversation;
- uses language in an inganekwane performance that is simple and realistic and corresponds to the language used in everyday conversation;
- produces a story which is always “new” and enjoyable.
The performer has at her disposal a traditional repertoire of core-refrains, core-songs or proverbs. This part of the story is traditional and remains rather fixed; it is known by most people, who will be able to participate in the performance (Canonici, 1985: 80). In comparison to written oral literature, verbal art has much more to offer in terms of what the performer has to illustrate through her/his actions. The story becomes vivid and understandable. Children get to know their culture, songs and the use of language expressions and their meanings. They also learn how to act or perform because the physical actions reflect what is narrated.

3.2.3 The audience

The audience (izibukeli) in traditional storytelling is usually made up of children although adults are not barred from listening. In the same way that a book needs to be read in order to decipher its meaning and gain knowledge from it, so the performer requires an audience. The audience is not simply passive listeners, but active participants who have a vital role to play in the whole performance act. In the introduction to the story, they respond to the performer’s “kwesukasukela” by saying “cosu”. Msimang et al. (1993: 68) expounds on this type of response:

“Cosu! Cosu! lyaphela-ke!” (bit by bit the story ends). This bit by bit development is also maintained by various forms of repetition, e.g. of verbs, wahamba, wahamba, wahamba (He walked and walked and walked) … of songs, and reduplication of ideophones.

As the story continues, children join in in places where there is a song; they dance, clap hands and sometimes remind a performer where it seems that there is something that she has forgotten. The audience is one of the necessary elements in storytelling because it not only complements the performer but completes the story.

From the responses to the questionnaire, it appears that all children love to listen to stories. It also seems that children love stories because they benefit
from this leisure time. This became evident from some of the answers that were received from various respondents to the questionnaires. When asked whether they had been told stories when they were children, all respondents gave a positive answer. On being asked why they thought it was important for children to hear stories, the following reasons were provided:

Children will be inspired to read and know about old stories. To open children’s lives [widen children’s horizons] about different things in life and to encourage listening in children. To develop a child’s mind, to teach, to warn children about things, to foster understanding among one another and to encourage discussion. Stories encourage children to tell their own stories.

All these responses indicated that the culture of telling stories to children was not a waste of time but was valuable because it had some important roles to play. This concurs with what was remarked by the two interviewees already mentioned above.

3.2.4 Down memory lane: a reflection on personal experiences

As a child, I remember that some evenings, after we had had our meal, we would all sit in the kitchen enjoying the warmth from the hearth and my mother would entertain us by telling stories. Although some of them were entertaining and enjoyable, some were really frightening. One day she told us a story about utokoloshe (a short hairy dwarf or spirit known to be used by witches) and umantindane (a zombie). The English/Zulu Zulu/English Dictionary defines umantindane as:

Isilwane sabathakathi okuthiwa ngumuntu ovuswe esefile, isilwane esinesimo esiphakathi kwesomuntu nesemfene (Doke et al., 1992: 289).

(An animal belonging to witches which is said to be a person raised from the dead; an animal which looks both like a person and like a baboon).
The performance of such stories would petrify us. We would scream, cry and block our ears. Initially, I would cling to my mother and beg her not to go on with the narration and I would refuse to listen to the end of the horror story. She sometimes told us stories about ghosts and witches who used to ride on baboons and pester members of her community, including her own family. It was very hard for me to believe that such things had really happened.

She told us stories about cannibals and, in addition, she would tell us different types of Zulu stories. For instance, she told us stories about a girl who failed to get married because, unlike her siblings, she was very arrogant and did not want to lick ubhici (a discharge) from the eyes of isalukazi (an old woman) she had met on her way to find a husband. I also remember a song that she used to sing to us which told the story of two young men who, because of pangs of hunger, stole meat at their parents-in-law:

*Izinsizwa ezimbili, zavakashela eMnambithi,
Zaziyalw’ impela ukuthi zingadli kakhulu.*

*Kwath’ uma sezidlile, zanikw’ indawo yokulala,
Ebusuku zalamba zase ziyavusana.
Yathi insizwa kweyakubo,
“Ngimbonile mina umame,
Ngimbonile lapho eyifake khon’ inyama.
Ngizonyonyoba kancane ngifike ngiyithathe
Ngibuye nayo bese-ke siyazikholisa.”*

*Kwathi kusa zase zishay’ utshani,
Kwathi kusa zase zishay’ utshani.*

(Two young men went visiting at Mnambithi (Ladysmith),
They were strongly advised not to eat too much there.
After they had eaten,
They were given a place to sleep.
And at night they felt the pangs of hunger
And they woke one another up.
Then one young man told the other one:
“I have seen the place where
The woman/Mama put
The meat so we can enjoy ourselves.
I will stealthily go there and take it
I will bring it along and we will enjoy ourselves.”*
At dawn they were nowhere to be seen, At dawn they were nowhere to be seen!

I used to marvel at the way she enacted the story. She sang the song slowly, mimicking the two men, indicating that they were dressed to the nines. She flicked dust off their “suits”, imitated them straightening one another’s ties, brushing their shoes, putting their hats on and waving goodbye to everybody. It was very amusing when she portrayed the scene of them waking up at night, whispering and complaining about their hunger. We would laugh our hearts out when she pretended to go to where the meat was hidden, trying very hard not to wake up the owners of the house. Thereafter, we would see the young men’s gluttony in their hurried eating of the meat. As children, we would be sitting together with our eyes fixed on her performance. As the story unfolded, we would react with smiles, giggles, laughter and apprehension. The response was indeed interactive. We all felt very entertained and happy!

In order to illustrate the interplay that occurs between performer and audience, mentioned in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 above, I have retold below one of the most popular Zulu stories as I remember it being narrated by my mother when I was a child, and later by a teacher at school. This story, and subsequent ones, will be told from the premise that all tales derive from primitive oral folktales. These ancient tales have been transferred by word of mouth from generation to generation; nowadays they are found in written form. Canonici (1985: 28) highlights this point when he comments on his research on written Zulu folktales:

Although they are found in a written form in IGODA, they have been transmitted orally in the past and are still performed as oral art, independently of the fact that they have been written down by C.L.S. Nyembezi.

This oral folktale is retold and reproduced in print especially for this study. Secondly, the folktale will be used to demonstrate the two-way form of communication that exists between the performer and her audience, i.e. as the narrator, through mimicry, endeavours to bring life to it. It is presented largely as
I remember it and in the manner that the performer - in this case - my mother, used to narrate it to us at home. Its retelling is explained and some of the devices used in the narration are discussed. The audience’s reactions are also discussed.

In the following section an example to illustrate techniques employed by the storyteller is provided in order to bring meaning to the tale. All tales discussed here, together with their translations, appear in appendix A.

3.2.4.1 UNanana Boselesele (Nanana Boselesele)

In the following discussion, techniques employed by the performer in the process of storytelling are illustrated in order to bring meaning to the tale. In presenting the folktale as a study of oral literature it is imperative to employ a performance based approach to explain the sub-genre. Finnegan (1992: 93) agrees:

> Meaning and artistry emerge in performance: this means that attention not just to words but also to how they are delivered: such elements as intonation, speed, rhythm, tone, dramatization, rhetorical devices, and performance.

*Time and place of performance*: The story was always told in the evening. The narration always took place in the kitchen around the warm hearth.

*The performer*: My mother did not start by mentioning the title of the story or briefly explaining what the story was about; instead, she uttered the magical words: “Kwesukasukela” (once upon a time). These words stirred up some expectations in us, and whet our appetite to hear more. According to Marivate (1973:77): “Folktales in Tsonga, as in other African cultures, are not given titles in the sense that a writer gives a title to the story in the book”. African tales are known chiefly by their main character/s or by the subject under discussion. Marivate, when expounding on this matter has this argument:
So, a title of any folktale in Tsonga which happens to appear in the written version of the folktale is not the accepted title supplied by the “owners” of the story, i.e. the speakers of the language; neither is it the title given by the narrator, but it is the title supplied by the collector or the recorder for easy reference to his material (1973: 79).

The audience: As the listeners, all of us responded to the introduction of her story by saying “Cosu” or “Cosu inyoni iyasuka” (slowly, slowly the bird moves/flies). Although we responded in this manner, I really never knew what the phrase meant. I worked out that it had something to do with the manner in which a story was told. Later, when I started school, I realised that the word “Cosu” was generally used as a response to the opening formula: “Kwesukasukela”.

Performing/narrating the story: The performer introduced the main character by saying “Kwakukhona inkosikazi eyayihlala nengane yayo yentombazana. Igama lale nkosikazi kwakungu Nanana Boselesele” (There once was a woman who lived with her daughter, her name was Nanana Boselesele). After this introduction she would continue with her performance. This story is an example of a monster and humans tale.

Nanana Boselesele had built her house on the path where all the animals passed. Every time the animals came upon Nanana Boselesele’s little girl, they would ask her the same question: “Whose is this pretty child?” The child would answer: “It is Nanana Boselesele’s child, the one who built her house near the road on purpose because she relies on her courage and cunning.” The animals would respond by warning her, “Iyeza indlovu; uyeza uSondonzima?” (The elephant is coming; Heavyweight is coming). The animals were referring to the size of the elephant.

One day, the elephant swallowed the little girl. When Nanana Boselesele arrived the child was nowhere to be found. She asked some small animals about her child’s whereabouts and they told her that her child had been swallowed by Sondonzima, a gigantic animal. On hearing this, Nanana
Boselesele armed herself by putting all her things in a basket. She went out in search of her missing child. When she found Sondonzima, the elephant, a fight ensued and he swallowed her too – basket and all! Inside the elephant’s stomach, Nanana found her child and many other people who had also been swallowed. Nanana Boselesele used an assegai to cut away the insides of Sondonzima. She cooked the food for her child and all the people who were inside its belly. She made a hole in the monster’s belly and set the people free. The story ends with these people promising her a big feast in acknowledgement of her brave act.

The performer starts performing by introducing the main character, Nanana Boselesele, and telling the audience about where she lived. This introduction portrays Nanana Boselesele as an ordinary woman who had purposely built her house on the path because she was brave and cunning. This statement not only opens the performance but is used several times in the story:

UNanana Boselesele wakha indlu yakhe endleleni ngoba ethembe isibindi nobungqokolo. Wayakhe lapho zonke izinyamazane ezazedlula khona.

(Nanana Boselesele built her house near the road on purpose because she relied on her courage and cunning. She built on a path all the animals used.)

The introductory part of the tale is “a fixed refrain, used as an introduction and as the mnemonic centre of the story” (Canonici 1996: 35). According to the Readers’ Digest Oxford Complete Wordfinder (1991: 977), the word mnemonic means something “designed to aid the memory”. In this narrative, it is noted that the performer used various techniques to bring life to her story. Msimang (1986: 109), discussing methods of portraying round characters in folktales, concludes that “in delineating a round character, the folktale performer exploits three techniques: description, dialogue and action”. In Nanana Boselesele we see the performer using these techniques even when not describing round characters. The audience knows that Nanana Boselesele’s child is beautiful because of the question that is always asked by the animals, “Whose is this
pretty child?” In order to indicate that one of the bigger animals is uttering this sentence, the performer would bend a little, smile, pretend to be touching the child’s chin and speak in a high-pitched voice. “The adjectival stem repetition of ‘omuhle-muhle’ describes the condescending way adults would address a small child” (Canonici, 1996: 36).

When performing, the storyteller used different nuances of the voice. Her voice would be soft to suggest Nanana Boselesele’s femininity. When referring to her shrewdness she would use non-verbal signs such as using her index finger to point at the her right temple. When illustrating the passing of “all” animals, she would stretch her arm to emphasise this. Sometimes this would be accompanied by the mention of the names of some of the animals. Each name would be followed by mimicking this animal’s voice. By mimicking the big voice of the rhinoceros the performer would portray it as a big character that could be dangerous and should be feared. But the animal’s constant warnings about the elephant in a way highlighted the fact that her hugeness was greater than any of the other animals. The facial expressions of the audience always supplemented the voice. The eyes of the audience would be wide open; or they would close their eyes tightly, trying to hide their fear. The children would involuntarily emit sounds which were indicative of fright, such as “Maye mina!” (Oh, dear me!). Different emotions and actions would be evoked by the statement “Iyeza indlovu, uyeza uSondonzima” (“The elephant is coming, Heavyweight is coming.”)

The performer’s mimicry of the monkey would evoke some laughter and the action would be comical non-verbal signs such as the pointing of a warning finger followed by a wry or sarcastic smile made in a jocular manner. The audience’s response would keep the performer on her toes and encourage her to raise the standard of her performance. In answer to the question, as it has been observed, the girl would always give the same response, a “fixed refrain” technique employed by the performer to teach the tale to the children.
The verbal and non-verbal gestures or descriptions of the physique of big animals like the huge elephant evoked awe and respect for Nanana Boselesele. The mere fact that she had built her house on a dangerous path where there was not a single neighbour made her appear to be different and special. As the audience, we saw her as a unique, fearless and courageous woman who was different from known mothers and aunts. This would create a vivid picture in the minds of any young audience who had to depend on its own imagination, not on the illustrations in a book. The performer was like illustrations in motion.

In narrating the story, the performer repeated the refrain several times as a function of teaching by repetition, typical to African storytelling. This helps children to respond to the language and the rhythm of what is being said. As she continued to repeat the same words over and over again, we would automatically say them together with her. This indicates that the refrain assists in the memorising of the tale and at the same time, teaches children the art and conventions of storytelling. This folktale also conformed to the aspect of age-appropriateness because it featured a child as one of its characters.

The second technique is that of dialogue between the characters in the story. Dialogue reveals to the audience that Nanana Boselesele, as the main character, was a stubborn single parent who had courage and a mind of her own. She did not conform to the expectations of her community. This can be understood from the dialogue between the animals:


(Every time any animals found the child alone, they asked the same question, “Whose is this pretty-pretty child?” The child gave the same answer she had given to the other animals. The animals warned, “The elephant is coming; yes, Heavyweight is coming.”)

Immediately after this dialogue the performer would utter the words:
The word “warned” in the refrain was skilfully chosen by the narrator because it has a role to play. It highlights the impending danger, and not only grips the listeners’ attention but also tantalises them into anticipating something as the performer builds the suspense. Msimang makes the following observations about the performer’s style:

It is interesting to see how the performer blends dialogue, narration and song in her performance. This style affords the audience a chance to participate actively in the total performance, for they have to join in when the chants are sung. This keeps them awake and attentive. The significance of this technique does not end there. It is also very instrumental in building and maintaining suspense and tension in the folktale (Msimang, 1990: 30).

The audience keeps on asking themselves the question: what is this huge animal going to do when it arrives? How is the little girl going to react? The audience, being children themselves, are affected on an emotional level and fear may begin to creep in as they imagine the huge monster towering over the tiny child. The role of the final refrain seems to be to prepare the listeners for the next episode in the story. It raises the listeners’ expectations and sense of suspense. They want to know what Sondonzima’s response will be. This indicates that the song is also part of the progression or the development of the story. With regard to the function of song in folktales, Vilakazi (1945:205) notes that:

They are not thrown in haphazardly. Their function is to clarify the outlines of the story, to divide it into section or chapters. As in the intervals between dramatic scenes, when the curtain falls and the stage behind is being shifted, so too, the songs occupy such intervals in the minds of the listeners and the story-teller. They give the space wherein the artist collects his material and marshals it for better and higher achievements. In these folk-tales one feels real dramatic movement much more intensely than even in the depth of some poetic gestalts.
The flow of the drama, though mentally conceived, is smooth and continuous, it needs no mental fillings.

When children start telling their own stories, they will remember the effective use of songs in the folktales they heard. They will have noticed that the performer not only uses song to connect events but that songs are also instrumental in indicating the progression of these events. When eventually the elephant arrives, he asks the child the same question the other animals have been asking and the child responds in the same manner. Sondonzima gulps down the child, probably feeling challenged by the daring response of Nanana Boselesele’s child. Little does he know that he is signing his own death warrant!

The event is followed by the arrival of Nanana Boselesele who is enraged to hear that her child has been swallowed by the huge animal Sondonzima. In her dialogue with the elephant, the performer breathes heavily and uses gestures to indicate her anger, and pretends to be wiping sweat from her brow. She places her hands on her hips, an action typical of angry women who find themselves in Nanana Boselesele’s predicament. Her actions are complemented by the tone of her voice which mimics an angry mother. At this stage, facial expressions are accompanied by the raising of the voice and the use of short sentences, as in the following scene:

\[
\text{Ntambama wayesebuya-ke uNanana Boselesele. Wamangala engayiboni indodakazi yakhe. Wathi qalaqala, wabuza kwezinye izilwanyana wathi,} \quad \text{“Uphi umntwana wami?” Zaphendula zathi, “Ugwinywe yindlovu enkulu, umimilitwe wuSondonzima.”}
\]

(At sunset Nanana Boselesele arrived. She was surprised when she did not see her daughter. She looked around and asked the small animals, “Where is my child?” The animals answered, “She has been swallowed by the huge elephant. Heavyweight has gulped her down.”)

Nanana Boselesele’s response is picturesque and filled with actions, and she is seen arming herself in preparation for a fight with this huge elephant herself. The performer explains the paragraph that leads to the climax in the following words:
Wathatha imbiza yokupheka wayifaka eqomeni, wathatha umkhonto omfushane nawo wawufaka, wathatha imbiza enamanzi wayifaka eqomeni, wathatha izinkuni nazo wazifaka eqomeni. Wathatha isikhuni esivuthayo wasifaka. Wathwala iqoma ekhanda, umphini wegeja wona wawubamba ngesandla.

(She took a basket, she took a cooking pot and put it in the basket, she took a short assegaaai and put it in the basket, she then took a pot of water and put it in the basket, and she took burning firewood and put it in the basket. She took the basket, placed it on her head and held the hoe-handle in her hand.)

It should be borne in mind that the performer's spoken words are always accompanied by some action which will evoke a response from the audience. Nanana Boselesele's step by step preparation for her journey to the “land of no return” is imbued with life by the performer's graphic portrayal of some of her unlikely weapons, which in the spoken word are articulated in a creative and poetic way. This is seen in the use of repetition. The performer's poetic prose evokes feelings of wonder, fear and admiration as the audience sees the determination of the fearless woman as she sets off in confidence to take the bull by its horns. The possible outcome of the journey is now the question in the audience's mind. In the story, the performer's portrayal of Nanana's gait is melodramatic:

UNanana Boselesele waphuma engasadle nkobe zamuntu. Wayedishazela futhi ehefuzela.

(Nanana Boselesele stormed out, boiling with anger. She walked with heavy, slow gait and she was breathing heavily.)

The story reaches a climax when Nanana Boselesele, with hoe in hand, confronts the elephant about the whereabouts of her child. The elephant's response is both deceiving and sarcastic as Sondonzima tells her to continue her search as he is not the culprit. During the confrontation and as Nanana questions insistently, the elephant becomes irritated:

“Ngizokugwinya, leli shingana lomfazana.”
Nanana Boselesele shows her fearlessness by attacking the elephant with her hoe. At this stage, the audience would take sides with the hero. They would interject by making a noise and clapping their hands when she strikes him. Unfortunately, her actions result in her being swallowed by the Sondonzima the elephant, together with all her possessions. The actions of the performer when the monster addresses Nanana Boselesele as “this little woman” are appropriate. The monster’s massive size would make her seem diminutive in its eyes. In her portrayal of Nanana Boselesele’s actions, the performer makes gestures that portray her as a small, determined woman making violent but futile attempts to fight a mountain. Her being swallowed symbolises victory to those who are naturally endowed with size and strength. But in the elephant’s case, the victory is shortlived because he ends up being outwitted by the unwavering and persistent woman who is brave and cunning. The following quote is true of Nanana Boselesele’s resilience and determination – despite her small stature – when compared to the monster:

The collective memories and ethical standards need to be pegged onto outstanding characters who summarize in themselves the aspirations of the group. The fictitious hero seems to become a corporate personality, a representative of the whole community. Thus the actions and movements do not center on the hero’s psychology, but rather on the descriptions of events, because these result from a shared effort. This is why, at times, the hero’s character is not developed in detail. His actions are more important than the person, because they represent the whole community (Canonici 1995: 17).

Nanana’s carefully orchestrated plan brings a slow, painful and unexpected death to the monster. The performer, imitating the ailing monster, describes the scene as follows:

hlafuniyani! Ngiphathwa yisiyezi ....” Yase ishayeka bhu phansi ifa indlovu.

(And the elephant said, speaking to other animals that lived with him in the forest: “There is something gnawing me in the stomach.” The animals asked, “What is happening?” The elephant replied, “Since I swallowed the woman it is painful in my belly. It goes, ‘cut, cut, cut.’” Then he added: “It goes ‘chew, chew, chew’ in my tummy! I am feeling di-z-zy ....” Then the elephant fell down and died.)

The performer’s choice of using ideophones to describe the symptoms of the monster’s illness is fitting as they illustrate the small but fatal pains suffered by the elephant very graphically. The villain’s pain would evoke feelings of pleasure and satisfaction in the children. “The main character, whether a person or an animal, will evoke a positive response in the audience both for the qualities displayed as well as the predicament s/he finds her/himself in” (Emslie, Levey and Viljoen, 2006: 10). The little pains are also indicative of the expression that minor problems should not be ignored since they can turn into mammoth ones. In expressing the various actions taking place in the elephant’s stomach, the performer would walk about in slow motion and use a tired, weak tone and slowly collapse to indicate the slow but painful death of the huge elephant.

The story ends on a positive note: when Nanana informs the people that she will now be their ruler, they agree to be her followers and to go with her and build their homes in her village. According to Emslie et al. (2006: 10):

...a happy ending, where good triumphs over evil, will bring with it a sense of closure, a sense that justice has been done. ... The happy ending too is of great importance because to the young child the world is a frightening place and s/he needs all the assurance possible that one can grow up to cope and survive the difficulties which one encounters on one’s journey through life.

The moral of the story could be summarised by a Zulu proverb which has not been mentioned in the story: Ayihlabi ngakumisa (bull’s ability to gore by the shape of its horns), which means that underestimating someone’s appearance or physical stature could have detrimental results. The lesson of the story
echoes Canonici (1996: 116) who says that a “number of stories have a proverb as their core-cliché, that is to say that they are built around a proverb, which may however not appear in the actual folktale text, but be used in the contextual situation”. Another Zulu proverb which would be appropriate here is *Isina muva liyabukwa* (one who laughs last, laughs the best).

It remains clear that the performer has the power to entertain and educate children by touching both their aesthetic and emotional levels and at the same time by teaching them life’s lessons in a vivid manner that captures their imagination.

### 3.3 Functions and values of folktales

Folktales are valuable to mankind because they provide us with a glimpse into a distant past and the minds of our forefathers. Although their generally accepted function is entertainment, they are also performed to imbue the audience with the value system and the body of knowledge possessed and treasured by the oral society (Canonici, 1995: 13). This notion is further strengthened by Msimang (1991:2) as he explains one of the aims of analysing folklore:

> Namhlanje nxa sihlaziya ubuciko bomlomo sisuke singenzeli khona nje ukuchitha isizungu. Qha, sisuke sigonde okukhulu kunalokho. Okokuqala sisuke siftu ukuthola injululwazi noma ifilosofi kaZulu wakuthangi. Sisuke siftu ukwazi ukuthi babecabangani ngomhlaba abawakhele. Sisuke siftu ukwazi izinto ezenzeka kubo nasezilwaneni babezihumusha kanjani.)

(Today when we analyse folklore we are not merely doing this to while away time. No, our aim is much bigger than that. Firstly, our aim is to search for the philosophy of the Zulu of yesteryear. Our mission is to discover the manner in which they interpreted things that were happening to them and to the animals as well.)

From what has been said above it is clear that folktales were regarded as a form of informal education, used not only to entertain but to teach a child about respect and behaviour, for instance. Folktales are related for their aesthetic value, as well
as for amusement, and constitute a real part of the education of the young of the Nguni (Vilakazi, 1945: 192).

This section will focus on the value of oral folktales in the life of a child. The various functions of each tale will be preceded by an example of an oral folktale selected particularly for this research which will be analysed and discussed. The analysis of some folktales will derive and borrow, to a certain extent, from Canonici’s (1995) and Msimang’s (1986) publications. In the following quotation, Canonici sets out to show that the function of folktale performance is multi-pronged because:

… apart from the intellectual feeding of children’s minds with a wealth of information and the instillation of the bases of traditional wisdom, performance has the power to integrate a child in his or her community both physically and spiritually, as it imbues him/her with principles on which the whole social fabric is built. Rather than a formal means of education, a folktale performance is an instrument for the education into a culture of the feelings on which a person’s responses to life changes will be based (Canonici, 1995: 13).

It is generally understood that the main function of performing tales was to entertain and teach children how to behave. Stories dealing with folklore are primarily didactic and aim at building a moral lore (Vilakazi, 1945: 191). Folktales, like any other form of fiction, could also be regarded as a reflection of life. As the researcher explores a number of Zulu stories to show their various functions, the following should be kept in mind:

The varying forms of literature we study may well not have any single function or meaning. Each is equally likely to be multivocal, to involve more than just a single “front” performer to evoke multiple meanings in different situations and for different parties even in the same audience, and to have a multiplicity of functions (Finnegan, 1992: 46).

In the process of examining the value of folktales in the life of a child, this implies that a story may not necessarily have a general meaning for the whole audience, because of the diversity of the group and the dissimilar personal experiences of the audience. For instance, a story about a trickster, cannibals
or cattle could mean something different to a boy, girl or an adult man or woman who may be a part of the audience at that particular point in time.

3.3.1 Entertainment and teaching

*UChakide nebhubesi* (The Weasel and the Lion) is the second story that will be discussed. It is a popular trickster tale in Zulu and the main character is regarded as a children’s hero. According to Canonici, trickster tales are examples of preventive education. They warn against people showing characteristics that constitute a threat to the good of human society. “The ambivalence prevalent in some aspects of the oral tradition allows the trickster to appear as the avenging angel against social misfits, who take pride in their strength and power” (Canonici, 1995: 15). The educational aim of such tales is to impress upon the listener that one should not feel too secure about one’s position, be it physical or otherwise.

The story is about an animal called Chakide, “the Weasel”. One day, Chakide became very hungry and went about to search for food in the veld. As he was wandering about, he smelled meat and headed in the direction of the smell, arriving at the lion’s house. The lion was building his home. Chakide greeted the lion in a typically Zulu way and explained that he was hungry and would appreciate some food. The lion ignored his request and asked Chakide to come and help him with the building work. Chakide agreed to help the lion. After working hard for a while, the lion went to the fireplace and dished up the meat from the pot. He ate all the choicest pieces and threw the lean meat and bones at Chakide. This displeased Chakide. This happened every day and Chakide’s heart became very sore because he only received lean meat and bones. One day they started thatching the house with grass. The lion was on top of the house and its tail was hanging over, into the house. Chakide was inside the house and so was the tail. He had a plan and said, “I am going to fix this lion.” He stitched the lion’s tail to a pillar. The unsuspecting lion thought that there were lice troubling his tail. While the lion continued to work, Chakide went down
and dished up all the meat and went outside. On seeing this, the lion became enraged! It got up with the aim of eating Chakide but it couldn’t because it realised that its tail was stuck. Chakide laughed loudly as he was enjoying all the fatty meat and said, “To whom do you give lean meat and bones?” He finished all the meat and left the lion on top of the house. The lion remained there until he died of starvation.

This folktale has both an entertainment and an educative value for children. It is entertaining because it presents a comical picture to children when they see, in their mind’s eye, hungry Chakide wandering about looking for food. Suddenly he stops, smelling meat, and saliva dribbles from his mouth. Later on they sympathise with him when he is snubbed and given only the bones after a hard day’s work, while the lion eats all the best pieces like a king. It also brings some fun when the lion keeps on calling Chakide “boy”. It becomes even funnier when the stupid, unsuspecting lion thinks that lice are troubling his tail instead of recognising the pain that Chakide has inflicted on him. However, this tale has a lesson for the children and it is revealed when Chakide, pretending to be a fool by allowing the lion to take him for granted, finally hoodwinks him and leaves him trapped on top of the house.

Chakide represents the qualities of independence, diligence, cunning and intelligence. Children can relate to him because, although small in stature, he knows how to use his brains. On the other hand, the lion is big and thinks too highly of himself, looking down on the one who has assisted him by treating him with disrespect and injustice. This is seen in the meagre “wages” with which he rewards Chakide.

The lesson here is that good must triumph over evil. What Zulus want to drive home is that if you act greedily and selfishly, like the lion, you will reap what you sow (Van Huyssteen & Mkhize, 1999:37). In a way, the tale also teaches children to be sensitive to other people’s feelings, instructing that: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Although Chakide used unethical
and vengeful means to drive this lesson home and to show that justice must be done, the “bottom line in this folktale is that both greediness and cunning are destructive and morally wrong” (Van Huyssteen & Mkhize, 1999:37). The folktale has positive messages that children can learn from: not only does it feed the child’s imagination, but it also instils important social and cultural values in the child.

In these tales, children, as the audience, see the grandmother, as a performer, taking the role of a teacher who teaches her audience, her learners, in an informal way about how to treat other people. When children go to bed they have been entertained but they also have the contentment of having learnt that in life one has to make the means of protecting oneself against people who may take one for granted. Again, an audience that represents the tormenters and oppressors of this world could have a change of heart after listening to this tale and may reconsider their bad behaviour. Animal tales can be viewed as subtle satire used to open society’s eyes to its vices and weaknesses, affording it an opportunity to do some soul-searching and to mend its ways. The moral lesson of this story has not been didactically spelt out but animals have been used as characters to drive the point home.

The lion has been used allegorically as a symbol of the strong and powerful or of bullies who treat the weak and small with disdain and disrespect. Consequently, this breeds anger and frustration accompanied by contempt and revenge, as is seen in Chakide’s harsh revenge. However, this cannot be condoned because two wrongs do not make a right. The lesson learnt in the tale is particularly applicable today because bullying still occurs in schools.

3.3.2 Transmission of cultural norms and values

This folktale has been effectively used as a vehicle to pass down heritage to children by teaching them about tradition and culture. On arrival at the lion’s house, Chakide greets the lion in a way typical to the Zulu: “Sikhulekile Baba,
Greetings Father”, said Chakide). Africans are known to have a culture of respect, and this is embodied in Chakide’s Zulu salutations which are used by men when greeting one another. This form of greeting was used in the olden days, and is still used today. When a man shouted at the gate to announce his arrival he would be heard saying: “Sikhulekile ekhaya!” (“Greetings at home!”). He did not have to knock at the door as is the practice in Western culture. According to Zulu culture, children or the young do not address an elderly person by name but as mama (mother) or baba (father), mkhulu (grandfather), babekazi (aunt), malume (uncle) etc. Therefore, as a small animal, Chakide was showing respect to the lion when he addressed him as baba (father). In a way, the performer of this tale is teaching young children how to behave and relate to their elders.

Furthermore, through Chakide’s words, Gogo is seen reminding children of one of the very important African customs which is embodied in the spirit of ubuntu. In a nutshell, ubuntu is preached by the Zulu proverb: “Umuntu umuntu ngabantu” (A person is a person because of others). The saying resonates with Nxumalo’s response when asked what could be done to encourage Zulu authors to write children’s books. Emphasising that African culture should be portrayed in children’s books; he provided the following fitting examples that reflect the spirit of ubuntu:


(You see, when you are harvesting in the field, you don’t reap everything but people will know that you have already harvested. You do not have to shout out loud, it will be known that you have already
harvested. People will also come and harvest without asking for permission. If, for instance, the cow of the Ntuli family has died, I, who belong to the Sithole, the Zulu or the Nxumalo family, I will take my cow and ask the boys to take it to the Ntulis, so that the children can have milk and eat. They are saved without having asked for anything.

Helping does not necessarily mean that one has made a request for help. As the one who has helped someone, I will not go about telling people that I have lent my cow to so and so. He is the one who will shower the praises and sing that, “When you see me still surviving and sitting pretty, it is because of this man.” Then Ntuli will call one of the men to give thanks on his behalf to his children. This is an act of spreading blessings to the children.)

Amongst other things, ubuntu advocates that one should be generous and welcoming to strangers by always offering them food. This is seen in the tale when Chakide highlights the fact that a hungry person should not be afraid to ask for food. When the lion pokes fun at him Chakide gives him a proper response:

_{Ibhubesi lahleka kancane lathi, “Yilokhu waba njalo ngokuthanda ukudla. Ake uzobamba lapha emsebenzini uzongisiza.” Waphendula uChakide wathi, “Cha Baba akusikho ukuthi ngzenziwa ukuthanda ukudla. Bengikhuleka nje. Phela uma umuntu ekhuleka usho njalo. Yikho nami ngithi isisu somhambi asingakanani.”} (The lion laughed a bit and said, “You never stop your love for food. Come and help me here with my work.” The Weasel responded and said, “No, Father it is not my love for food that has brought me here. I was just greeting you. After all, when a person is hungry, he should ask. That is why I was asking for food.”)

Chakide’s response would resonate with both the performer and some of the children in the audience. Being in the shoes of children, he is echoing words and teachings of adults at home. Children will thus learn from him that during trying times when people mock you, it helps to do what one’s parents have taught you at home. On the other hand, any adult who is part of the audience would be pleased to witness the value of teaching children by way of storytelling. This draws a parallel with one of the most important moral lessons found in the Ten Commandments, where man is instructed not to steal.
3.3.3 Language and teaching

During the process of storytelling children are informally taught how to use the Zulu language, its idioms and proverbs. In the story, the performer is heard using the language beautifully to teach children about Zulu expressions, as when Chakide refers to the lion as “Owakhula silibele”. This expression literary means “the one who grew up whilst we least expected it or while we were still ignorant”. This is a Zulu idiom that is used to show respect to someone of high standing. The idiom is normally used by a subordinate or someone of low rank to acknowledge another’s status, experience, intelligence, etc. The Zulu use this idiom to address their king. Chakide could be viewed as elevating, recognising or alluding to the lion’s position as the king of the animals.

Furthermore, the proverb “Isisu somhambi asingakanani singangenso yenyoni” (the stomach of a visitor is not big; it is (as small) as the kidney of a bird) has been effectively used to teach children to be kind to strangers because the little food that they share or give to them will not make them poorer. The literal meaning of this proverb, as used in this folktale, is that the beggar (Chakide) is prepared to accept any food; no matter how little it may be (Van Huyssteen & Mkhize, 1999: 41). Ironically, this did not prove true of the trickster; because of the lion’s stinginess, Chakide ends up taking the lion’s share and this leads to the lion’s demise. Msimang, remarking on this story in relation to the background against which it is told, says that it reflects the cultural context from which it originates. This is true of the abovementioned proverb as well because it shows that the Zulu also teach by means of storytelling because: “An elder … not only succeed[s] in illustrating and supporting his facts but also communicates to the young generation the wisdom of their forebears” (1986: 136).

Language teaching is further manifest in the use of different concepts or terminology found in various Zulu stories. In Chakide’s story, vocabulary that is central to the story deals with hunger, food and cooking. Some of the concepts are related to different senses and opposites such as “inyama ekhuluphele”
(rich meat) and (extremely lean meat). For example, the expression “ukwephula imbiza” can only be used in the context of removing the pot (that contains the food) from the fire or the hot stove. Also the noun “ugqoko” indicates a traditional Zulu wooden tray used particularly for serving meat. In a way, this teaches children about different words which are used in specific contexts, depending on the theme of the story. In the process of entertaining and teaching her audience about her culture, the norms and values are also observed; ugogo, as the performer, has used “language in an inganekwane performance in Zulu that is simple and realistic and corresponds to the language used in everyday conversation” (Canonici, 1996: 59).

3.3.4 Storytelling skills

In this tale it is apparent that although the purpose of telling the story is to entertain and teach children how to behave, children acquire more than that. While they are entertained they are also learning how to tell a tale. The introduction commences by placing the tale in the remote, fictitious world of the past where the children’s imagination has to be activated. This is observed as the story starts with the opening formula: Kwakukhona (Once upon a time). The practice, common in folktales about trees and animals both wild and domestic indulging in conversation and behaving like human beings, aims at enhancing the imaginative value and the plot of the story, to suit the minds of children and to test the oratorical powers of the narrator (Vilakazi, 1945: 191).

Nxumalo’s response in an interview not only corroborates the important function of folktale performance of teaching by imitation but other functions as well:

_Ngesikhathi oyixoxayo eyetha lapha ezinganeni kuba khona izinto eziningi ezikhulisa ingane: njengokulalela, nokubheka ukuthi into into ukuze ibe mnandi ihleleka kanjani. Okuhamba kuhambe kube khona nomculo phakathi nendawo yokulingisa okusho ukuthi ingane kumele ifunde ukuthi kulingiswa kanjani, kwehliswe izwi kulingiselwa abantu - kuba yinto enkululekhulu._

(In the process where the performer is narrating the tale to children, there are numerous things that develop in a child: like listening skills,
and observing how something is arranged in order for it to be interesting and engaging. As the story develops, one finds places where mimicry is employed. This suggests to a child that s/he should learn how to use gestures, lowering the voice while imitating people.)

The quotation is apt because the examples provided by Nxumalo introduce a holistic idea of how storytelling skills may be taught and acquired, that is by “looking”, “listening”, “articulating” and “demonstrating”.

In uChakide nebhubesi the art of storytelling is refined by the repetition of words and the juxtaposition of antitheses:


(Once upon a time there was a Weasel. The Weasel was starving. He had spent a few days without food. One day he went out hunting for food. He walked and walked and suddenly picked up the aroma of meat. He stopped and lifted his snout, wanting to locate the direction the smell was coming from. Once he was certain he walked in that direction. As he was walking, he came upon the lion’s house. He went straight into the home of the lion. The lion was busy building its house.)

In the above excerpt the word *hamba* (walk) is repeated five times. In the first two instances the word indicates that the weasel was walking with no specific destination in mind, until he detects the smell which leads him to the lion’s house. The idea of *hamba* has been repeated several times, both in words and in actions, to emphasise that he walks a long way before he finds what he is looking for. The performer has used this technique to indicate the time frame. The audience, as they listen and observe the performer’s method of synchronising words with mimicry, subconsciously internalise what is being illustrated and learn to put it into action themselves. The following extract supports this:
The child responds with rapt attention, fascinated by the elements of the story, not for one moment questioning the credibility of the animal characters. Subconsciously, the child is absorbing the conventions of storytelling, her imagination is stimulated and her own creative ability is being developed (Emslie et al., 2005: 19).

Because children learn by imitation, folktale performance can be said to indeed teach a child the creative art of storytelling. In the following passage, the effective use of repetition and the indication of timeframe is once more noticeable as a skill employed in telling tales:


(The days went by. The work progressed very well each day. The lion would eat all the fatty meat each day. Each day, the Weasel would eat the lean meat and the bones.)

The repetition in this story is poetic and pleasing to the ear and teaches the child how to construct a story in a way that would be easy to recall. The reiteration of the word nsukuzonke (each day), however, has yet another important function. It highlights the fact that the lion’s ill-treatment of Chakide had been going on for several days and consequently, it depicts Chakide as a patient creature but, like human beings, fallible; and that is why he makes the lion pay for his heartlessness.

3.3.5 Sense of responsibility

The next tale to be discussed is entitled UBongpha inkabi yezimanga (Bongopha the magical ox) and its content reveals three functions. As the song plays a major role in the narration and performance of this tale, and a brief explanation of the use of songs in storytelling is provided first.

Songs are not there only to serve as adornments; they have a number of other important roles to play in the narration of tales. One of these functions is to
reveal the theme of the story. Bongopa’s story is a tale about cattle theft and the importance of a herd of cattle to the primitive Zulu. This is clear from the lyrics in which chiefs of various tribes send their men to steal cattle from their fellow men:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hamba Bongopa,} \\
\text{Amasela akwebile} \\
\text{Ubohamba, kuyahanjwa.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Move, Bongopa,
The thieves have stolen you
Move, it’s time to move.)

Msimang (1986: 198) enumerates some of the functions of songs which are pertinent to storytelling:

First, they are the means of audience participation. Secondly, they dramatise action. Thirdly they play a literary role in developing plot, conveying theme and revealing characters. In developing the plot, songs are important in many ways. Firstly, the movement from one episode to the next can be brought about by means of a song. Secondly, songs heighten tension and suspense thus moving the story to its climax. This normally results from the fact that songs are sung at critical moments, when the character who is singing is experiencing extreme grief. It becomes difficult for such a character to express his emotions and feelings except in a song (1986: 193, 198).

True to Msimang’s observations, the following lyrics assist not only in allowing the audience to participate but also play an essential role in the progression of the story. The following lyrics were sung whenever Bongopa was to lead the herd from the pastures back into the kraal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ngena Bongopa} \\
\text{Ubobuya, kuyabuywa} \\
\text{Ubongena kuyangenwa}
\end{align*}
\]

(Enter, Bongopa,
Return, it’s time to return
Enter, it’s time to enter.)
In this story, whenever anything was to be done with the cattle, the boy would sing, pleading with the bull to do what was needed. This included occasions when the bull was supposed to be cut up into pieces and resuscitated after being killed. Msimang (1986) observes that the movement from one episode to the next can be brought about by means of a song. After the boy had spread flat Bongopha’s skin and wrapped up all the pieces of meat, he sang the same song to resurrect it. When the song is sung towards the end of the story, Msimang (1986) is correct in his observation that songs heighten tension and suspense, moving the story to its climax. The boy sings the magical words that open the gates of freedom for him and change his life in a way that no one could ever have envisaged.

As in all Zulu folktales, although this story was used to entertain, it has also been used to teach children a sense of duty and responsibility from a tender age. The Zulu proverb puts this succinctly: *Ubudoda abukhulelw*, or “one need not be mature / old to be a man or to conduct oneself like one”. The boy portrays this in more ways than one. Firstly, he demonstrates his quick thinking by playing along with the thieves’ demands when they compel him to sing so that they can accomplish their mission. Secondly, when he is left alone at night with the dead ox, he is cunning enough to wait until everyone is fast asleep before orchestrating his plans to resuscitate Bongopha. After he has resuscitated the whole nation and kept the people captive, he sings the relevant lyrics of the song at the appropriate time.

The performance of the story would be beneficial to an audience. It teaches the audience, particularly young boys, to be quick thinkers in times of crisis and to take authority over things that rightfully belong to them. In a way, boys are indirectly prepared to be men and to protect not only what belongs to the family but also to the nation. Secondly, the boy in the story single-handedly wipes out the entire tribe of the rival chief and, on second thoughts, shows wisdom by resurrecting everyone but the chief who was the main cause of the strife. This indicates that the boy has no intention of abandoning his father’s cattle herd which he was born to take care of. He kills the enemy initially because he
realises the trouble he will get into should he arrive home without his father’s herd and his favourite white ox. His act of bravery is an indication that he does not want to be ridiculed or called a coward because he has not made an effort to protect his father’s most treasured possessions. His brave act of bringing the spoils home encourages his father to award him a wife. By his actions and trustworthiness, he has proved himself worthy of ascending the throne and being the successor after his father’s death.

The moral of this story is that bad deeds such as accumulating wealth through foul means, stealing and robbery are discouraged, but responsibility, dependability and heroic deeds are rewarded. The message has not been explicitly hammered into the child’s head but the educational value has been identified in the underlying wisdom of the tale (Canonici, 1995: 14).

3.3.6 Love for cattle

Another important function of the performance of the story is illustrated in the immense love that Africans, the Zulu in particular, have for their cattle. The Zulu cherish their cattle! The heroic act of the boy will, as a result, implant in the children’s mind the fact that one can put one’s life in danger for what one treasures and values. This underlines that folktales are a storehouse of knowledge and wisdom, and are also performed to:

…imbue the audience with the value system and the body of knowledge possessed and treasured by the oral society. … Before the introduction of literacy, the dramatic re-enactment of a folktale was considered the most powerful medium to teach a group what to think, in order to form the minds and souls of the people. Being artistic representations of life, folktales challenge and may even shock into action, while training the mind in the quest for wisdom (Canonici, 1995: 14).

In the past, cattle were very important because they symbolised wealth and a man’s affluence. Cattle were used for various things, for instance, to pay ilobolo (lobola, herds of cattle given to the bride’s parents by the groom as a token of appreciation for having given her to him as a wife) and to provide milk and
meat. Amongst other things that livestock were deemed important for, Msimang mentions that they were a means of payment to izinyanga (herbalists). Furthermore, cattle were and still are used to appease the ancestors or to thank them for something good that has happened. They are used during various rituals and feasts as well:

_Amaqhawe, izingwazi nezihlabani bezixoshiswa ngayo. Izinto zentengo ephakeme bezithengwa ngayo_ (Msimang, 1975: 36).

(Cattle were used to reward warriors, expert spearmen and men of valour. They were used to buy expensive things.)

Msimang’s (1975) comments are also evidence that cattle were some of the most important and valuable possessions amongst the Zulus. It is for this reason then that the king’s son in the story was given a wife for his heroic deeds. It goes without saying that boys in the audience will see the importance of protecting his family’s treasure, even if it costs him his life. In addition, the tale will play another important role: looking after such highly valued animals must instil in one a sense of responsibility and encourage others to act independently and make wise decisions.

In his endeavour to show the status that was accorded to a man who had cattle, Msimang (1975) draws parallels with the respect that is nowadays given to the modern man. He states that in the present day, men are held in high esteem because of the money they have saved in the bank for their education, for their businesses or for things similar to these. However, when he comments about the Zulu of yesteryear he remarks that:

(A man who was respected and greeted was only the one who had a big kraal. In KwaZulu, livestock was a huge thing. The one who possessed a lot of livestock had a massive house, and got married to numerous wives. The voice of such a person became law ... at the meetings and large gatherings (e.g. called by chiefs) it was those who had livestock who became chairpersons and main speakers. All these are clear indications of how important livestock was.)

In the light of the importance of cattle that is instilled in children from birth, the next chapter will reflect how modern writers adapt this theme as they move from oral rural to modern settings.

3.3.7 Folktales provide clues to cultural history and life before Western civilisation

Tales told in the remote past are important because they tell of battles and the courage of the forefathers. In passing down this history to the next generation, parents encourage their children to be brave and courageous as well. Vilakazi, when commenting on an earlier version of the same story, titled *Bongopha kaMagadlela*, recorded and written in an anthology of folktales by Stuart (1886), makes the following interesting comments about the theme:

"The whole theme is suggestive of tribal migrations and the cattle being passed by ceremonial rights into the hands of the conquerors. It speaks of the killing of kings and the natural marrying of the warriors to the women of the conquered tribes (Vilakazi, 1945: 211)."

This is true as it has revealed in *Bongopha inkabi yezimanga* (Bongopha the magical ox) that people depended on livestock for sustenance. The passing of cattle into the hands of the conquerer thus intimates the survival of the fittest. It points out that in the past, power and valour determined a man’s status and indicated who was to be the ruler or king. Although this story would seem to be relaying to children a message of the savage life of the past and the fact that parents had the latitude to choose partners for their children it will, however, assist children in comprehending the milieu and culture of the time and how their ancestors survived. They will realise how things have changed.
Besides the already mentioned educational functions of Zulu folktales, Canonici (1995: 15) mentions additional functions that sometimes reveal "human curiosity with regard to the knowledge of naturally observable phenomena". In this context, the researcher considers aetiological stories. Aetiological tales are stories which explain the origin of things; for instance, the Zulu tale which will be discussed next. Its title is *Isizwe esaphenduka izimfene* (The tribe that became baboons). This story explains the origins of the baboon and concerns the Thusi people. They were lazy and unwilling to work and one day they turned into baboons. The story may not be true but, like all children’s stories, it was composed for a purpose. Another Zulu aetiological tale, not discussed in this chapter, is one that explains why the rock rabbit has no tail.

3.3.8 Prevention of laziness

Since time immemorial people have had to work to live. Even children are taught from a tender age to do some sort of work. Zulu children are no exception and chores are allocated to them according to their gender. Girls learned from their mothers and sisters to draw water, cook and clean. The boys’ work was mainly looking after livestock and milking the cows; this they learnt from their brothers and fathers. These tasks were given to children to prepare them for adulthood. Laziness was never encouraged. This reminds me of a song that my grandmother used to sing. She detested laziness and loved to sing this favourite song about idleness, mostly directed at my lazy uncle:

*Ulel’ ulova, ulel’ ulova*
*Uyawashelwa,*
*Uya-ayinelwa,*
*Uyaphekelwa,*
*Ulel’ ulova.*

(The loafer is asleep, the loafer is asleep
They are doing the washing for him,
They are ironing for him,
They are cooking for him,
The loafer is asleep.)
In the song, my grandmother voiced her complaints because she was tired of taking responsibility for her grown up son who was unemployed and never made any effort to get a wife. This instilled in my mind the idea that laziness was a vice. My uncle shunned work, loved idling, basked in the sun and drank cups and cups of tea. For me, my uncle lived a parasitic life, just like the Thusi clan who sponged on active and hardworking people. According to Vilakazi, this clan was known for its laziness and their isithakazelo (clan name), abakwaMfene (the people who belong to the baboon clan) reflects this. “Tradition has it that the Thusi clan was idle” (Vilakazi, 1945: 206). This story was evidently told to frighten children and to deter them from being lazy; it encouraged them to be diligent instead and not to rely on others.

The moral of this story is similar to the moral in the story about the rock-rabbit who was too lazy to fetch its tail as uNkulunkulu (God) or uMvelingqangi (the first being or the Great-great-one), as the Zulu referred to God before they were introduced to Christianity by the missionaries, had commanded all the animals to do. Instead, he asked some animals to bring it to him, something the Creator had not instructed.

3.3.9 Preparing children for the adult world and expressions of beliefs and attitudes

Stories about marriage and fertility are not uncommon in Zulu. Makgamatha (1991), in his article entitled Cultural values and strategies in the Northern Sotho Prose Narrative: from Oral to Written, aptly puts this story in context:

Another culturally shared value which is closely related to security and vital force in the Northern Sotho community is marriage and fertility (ability to procreate). A man is considered to be a man of some standing in the community, to be ready to assume positions of responsibility in the community when he gets married. A woman’s prestige in the community is also enhanced by marriage. ... Not only does a man’s ability to marry a wife suggest that he can be entrusted with serious social responsibilities, but, like his well-fed external
appearance, the number of wives a man has (in the traditional African society) also represents his prosperity and his vital force. ...The prominence of marriage as an institution does not only lie in affording a man status in the community: the union must yield offspring. The worst evil that can befall a man is leaving no living heirs behind him when he dies.

The next story, *Inkosikazi eyabe ingabatholi abantwana* (A barren wife), reflects Makgamatha’s observations. In the story, we see the king’s love for his beautiful first wife decreasing and finally hanging by a thread because she cannot bear him children. He ends up rejecting her and demoting her and moving her out of his sight. On the other hand, he is seen to be accommodating towards his other wives who are not barren, albeit they bear him crows instead of real children. The king puts all the blame on his ancestors who seem to have rejected him. As time passes, the first wife’s misery is ended by the intervention of the ancestors who have heard her pleas and seen her tears. They send a herbalist or a traditional healer to cross her path. Later on in the story we see the king jubilant on hearing that he is now the proud father of twins. When he sees the two children, he is overjoyed, especially so as one of them is a boy. He welcomes the new heir by showering him with praises and thanking his ancestors for the two beautiful gifts. From that day forward, the mother of the twins becomes the most loved and cherished wife of them all. Her reinstatement to her original status revives her position. This all comes about from a union that has “yielded offspring”. Without doubt, the king can now truly be considered “a man of some standing in the community”. The story is used as a strategy to teach Zulu children about people’s beliefs and about marriage. The moral of the story will make the girls aware of the importance of marriage, especially of bearing children. The tale will motivate young girls to aspire to having children of their own. The story will at the same time provide the lesson that not everyone is born to procreate and that this depends on powers that are above those of human beings. It will also teach the audience not to make fun of those who are unable to bear children because it is no fault of their own.
Although there is yet another Zulu folktale which carries the same theme as this one, the researcher will analyse this retransmitted version because it has the attributes of traditional oral tales. Characters such as the inyanga (the herbalist) and the crows place it in the remote past, unlike the transmitted version penned by Msimang (1987), where he translates crows as doves.

In Msimang’s version, the childless woman is helped by doves to bear children. The theme and connotations of the story are analysed from a religious perspective and reveal the influence of the spreading of the gospel by the missionaries.

This story of the barren woman seems to reinforce Makgamatha’s opinion about marriage and producing offspring. From its content it is apparent that matrimony and children bring respect to a man and enhance a woman’s status in the African community.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the fact that traditional oral folktales encompass stories that were told to entertain children and to transmit culture from one generation to the next. This is particularly evident in the section in which the researcher retells a story told to her by her mother. This underlines Msimang’s (1986: 138) observation that: “The tales that a child hears as a member of an audience are the same tales that her grandmother listened to as a child; they are likewise the same stories that this child will perform before her grandchildren in her old age”. This chapter also makes clear that, over the years, many of these stories have been retold, transmitted, recorded, written down and preserved for posterity.

It is apparent that a folktale performer acts not only as an entertainer but also as a critic, an educationist or a moralist (Msimang, 1986: 136). The chapter has revealed that the performer is not only a storyteller; her success in injecting life into the performance depends also on the skill she has at her disposal. In order
to delineate her characters clearly, illustrations, comments, mimicry and voice are employed. Young children may respond differently to various stories but they also love and enjoy them.

Some stories also provide life lessons to children and assist them in coping with some of life’s challenges. For instance, in the story about the barren woman, young girls learn the value, embedded in culture, of getting married and bearing children. On the other hand, they will also realise that procreation depends on fate and that not everyone has been blessed with this gift. Sometimes people have to learn to accept their fate, like the women whose children were crows, and go on with life, content with other things.

The plot of the traditional folktale and the importance of using songs, repetition and refrains were indicated by relevant examples. All these were used for a specific purpose: to relay some form of message to children directly or indirectly, and to transmit social and cultural norms and values to them. This resonates with Dorson’s definition of a folktale:

A tale is not a dictated text with interlinear translation, but a living recitation delivered to a responsive audience for such cultural purposes as reinforcement of custom and taboo, release of aggressions through fantasy, pedagogical explanations of the cultural world, and application of pressure for conventional behavior (1972: 21).

In addition, observations were made that the content of the story encompasses all that has to do with the performance of oral tales such as the storyline, characters, setting, function, themes, etc. It was further observed that the value of folktales transcends entertainment since they teach children about cultural values and language use, amongst other things. “The cultural background as an important element of the interpretation of meaning in a literary text not only impacts on the characters, their actions and their settings; it also impacts on the language and style in a text” (Mafela, 1996: 18).
Finally, the chapter underscored the importance of telling stories to children at home as this also teaches them how to be performers and, as a result, assists in building their communication and storytelling skills. Some stories illustrate the value of being brave and of having a sense of responsibility. They also teach children about different animals and their weaknesses and strengths, as observed in the story about the lion and the weasel. Traditional folktales provide children with an idea of the type of life that was lived by their great great grandparents over the centuries.
CHAPTER 4

IMILOLOZELO, IZILANDELO AND IZANGELO AS CHILDREN’S ORAL POETRY IN ZULU

4.1 Introduction

African children have always learnt about their culture. Family members took it upon themselves to impart knowledge and wisdom to their descendants. Weinberg (1979:25) differentiates between formal and informal education:

*Imfundiso* was an informal educative process in which the child learned through the family values and skills pertaining to Zulu culture. This was an “enculturative” process. *Imfundu*, on the other hand, is education in the Western sense, knowledge imbibed through book-learning, through the teaching of Christianity, an education that is formal and institutionalised.

The discussion of *imilolozelo* (lullabies) and *izilandelo/izidlaliso* (game songs) will reveal that these two types of traditional oral children’s poetry in Zulu are the most suitable for informal teaching or training, known as *imfundiso yasekhaya* or “home teaching”.

Like all folklore, oral children’s poetry is an art and tradition transmitted from one’s forefathers. It is probably the most ancient form of African literature. It includes the poetry and folksongs of societies whose literature was transmitted orally instead of in the form of writing and print.

Zulu traditional oral poetry comprised mainly praise poetry, *imilolozelo*, and *izilandelo*. *Imilolozelo* is a form of children’s poetry delivered in the mode of song. *Imilolozelo* are sung by mothers to their babies and can in some instances also be viewed as *izilandelo* or *izidlaliso* (game songs). *Isilandelo* means “a recitation” and the verb *-landela* means “to follow or to follow after (someone else)”. The term *isidlaliso* is a singular form of *izidlaliso* and means a
“source of amusement”. It therefore alludes to the fact that izidlaliso bring enjoyment and happiness to children.

In their attempts to define Zulu children’s poetry, some researchers have used different terms which have almost the same meaning. For instance, some Zulu authors like Mabuya (1990) and researchers like Fraser (1996) tend to use the term imilolozelo as an umbrella term for all Zulu children’s poetry, thus incorporating izilandelo. This is the case in the following excerpt where Mabuya explains that poetry found in imilolozelo is not deep poetry, but that its use is to lull a child to sleep. On the other hand, he mentions that some imilolozelo form part of a game for children:


(Some lullabies, despite the cumulation of sweet words which are characterised by their similarity, contain some song-like parts which the baby-minder sings. The level of some lullabies gradually becomes elevated; the level is raised by the inclusion of a dialogue between two performers. This type of lullaby is like a game that is played by responding to one another.)

As such, in instances where an author or researcher is found to have used the terms umlolozelo or imilolozelo only, it should be taken for granted that the terms have been used as umbrella terms. However, the context in which they are used will be the guideline. On the other hand, Kunene (1961) employs the English term “nursery rhymes” to refer to Zulu children’s poetry and divides them into two types, simple lullabies and complex lullabies. This classification of imilolozelo and izilandelo does not fully reflect their nature, however.

Even though imilolozelo can be said to be similar to nursery rhymes because they fall into the category of traditional children’s oral poetry of the West, the comparison cannot be said to be precise. Nursery rhymes lack the hallmark of
performance which is the distinguishing feature of African oral traditional fiction or art. Fraser (1996: 33) attests to this when she highlights the following two most important facts which render *imilolozelo* unique and different to nursery rhymes:

Firstly, rhyme is an important feature of nursery rhymes, whereas, *imilolozelo* have no rhyme, but a particular underlying rhythmical pattern into which the words of the poem are aligned. Furthermore, nursery rhymes are performed without action, whereas, with *imilolozelo*, the non-linguistic aspects which link with the words of the poems are the general feature evident during performance.

Ntuli (1984), in his discussion of rhyme in Vilakazi's poetry, explains that composers of traditional Zulu poetry never made an effort to employ rhyme in their poetry for the apparent reason that their poetry was not written. He makes it clear that in traditional poetry, what is found is the repetition of whole words or sentences. He provides reasons for the later introduction of rhyme into Zulu poetry: “Zulu poets introduced rhyme into their compositions after seeing examples of this in hymns and Western poetry” (Ntuli, 1984: 203).

However, Kunene's (1961) categorisation and differentiation into simple and complex lullabies is the most logical one as it aligns itself with the functions of *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo*. This makes more sense when one examines his definitions. Kunene (1961: 38) says that simple lullabies:

... are recited or sung to the accompaniment of the rhythmic jerks of the child-tender. They usually consist of only a few verses .... The essential point about them is that they should be highly rhythmical. Meaning itself is subordinated to form. The complex lullabies are not only composed for children, but may also be enjoyed by adults. They have greater literary value than the simple lullabies. Meaning is of prime importance. In some of these there are serious satiric poems. This type is characterised by the exchange of words between the “voice” and the “chorus”.

For the purpose of this study, the Zulu terminology *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* used to distinguish between simple and complex lullabies will be recognised as
their names or labels are aligned with their meanings. However, the terms “simple” and “complex” are to be used for the purpose of illustration in instances where a clarification between umlolozelo and isilandelo is necessary.

The location of teaching, learning and performing imilolozelo was the home and within the child’s immediate environment; it was done in an informal and interesting manner. Imilolozelo were performed at any appropriate time, when the need arose, especially in the afternoon when children were playing. Children performed individually or in groups. According to Fraser:

The younger children stayed close to their mothers or other female relations or friends and when a suitable opportunity arose, teaching, performing of imilolozelo could take place. It was the child-minders’ task to pass on the poems from one generation to the next (1996: 22).

The performance was intended not only to while away time but also to teach and bring people together. The researcher herself experienced the teaching firsthand growing up. Her mother sang lullabies to her and later, when she had children of her own, she passed on to them this skill by singing them “cradle songs”, as Weinberg (1979) calls them.

The aim of this chapter is to show that in ancient Zulu societies, imilolozelo and izilandelo as an oral art form had a vital role to play in the upbringing, socialisation and development of a Zulu child. Women, especially mothers and nannies, used imilolozelo as an active and dynamic resource and instrument, intermixed with action that in many ways could be compared to reading a book to children in the modern era.

Most of the examples in this chapter emanate from the researcher’s personal experience, that is, from what she saw and did as a growing child. Further information is gathered from the researcher’s mother, grandmother, family members and from interacting with siblings and friends from the same neighbourhood and at primary schools.
4.2 Content and context of Zulu children’s oral poetry

The content of Zulu *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* may include nature, people, children, animals, birds, water, food, plants and objects. Fraser remarks that the meaning of the content of *imilolozelo*, even though some may be meaningful and comprehensible, “most of the poems make little sense” (1996: 26). She goes on to say that the meaning of poems may be sometimes evident; at others they may have a deeper, hidden meaning.

Traditional *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* reflect a rural way of life; this assists in determining the time and setting in which some lullabies were composed. Although some oral poetry seems to be rooted in a particular culture and time, it nonetheless essentially demonstrates African experiences. Fraser contextualises Zulu oral children’s poetry in the following remarks about their suitability, content and performance:

*Imilolozelo* are appropriate for young children and have a particularly strong rhythm. The content of these poems generally relates to the world of the child and his particular needs. Some of the poems seem to make little sense, especially the poems which have been passed on for many generations. … *Imilolozelo* have a distinctive “chant-type” mode of delivery and can be performed at full speed and volume. The poems are said enthusiastically and movement is always included in the performance. The poem can be repeated over and over until the children tire of it (Fraser, 1996: 50).

The researcher supports Fraser on the content of *imilolozelo*, that is, Zulu children’s poetry, because the content does indeed stem from the child’s environment. This influences the manner in which s/he relates to it and the effect it has upon her or him and the community in which s/he grew up.

*Imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* can be distinguished by their theme, meaning and functions. Meaning can also be drawn from the context, especially if one is familiar with the cultural practices, norms and values of a particular community.
Performance may also assist in shedding light on and providing insight into the content. However, as the researcher and some scholars have realised, it is sometimes not easy to grasp the entire meaning of some Zulu children’s poetry. This is because of the use of archaic words which could be unfamiliar or alien to the modern child.

Mabuya (1990: 9) ascribes the presence of unusual words in *imilolozele* and their unintelligibility to the fact that the language used is mostly drawn from the world of children but some words have an unknown origin. Fraser agrees:

> Although some *imilolozele* have meaningful and logical content, most poems make little sense. With *imilolozele*, meaning is not necessarily at issue as the focus is the effect the word has on the ear, the compelling rhythm and the scope provided for bodily movement and gesture. Many poems are rooted in a fantasy-world where all things are possible. Children enjoy the opportunity to stretch their imagination and are not concerned if unconnected ideas are juxtaposed (Fraser, 1996: 28).

One of Stewig’s explanations of why Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes appeal to children seems to be in accord with Fraser’s observations and fitting to *imilolozele*:

> Many of these rhymes are sheer nonsense, lacking logic but not needing it. Strong rhyme and rhythm make these verses a delight to the ear, enjoyable solely for the flow of sound they provide (Stewig, 1988: 271).

On the other hand, Fraser’s words bring to mind the following important observations. Firstly, the rhythm found in *imilolozele*, merged with performance, brings joy to the child and elevates the spirit as the child feels entertained. Secondly, some oral children’s songs or poetry in *imilolozele* may seem nonsensical to a foreign researcher who is unfamiliar with the culture of the Nguni and the artistic use of their language, especially the ideophones. Thirdly, the more the *imilolozele* belong to the distant past, the more incomprehensible they are since they fit into the fantastic and illogical world of children and are part of their journey of self-discovery.
Children’s oral poetry differs from written poetry because there are no titles. “Children’s poetry in all cultures very seldom has a ‘title’, but is known by the words of the first line, and the first line is given as the ‘title’” (Bill, 1988: 71).

4.3 Form in Zulu children’s oral poetry

Riccio (1980: 62) describes form as the visual outer shape of the poem that is brought about by particular arrangements of structural components. These components include the physical framework of a poem and the pattern created by the organisation of sounds and rhythm. Despite this definition, children’s oral poetry cannot in the true sense be analysed in a Western sense because it is spoken and not written.

When form is discussed, one should consider the manner in which the words in a poem have been assembled and organised to give the poem a particular form. Zulu children’s poetry features different shapes and is dominated mainly by repetition and rhythm. The rhythm provides a framework within which to store the words of the poem and thereby reduces the amount of brain-work necessary for recall (Fraser, 1996: 101). Although the researcher agrees partly with Fraser on the issue of this reduction of mental effort, she must add that as the number of words used in some imilolozelo is so small, this is not really always relevant. The brevity of the lullaby is in keeping with the developmental level of the child who, as yet, is not in the position to retain information. Because babies do not understand the words, they respond mainly to the soothing voice and the rhythmical rocking of the mother.

In the following section, the forms of imilolozelo and izilandelo will be analysed.
4.3.1 Form in *imilolozelo*

Repetition in *imilolozelo* is instrumental in the creation of form in oral poetry. Ntuli and Makhambeni (1998), in their definition of a lullaby, go further and comment on its structure:

... *Ngakho sivamise ukuba sifushanyana, siphindaphinde amagama noma izinhlamvu ezithile okuletha umgqumo wobunkondlo omnandi* (1998: 46.)

(... Therefore, it is usually a bit short; it repeats words or some syllables that yield a pleasing poetic rhythm.)

In the performance of *imilolozelo*, repetition and rhythm are complemented by the performer’s gestures and all this has a certain effect on the audience. Ntuli (1984), in his definition of rhythm in a poem, explains that rhythm means a more or less regular occurrence of time patterns and patterns of successive emphatic elements which are associated with the ones that are less emphatic:

These patterns include a combination of the various degrees of stress, duration or length and tone. It is difficult to give a fixed description of how exactly this rhythm is achieved because some languages have characteristics which others do not have. While languages like English have patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables, languages like Zulu use patterns of tone and length (Ntuli, 1984: 221).

Concerning the form of *imilolozelo*, simple lullabies, Kunene remarks that “nursery rhymes were composed mainly for children, and as such simple in structure. The majority of them depend for poetic effect largely on their highly rhythmic form” (1961: 37). The simplicity of these lullabies is caused by the fact that most of them have only one stanza. The stanza has three lines which are loaded with repetition of the same words, as in the following example:

*Thula mntwana, thula, thula*
*Umama uzobuya*
*Thula mntwana, thula thula mntwana*

(Hush, little baby, hush, hush, Mother will come back)
Hush, little baby, hush, hush baby.)

The form of the verse has been built by repeating the word *thula* (hush) six times, three times in the opening line and three times in the closing line of the stanza. This not only foregrounds the meaning of the repeated word; it also points out the function of the song: quieting the child. The word *mntwana* (baby) has been repeated three times. Repetition of the words and their sounds helps to create rhythm which is highlighted by the physical movements of the mother, such as rocking the child to and fro. The end product confirms Kunene’s (1961) attestation that: “Meaning itself is subordinated to form” (1961: 38). In the performance of oral poetry, the rhythm is conveyed not only by the way in which the poem is recited but also by the movement of the body.

4.3.2 Form in *izilandelo*

Form in *izilandelo* is rather more complex because *izilandelo* are intended for older children who can talk, walk and run and who have a certain amount of experience of their culture and their environment. Their language acquisition and cognitive level are more advanced and they have a more developed sense of responsibility. It is for this reason that Kunene says that these lullabies may also be enjoyed by adults; they have greater literary value and meaning is of prime importance (1961: 38). *Izilandelo* may at times be longer and be constituted of more than three stanzas. Repetition also plays a role in *izilandelo* as can be witnessed in the following game song about birds:

- *Yaqhamuka inyoni*
- *Yandizela phezulu*
- *Yabhula izimpiko*
- *Bhengu bhengu yandiza*
- *Yandizela phezulu*
- *Kunyonini lokhuya*
- *Okundizela phezulu?*
- *Kufana noheshane*
(A bird appeared
It flew high in the sky
It flapped its wings
Flap flap it flew
It flew up in the sky
What kind of bird is that
That is flying up in the sky?
It looks like a hawk
A bird that eats chickens
All the chickens
Scurry about
And go blindly into fenced barriers
Since they have been hunted
By hawks the kings
They had a terrible experience
Which burdens them.)

Here the word *ndiza* (“flew” or “fly”) is repeated six times and the word *bhengu* “flap” is repeated five times. The repetition here assists in memorisation of the poem and creates a rhythm that blends well with the performance of children as they mimic the flapping of the wings, moving their arms up and down. The words “It flew high in the sky” will be followed by their jumping into the air and the crescendo of their voices.
Thus form in children’s oral poetry is effected by repetition which creates rhythm. These two elements of traditional poetry can be said to be the building blocks of form, and one can conclude that rhythm in traditional performance of oral poetry constitutes form. It is for this reason that oral poetry may not necessarily be analysed by using terminology like rhyme, linking, etc., because traditional African children’s oral poetry does not lend itself to analysis using Western tools.

4.4 Performance of children’s oral poetry

Zulu traditional oral poetry, like all African poetry, was not composed to be read silently or aloud; instead, it was always meant to be heard by the ear and its actions perceived and appreciated with the eyes. The oral element focuses on performance and sound whereas the written form is text-centred. Oral children’s poetry is characterised by song, repetition, physical actions and gestures.

The performance nature of *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* can be likened to an informal school where, from infancy, a child slowly discovers her/his world and some aspects of all that is in it. The simple lullabies and game songs are poetic forms that are introduced to children at kindergarten and in lower primary school. The only difference is that *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* have their roots in and have emerged from the custodians of the culture such as mothers, uncles and grandparents, in an informal classroom called home. In the home environment, children were taught about the people, things and nature that surrounded them: the bird and animal kingdom, language, communication skills, and so on. In the process of performing, singing and playing, children were thus taught indirectly to commit the songs to memory and to pass them on to the next generation. Children’s songs played a fundamental part of the upbringing and teaching of children.
In African traditional society, particularly in Zulu culture, music is an essential element and folksong is very important; it is the blood vein of life and culture because there is a song for every occasion. Song is part and parcel of performance and drives it. Traditional songs, including children’s poetry, are characterised by dance rhythm and repetition. Africans and singing are like the tongue and saliva; they cannot be separated. That is why the Zulu have the following idiom: “Bangamathe nolimi” (they are inseparable) to refer to a couple who is smitten with each other, or to bosom friends. It is thus not surprising when mothers want to teach or relay a message to their babies from an early age, they use song as one of the vehicles. Makina (2009), in her attempt to show the importance of song among the Shona, encapsulates the inborn, instinctive and inherited love of song dominant among all Africans:

Like most African languages, Shona is tonal in nature, and therefore, lends itself to song and also, dance. The Shona people are expressive and spontaneous and it is not unusual for someone to break into song and dance at the sight of an unexpected guest! In other words, the Shona people sing and dance their way through life. Rhythm, therefore, permeates the life of the muShona from the cradle to the grave. As a baby, she is lulled to sleep by rhythmic songs and as she grows up, she participates with other children in songs and dances which enable her to express her emotions and acquire skills. As an adult, she participates with other adults in ceremonies and festivities which are accompanied by song and dance and at her funeral she is escorted spiritually to the world of ancestors with dance and song (2009: 51).

The excerpt clearly demonstrates that to Africans, song is the air they breathe, the food they eat, the water they drink and the dreams they dream. For Africans, songs bring meaning to life and they are the meaning of life! If they are life, they thus have to be inculcated in the minds of offspring from infancy. Thus, from an early age children are taught different types of chants and songs and how to sing them. Okpewho, describing the variations that take place during the delivery of poetry for children, explains:

The chant, which is sometimes called recitation, is a widespread form of performance in several African communities. There is clearly a marked difference between the speech voice and the chanting voice. The latter
is marked by a higher degree of stress in such a way as to achieve greater emotional intensity than in normal conversation speech (1992: 131).

Different stages or levels in the performance of Zulu children’s oral poetry will be discussed in the following section in order to illustrate how they are utilised in the upbringing and socialisation of the child.

4.4.1 Performance of *imilolozelo*

Nguni children are first initiated or introduced to poetry and its rhythms when their mothers or *umzanyana* (baby-minders) transmit *imilolozelo* to them. Doke, Malcolm and Sikakana provide the following definition of a baby-minder as it used to apply in the traditional Zulu setting: *umzanyana* is a “nurse for a baby (an old woman, e.g. maternal grandmother of the child, or a little girl, a close relative of the child’s mother); a girl who accompanies the bride to her new home and remains with a view [of her] until a baby is born” (2001: 888). In the performance of Zulu children’s oral poetry, repetition and rhythm stand out and dictate the genre. The performance of all *imilolozelo* is not precisely the same. Its difference comes about through the different developmental stages of a child. While the performer and the audience might be the same people, owing to some circumstances and content of the poem they may sometimes be different. The following examples will help to illustrate this.

4.4.1.1 The initial (baby) stage

From the researcher’s general and unscientific observation, it has been observed that the socialisation of the Nguni child, carried out through the performance of oral poetry, can be divided into four stages. This is because the nature of different types of *imilolozelo* seems unwittingly to reveal their various functions. It is for this reason that the discussion on performance will link with its function. Lullabies for infants usually consist of a few repeated short lines or verses:
Thula mntwana, thula thula
UMama uykubuya
Thula mntwana, thula thula.

(Hush, baby, hush hush
Mother will return
Hush, baby, hush hush.)

The girl, mother or grandmother will sing in a low, comforting voice and will repeat the song in a rhythm that is pleasing to the ear. This will be complemented by the rhythmical movements and warm comforting hands of the minder as she holds the baby to her breast or rocks it while it lies on its back. The swinging movements of the minder become slower and conclude when the child gradually falls asleep. The song soothes the baby with a feeling of warmth and security from the loving arms and transports the child into slumber. The whole process turns this into a performance.

The performance of imiolozele not only results in lulling the child to sleep but, according to Maphumulo and Mathenjwa (1999), it also helps to form a bond between mother and child:

Umzanyana noma unina wengane wayezihaya sankondo, elandela umgqumo othize wokwehla nokwenyuka okuyikhona okuhleha ingane ngesalamuzi ithule, ize igcine isizumekile. Singathi umilozele lona wakha intanjana yosinga engabonakaliyo exhumanisa unina wengane nomazanye kanye nengane leyo esuke iculelwa lowo mlolozele (1999: 59).

(The baby-minder or the mother of a child used to recite them (lullabies) in a poetic form, following a certain lowering and rising rhythm, an act which is one that magically sends a child to sleep. We can say that a lullaby crafts a small, invisible cord that bonds the mother or the babysitter with the child to whom a lullaby is sung.)

This function could bear testimony to the general observation of most African communities, that children have an inclination to be closer to their mothers and grandmothers than to their fathers and grandfathers. This could also be one of
the reasons why there are more female teachers than male teachers at primary schools.

The actions that have been briefly described above demonstrate the performance nature of children’s songs or imilolozelo. The performance is short but effective. The minder becomes a performer, the child a participant, even though she may not be fully conscious of her role. The song and gestures become the method of relaying the message. The repetition of words, akin to poetry, can be seen in *Thula mntwana* (“Hush, little baby”). “Lullabies provide a good example of what is regarded as a simple, natural, and spontaneous expression of feelings in all societies – it is in fact governed by convention and affected by the particular constitution of the society” (Finnegan, 1970: 299).

4.4.1.2 The second stage

A careful observation of the performance rendered by the minder in her quest to gradually allow a child to gain the confidence to walk reveals the creative tactics she possesses. Some of these will have been employed by her predecessors and family members. She will sometimes bend down to be more or less on the same level as the child. She will assist the child to stand by holding its hands, smiling and chanting the song: “Yedwa, wama yedwa!” (“On her own, she is standing on her own!”) as she encourages the child to take a few baby steps. The chant will be sung several times in a loving and encouraging baby voice. The performance is repeated several times and sometimes the song will be chanted while the child is seated. During the performance the child is not a passive listener but a keen observer who gradually becomes aware of what is informally being taught. Fraser appears to be corroborating this when she comments on the method that is used by the participant to receive and internalise the performance:

*Imilolozelo* is a poetic form where rote-memorisation of the words and accompanying actions is required. A “see, hear and then do” approach is followed – first the children look and listen to the teacher (in both
formal and informal environments) and only after that do they attempt to join in (Fraser, 1996: 24).

Small children, as participants, are quick to grasp and they learn by imitation, especially when it is through play. The encouragement and teaching would be accompanied by the rhythmical clapping of hands and stamping of feet, supplemented by encouraging facial expressions like a smile until the child is seen standing on her/his own. There is scope for total personal involvement in the act of performance as the rhythm is expressed both verbally and non-verbally (Fraser, 1996: 74). The following song is used during such a performance:

\[
\begin{align*}
Yedwa, \ wama \ yedwa, \\
Umntwana! \\
Yedwa, \ wama \ yedwa, \\
Umntwana! \\
Yedwa! \ Yedwa, \\
Umntwana! \\
Yedwa, \ yedwa, \\
Umntwana! \\
(On \ her \ own, \ she \ is \ standing \ on \ her \ own, \\
The \ child! \\
(On \ her \ own, \ she \ is \ standing \ on \ her \ own, \\
The \ child!) \\
\end{align*}
\]

There is repetition in this lullaby, when words are repeated in order to encourage the child to gain confidence as s/he is persuaded to: “\textit{Yedwa, wama yedwa, umntwana!”

As the child grows accustomed to the song s/he will at times be seen standing up, clapping hands and singing the chant in an attempt to show the mother that s/he can now do it on her own, without any form of encouragement or persuasion.
4.4.1.3 The third stage

*Thula mntwana*
*Thula mntwana*
*Thula nsizw’endala*
*Amathol’aphumile*
*Abafan’ethafeni*
*Nampa balusile*
*Thula nsizw’endala*

*Thula ntomb’endala*
*Izigubhu zigcwele*
*Izintomb’emfuleni*
*Naziya zikh’amanzi*
*Thula ntomb’endala.*

(Hush, baby
Hush, child!
Hush, young man
The calves are out
Boys at the grazing field
They are herding (cattle)
Hush, young man.

Hush, young girl
The gourds are full
Girls over there at the river
Are drawing water
Hush, young girl.)

Although this lullaby is also used to lull a child to sleep, it is a good deal longer than the first one. This could be indicative of the fact that it is sung to a child whose mental and physical development is more advanced. This fact is implicitly stated in the song. The nursemaid starts by pleading with the child to keep quiet; the child is addressed as *mntwana* (child). As the song continues the child is referred to as *nsizwa endala* (young man). This is a typical term used by the Zulu to show affection to their children. It does not necessarily mean that the child is old or mature.
The fourth stage

After the child has learned to stand without any assistance, it will be time for her/him to begin to toddle. The mother helps the child to take initial baby steps. As the baby makes attempts to stand on her/his own, the mother holds her/his hands and slowly moves backwards, encouraging the child to copy her. The following lullaby may be used as a vehicle of motivation:

*Cathu! Cathu! Cathu!*

(Toddle! Toddle! Toddle!)

*Cathu* is an ideophone derived from the noun “ingcathu” which means to walk slowly or to toddle. The verb from which this is derived is *ukucathula*, “to toddler”. The chant will be followed by the simulation and repeated several times till the child gets the message and starts toddling. Madzidzela comments on the initial reaction of a toddler when this type of training is exercised:


(The baby gets a fright and falls because she is not used to what is happening. As time goes on, she becomes accustomed to this song and then toddles. Sometimes, noise-making objects are tied around a child’s ankles so that they will make a sound when s/he walks. The noise that is made by these things makes the child continue walking until at times it will seem as if s/he is attempting a traditional dance on the same spot and eventually, s/he will end up performing a traditional dance.)

The end result of encouraging the child will reveal that the communication between the sender and the receiver has been successful and the “education” has yielded the desired outcome. All the new knowledge was acquired through the use of the verbal, visual and auditory aspects of communication. This will be
followed by jubilation from everybody in the house when they see the fruits of their labour. Later on, more delight will be experienced when the child is seen walking faster and faster every day, prepared for the next life lesson and experience through children’s songs.

Unlike folktales, original lullabies and children’s poetry have stood the test of time and many of them are still in their original form and have not been tainted by the influence of the missionaries. The Zulu have many children’s songs, some of which can also be found in urban areas, which proves that culture is not static but dynamic, moving with the times.

Examples already cited are a clear indication that the performance of *imilolozelo* can be used as a mode of informal teaching and interactive communication and that they still have a definite role to play in the socialisation and upbringing of the African child.

### 4.4.2 Performance of *izilandelo* and *izangelo/izidlaliso*

As was explained in the first chapter and in the introduction above, some children’s game songs can also be viewed as *imilolozelo*. Unlike the pacifying *imilolozelo*, game songs are simple poems for older children. They are part of the games children play and are sometimes complemented by vigorous and energetic actions and rhythmical movements. Ntuli and Makhambeni explain the relationship between the two:


*(Isilandelo)* are sometimes used to calm (a child), performing the same function as that of *imilolozelo*. It sometimes differs by being a game played by older children when they are keeping themselves happy,
whiling away time. It is usually recited by two children or two groups taking turns, one group asking questions and the other responding. The question and response game is characterised by the variation of the voice that creates a beautiful poetic rhythm that sounds like a song.)

Like lullabies, game songs are associated with action and rhythmical movement as a source of entertainment and education for children. During the performance, the poems may be performed with or without a song. When performed without a song, they are chanted. A chant is defined as “a spoken singsong phrase, esp. one performed in unison by a crowd etc., a repetitious singsong way of speaking” (Tulloch, 1994: 236). According to Moore:

Game songs provide an exceptional means of education. They help bridge the adjustment gap between the child’s home and the outside world, but usually the jeering, pushing, and pulling enable the child to learn the rules of the game and constitute a successful and healthy entertainment (1970: 20).

In izilandelo, communication is not only between the nursemaid and small children as some game songs take place between children themselves when they are playing. In the analysis of the following types of izilandelo it will be apparent that these game songs are different from the ones already discussed because they are performed outside the confines of the child’s home and they do not necessarily need an adult as one of the participants or performers. The children are in control here for they are the ones who decide when and what is to be performed.

While izilandelo are almost similar to imilolozele they are, however, recited by children who are more advanced in age. Their main function is not to soothe, quieten or lull a child to sleep but to bring pleasure to children. Some of them are performed using a question and answer method or a call/response mode. The method of delivery could be a song or a form of chant. Some are ordinary recitations.

Besides this, in Zulu children’s poetry there also exist special game songs that occur between the mother and her own children. These forms of izilandelo,
sometimes called _izidlaliso_ or _izangelo_, are rare. They may be composed by an _umakoti_ (a bride) to express her feelings about anything concerning her family. This could include problems with her in-laws or husband, discrimination in a polygamous marriage, etc. As a form of simple lullaby, these _izidlaliso_ were sometimes used by mothers not only to pacify their children but also to entertain their small children. As the mother lifts the child up and down, squeezes her cheeks, or tickles her to make her laugh, or while she tends her sick baby, she will sometimes be overcome by emotions and voice her personal feelings about various issues. Nxumalo was asked the following question about genres of children’s literature:

_What is Zulu or African children’s literature? Can it be divided into different genres?_

His answer included children’s storybooks and oral poetry. Concerning oral poetry, he focussed mainly on _izilandelo_:

... Kungabakhona esingathi ezinobunkondlo, ikakhulukazi ... _izilandelo_, nezhisho bese kuba khona izangela lezi zokusinisa izingane ... Kodwa khona osekuphela manje, lapho umama ekhuluma khona nengane sakulanda indaba, sakuhlabelela kodwa ebe ekhuluma izinto ezithile. Esingathi ubhala incwadi yesiZulu ngoba ukhuluma nabantu abathile lapha ekhaya izinto abazishoyo, indlela abamphethe ngayo kodwa ikhuluma nengane kodwa efuna bezwe ukuthi uthini.

(There could be those which we can say are poetic, especially, ... game songs, izihasho, and also _izangelo_, used to bring joy to children ... But it is something that is now diminishing, where a mother speaks to her child as if she is narrating a story, in the form of a song but whilst at the same time communicating other things. We could say that she is writing a Zulu book because she is talking to some individuals here in the homestead. She is talking about the things that they say, the manner in which they treat her but she is talking to the child but she wants them to hear what she is saying.)

Maphumulo et al. (1993:52) put this in context when they observe:
(Game songs are the result of the pleasure and the bitterness of getting lost in thoughts, that come upon the mother of a child like showers of rain whilst she is cuddling the baby … it flares up in the form of praise poetry or song that which is, covered up by the lids of the soul. Game songs are a large plaited basket used for storing the history that had once befallen the bride at her in-laws.)

These types of izidlaliso are composed by mothers for an individual, for instance, for her child. The mother would tell of things that took place before or when the child was born. They cannot be used for someone other than a family member as they do not have any relevance to any other person than the one talked about. This explains their scarcity or general absence in Zulu books or in research on traditional oral poetry.

As a young girl I remember a game song my mother used to chant while playing with my brother’s children, and also later on to my own children when I became a mother. I liked the sound and the rhythm of the game song:

*Lolo malolo nant’ ubhec’ esilevini*
*Lolo malolo nant’ ubhec’ esilevini.*

(Be quiet, there is a pip/seed of a melon on the beard
Be quiet, there is a pip/seed of a melon on the beard.)

One day I tried to work out the meaning of the song only to find that it was incomprehensible. When I asked my mother what the song was about she told me that it was directed at men who always see mistakes made by women although they cannot see their own flaws. This not only opened my eyes but at the same time amused me. I understood the hidden meaning that emerged from this interpretation of isangelo, which may have been composed in the clever and creative way a mother has to vent her anger at an ungrateful husband. The
woman was telling him to be quiet and to stop criticising her. In an interview, I happened to share this game song with Nxumalo and his response was:


(Some of these are just for amusement. She can say anything; some of it is deep/serious and some of it is just a way of playing. Some of it stems from something else without even meaning that such a thing exists. There probably was a woman who had a mole in the chin or who had a beard or hair because there were such people. It is also possible that there was someone who was caught drinking liquor and some of it remained on the beard, but it could mean anything.)

The above discussion about lullabies and game songs sheds some light on the creative skills of African women. They created and established the genre of oral children’s poetry which has given birth to written genres.

4.4.2.1 Performance of izangelo/izidlaliso by mother and child

The following two game songs between a mother and child, and explanations thereof, were provided to the researcher via a telephonic interview conducted with DBZ Ntuli on 8 June 2010. He was generous enough to give me izangelo/izidlaliso, as he calls them that were composed by his mother, MaShezi. In Zulu culture, a married woman is called by her maiden name to acknowledge and pay homage to her father. The term izangelo means izidlaliso zabantwana (children’s game songs) and has more or less the same meaning as izilandelo. However, Ntuli explained that the name izangelo and izidlaliso would be the most appropriate terms to use because they are not recited by a group and they do not follow a call/response pattern. In the first game song, MaShezi is playing with her child and remarking on her frailty and fragility. The song suggests that she is worried about her child’s state of health. As such, the
lullaby plays a role in recording a slice of history about Esther, Ntuli’s sister. Esther’s nickname was *Ntenge* (weakling).

_Ngayibona intentemisane yami,_  
_Yitenge,_  
_Ngayibona intentemisane,_  
_Yitenge._

(I saw my peevish child  
She is a weakling,  
I saw the peevish one  
She is a weakling.)

The second game song was sung by MaShezi when she was playing with her son, Bhekinkosi (DBZ Ntuli). The song was directed at her community:

**Voice:** Anongisizani nibuye niyeye,  
**Chorus:** Zitikeni,  
Kanti ubeneziqa ezingakanani  
Umuntu yindephu.

(I beg you to please stop doing this,  
Indulge yourselves,  
How many things does he have in excess?  
A person is bountiful.)

Apparently, MaShezi’s husband was a generous person and people in the village started taking advantage of his kindness. In the song, she voices her annoyance and disgruntlement. The performance usually takes place while the mother is seated, holding her baby. As she sings, she makes slight head movements and rocks the child from side to side. Other children provide an audience and participate in the performance by clapping their hands and/or joining in the game song. Kellina Linda, one of MaShezi’s daughters, pays homage to her mother’s creative skills:

(Even when she was angry she did not show it. She would be heard playing with her child by using game songs to comment about things that she did not like. Well, she had an amazing gift for composing game songs.)

This performance is for children who participate in the action, clapping their hands to the chorus part and crying, “Zitikeni!” (“Indulge yourselves!”). The composer becomes an informal teacher who is training the child from a tender age in ways of voicing her feelings. This includes writing down a child’s own history and things that happened to her and her family while growing up.

4.4.2.2 Call and response performance

(i) Performance by two individuals or groups

The following example is illustrative of a call and response performance by two individuals or groups of individuals:

*Sawubona wethu*
*Yebo wethu*
*Uphumaphi na?*
*KwaMatshekana*
*Wadlani na?*
*Isinambathi*
*Singani na?*
*Nomcengezana*
*Abantu pho?*
*Musa bo*
*Uvemvane*
*Luyagcakagc’*
*Emagangeni*
*Imbuzikazi*
*Ithwel’ umqhel’*
*Ayibhekeki*
*Iyesabeka*
*Wo, mekle, mekle*
*Wo, mekle, mekle*

(Hello, friend.
Yes, friend.
Where do you come from?
From the Matshekanas.
What did you eat?
Pumpkin cooked with maize meal.)
In what is it?
It is in a small earthen bowl.
And the people?
A butterfly
Fluttering
In the hills
The she-goat
Wears a crown
You can’t even look at it
It is frightening.
Oh, snap, break off
Oh, snap, break off.)

This is simply a question and answer game song which corresponds with what is taught to children at home. Zulu children are taught to greet others, especially older people, and that is why the game starts with a form of greeting. Children also learn how to take turns in asking and answering questions. The poem follows a call/response pattern and is performed by two groups facing each other. The content of the chant is an assortment of things that can be found around the child. It is about people, types of food common at that time, animals, nature, butterflies, etc. The game song seems to be telling a story about a feast or wedding that was witnessed by the respondent at the Matshekana family’s home. There were so many people that they are compared to butterflies. These people, like butterflies, were in a jovial mood, bobbing up and down. The meaning of this *isilandel*o is obscure for it lacks logic and it is difficult to settle on an exact interpretation. Notwithstanding, young children appreciate it and respond positively to the rhythm produced by the question and answer game, especially by the last line of the poem. When explaining the meaning of the poem on a surface level, Mabuya describes the amazing, entertaining and comical image of a crown-wearing goat as follows:


(What would you say should you see a goat standing on its legs like a human being? How much more if it is wearing a crown? Crowns are
worn by kings! What, then, if while standing on its legs like that, its tendons snap/break because of the weakness of its knees?)

The repetition of the closing sentence and the use of the ideophone “mekle, mekle” ("snap" or "break off") brings immense pleasure and entertainment to the children as they picture and mime the hilarious goat. On a deeper level, the poem could be interpreted to mean that the goat is compared to someone doing a traditional dance (while intoxicated) and the moves remind the respondent of a she-goat wearing a crown.

Mabuya’s clarification of the entire picture portrayed in the game song indeed confirms his view that

… izithombe kanye namagama emilolozelo kungase kuliphakamise izinga layo ngaphezu kokuba thina sicabanga nje ukuthi lokhu kuyizinto zasezweni lobungane elingasho lutho! (1990: 9).

(... images and words used in lullabies may elevate their standard beyond what we think, thinking that these things belong to the world of children that does not mean anything!)

The researcher agrees with Mabuya on this point because it validates izilandelo as a form of children’s poetry; like adult oral poetry, this poem has meaning which could be analysed on different levels. The poem is short and thus age-appropriate. Images painted by the diction belong to the world of children. The use of the nonsensical language and the resultant rhythm lends itself to the performance nature which is akin to oral performance.

Stewig’s comments summarise and echo Mabuya’s statements above:

Walter de la Mare, himself a poet, introduced his Nursery Rhymes for Certain Times by saying that rhymes “free the fancy, charm the tongue and ear, delight the inward eye, and many of them are tiny masterpieces of word craftsmanship … they are a direct shortcut into poetry itself” (1998: 270).

(ii) Performance by an individual and a group of boys
The content of this poem indicates that it is a game that is played by young boys only.

We bafana iyo!
Aph’ amathole iyo?
Akonina iyo
Azodlani iyo?
Umgqushumba iyo!

(Hey, boys, iyo!
Where are the calves, iyo?
They are at their mother’s, iyo
What will they eat, iyo?
A mixture of mashed food, iyo.)

The poem can be led by one voice and responded to by the whole group, or the group can be divided into two. The leader of isilandelo can alternate so that all participants learn how to lead. This in a way compels children to sharpen their learning skills and their memories. They also learn how to project their voices. It should be noted that the repetition of “iyo” creates a pleasant rhythm on the ear, which is followed by the clapping of hands and the stamping of feet. This makes it a pleasant and enjoyable game which children can repeat over and over again.

4.4.2.3 Performance through song

Nhloyile, nhloyile, nhloyileka Gelegele,
Uphetheni ngomiomo?
Ngiphethe’ amas’ omntwana.
Uwasakubani?
Ngiwasa ku Zancengе,
Ancenge kancinyane,
Athi ngci! ngci!

............... ... ...

Wabahlabisani?
Ngabahlabis’ ucilo.
Ucilo bamalile,
Baqond’ imvubu,
Yonanyam’ enkulu,

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Badle baphelele,
NoNtembuzane,
Ntembuzane vosho,
Vosho, vosho, vosho.

(Kite, kite, kite of Gelegele,
What are you carrying in your mouth?
I’m carrying the baby’s sour milk.
Who are you taking it to?
I’m taking it to Zancenge,

...What did you slaughter for them?
I slaughtered a lark.
They refused the lark,
They went for the hippopotamus,
That has big meat,
The whole lot of them ate,
Together with Ntembuzane,
Ntembuzane vosho,
Vosho, vosho vosho).

This lullaby is obscure in meaning because it was composed in a traditional setting. However, Kunene (1961: 40) regards it as one of those that has “a slightly humorous tone”. He provides an indication of what the poem is about when he comments as follows on the last stanza of the following version of his untranslated game song, “The following example refers to a stingy man who gives his guests very little after having invited them to a feast”:

Chorus: Wabahlabisani?
Voice: Ngabahlabisa ucilo
    Ucilo bayamala bathanda imvubu.
    Yona unyama inkulu badla baphelela,
    Nemikhonyana yabo, nezandlana zabo,
    Nemilonyana yabo, nezingane zabo.

The translation of the song would be:

(What did you slaughter for them?
I slaughtered a lark.
They refused the lark but they liked the hippopotamus.
Which is big meat and was sufficient for them,
With their small arms and their small hands,
And their small mouths, together with their children (they ate.)

The researcher agrees with Kunene that the lullaby is humorous. How could all the guests, together with their children, be expected to share a small bird? On the other hand, the opposite is rather amusing. During its performance, one can only imagine tiny arms and hands cutting meat from the gigantic hippopotamus and eating it with their tiny mouths. This was done while squatting as indicated in “NoNtembuzane, Ntembuzane vosho” (“Together with Ntembuzane, Ntembuzane vosho”). Vosho is an ideophone that has the meaning of squatting down. Ntombizane is a female name; however, it is difficult to determine who Ntembuzane was. The lark seems to represent a little meat that will satisfy their hunger and the hippopotamus represents man’s love for food or things that he does not have or cannot afford.

4.4.2.4 *Isilandelo* as a form of play and physical activity

In all communities there are children and all children of the world love to play games because playing and games are inherent in childhood. Zulu children’s game songs reach children not only on an intellectual level but also on the physical level. The rhythmical element intrinsic to oral children’s poetry compels children to act in response to it. During the performance of *izilandelo*, children have the opportunity for exercise. As they sing or recite, they perform various actions. They run around, clap their hands, stamp their feet, laugh, fall and make various other gestures, as in the poem about *nezinkukhu* (the hawk and chickens) and *Sawubona wethu* (Hello, friend) and many other Zulu children’s game songs.

4.5 Functions and values of oral children’s poetry

Besides the fact that *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* were used in the socialisation of a child, they had other important functions which developed the child holistically.
This becomes apparent when the following points about English nursery rhymes – similar to *imilolozelo* in more ways than one – are explained by Andre Wright and Alan Maley (2010):

They are fun, humorous and witty. They have rhythm and rhymes, they open up our imagination, have poetic devices. Nursery rhymes show the world in new ways. They tap into feelings and they are a necessary antidote to the linguistic nonsense that surrounds us. They facilitate language play and risk-taking, they tap into feelings, and they offer painless repetition. They promote language acquisition, e.g. phonology, and they promote imagery and visualization and they often invoke a physical response (Notes taken from a conference attended in Germany, 25-27 February 2010, *Children’s literature in language education: from picture books to young adult fiction.*)

From the above, it is apparent that *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* had several roles to play in the life and upbringing of a Zulu child. In the next section, examples will be provided to illustrate some of these. A brief analysis of the functions and values of the various types of Zulu *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo* will also be provided.

4.5.1 *Umlolozelo as a pacifier*

As already observed, in Zulu a number of lullabies are used as pacifiers and, although short, they portray an element of dynamism in the fact that they were composed by creative women and performers. Two lullabies are illustrated here but only the second one will be discussed. The first one is used as an example of the dynamic nature of *imilolozelo*. Although it is a traditional oral lullaby, Busi Mhlongo, a renowned Zulu South African musician and performer included it in her album entitled, “Freedom” The lullaby is called “Baby, don’t cry”:

*Walila umntwana*  
*Elilela umama-khe*  
*Wamthatha wambek’ esifubeni sakhe*  
*Wathi thula sana lwam’*  
*Wathi thula sana lwam’*
Samthatha
Samthatha sambeka ekhaya
Wasuke wakhala wathi maye babo  x2

(The baby cried
Crying for her mother
She took her and put her to her breast
She said, hush my baby
She said, hush my baby

We took/picked her up
We took her and took her home
She just cried and said, oh my. x2)

The original lullaby comprised only the first stanza, as reflected in Weinberg's (1978: 50) research. The second stanza was apparently taken from another popular Zulu lullaby, also used to quieten a child:

Thula mntwana,
Thula mntwana,
Unyoko amukho.
Uyolima amabele.

(Hush, little baby,
Hush, little baby.
Your mother is not here.
She has gone to work in the fields.)

The above umlolozelo is very short and is performed as a song. The lullaby is a form of communication between the speaker, the nursemaid, and the child, who is the receiver of the message. The message is found in the lyrics of the lullaby which indicate that the lullaby is sung by the baby-minder and not the mother of the child. The purpose of the song is to lull the child to sleep. The message is addressed to an infant who is still little and can, as yet, not understand what is being said. The baby is told through the song to keep quiet because her/his mother has gone to work in the fields. It is clear that this type of Zulu imilolozelo at times tell babies why their mother is absent, even if the baby is too young to understand. In the case of children old enough to understand the message, the reason may give the child some hope that its mother has not deserted it forever and that she will eventually return home.
On another level, the minder’s explanation can be interpreted as communicating and alluding to her underlying emotional feelings, as she empathises with the child’s desire to be with her mother. This is something that text alone cannot always reveal. Through the tone of her voice and her gestures, the nurse may reveal her anxiety and frustration about the child’s seemingly distressed state in her/his mother’s absence. The lyrics of *imilolozelo* and the nursemaid’s reaction seem to support Guma’s observation of Southern Sotho songs when he observes that: “This poetry in the form of songs, is essentially intimate, personal and subjective. It is descriptive of the joys, sorrows, hopes and aspirations of the individual” (1977: 102). If the child minder is a young girl, her concern would be intense because of her lack of experience. Through the use of the diction, she makes an effort to appease and reassure the child that her/his mother will soon be back to provide the love and to breastfeed her/him. This would be reflected in children’s subsequent delight, laughter and joyful noise when the mother finally arrives. Such *imilolozelo* may be very short and simple but they can be viewed as a source of communication. They have the important function of communicating and relaying messages, directly or indirectly.

4.5.2 *Umlolozelo* as a form of encouragement

In her continued efforts to build a relationship with her baby as the child grows, a nurse or mother may also use lullabies to encourage it to stand on its own – literally – and to learn to walk. This is not necessarily an individual effort because the child’s siblings and/or family members may also be heard singing the chant to persuade it to stand up and learn to walk, as in the example: *Yedwa, wama yedwa umntwana* (On her own, the child is standing on her own) and *Cathu! Cathu! Cathu!* (Toddle! Toddle! Toddle!)

At this stage the child is conscious of the message and when s/he responds to it s/he can thus be seen as an active participant. The child’s imitation of the action confirms the success of the learning and the “see, hear and then do” method.
4.5.3 Entertainment and commentary in izangelo/izidlaliso

As already mentioned, game songs that bring enjoyment entertain a child and give the mother an opportunity to express her views are played by mother and child. They are composed by umakoti (a bride). They function not only to advantage the child but the mother as well. They allow the latter to express her feelings about things that concern her family. This might include difficulties she has with her in-laws or her husband, discrimination in a polygamous marriage etc., as in MaShezi’s two izangelo / izidlaliso discussed in section 4.4.2.1. While the mother is tickling and playing with her child she is voicing her feelings, sometimes to her advantage. She will also laugh as the feelings of joy swell up. The mother and the other children who are also participating by singing along, clapping the hands and stamping their feet will also be entertained.

4.5.4 Isilandelo teaching and instilling a sense of responsibility

As noted in chapter three (3.3.6), and in the poem We bafana iyo! (Hey, boys, iyo!), cattle play an important role in the life of the Zulu. Through the singing of lullabies, a sense of responsibility is both directly and indirectly instilled in the mind of a boy as he grows up to be a man. These songs underscore the fact that even when the child is playing he should think about the whereabouts and the safety of the livestock. The lullaby discussed in the following paragraph attests to this fact:

\[
\begin{align*}
Thula mntwana \\
Thula mntwana \\
Thula nsizw’endala \\
Amathol’aphumile \\
Abafan’ethafeni \\
Nampa balusile \\
Thula nsizw’endala \\
Thula ntomb’endala \\
Izigubhu ziczwele \\
Izintomb’emfuleni \\
Naziya zikh’amanzi \\
Thula ntomb’endala.
\end{align*}
\]
(Hush, baby
Hush, child!
Hush, young man
The calves are out
Boys at the grazing field
They are herding (cattle)
Hush, young man

Hush, young girl
The gourds are full
Girls over there at the river
Are drawing water
Hush, young girl.)

The content of the song makes the little one aware that one day he will also grow up and have time to play and do the same chores as young children like him. Weinberg’s remarks underline the lyrics of this *mlolozelo*: “Traditional education revolved round pastoral life and evolved from life within the ‘*umuzi*’ (village)... Children learnt through language, observance and participation in traditional events and also through the text of song, as singing was a natural part of their lives” (1979: 25). This message can be read in the lines: “The calves are out, boys are at the grazing field, and they are herding (the cattle)”. On the other hand, this may not be the case as the lullaby is also sung to little babies, even if they do not understand what it is sung.

The Zulu language has the saying: *Inkunzi isematholeni*, meaning literally that the bull is among the calves. This means that children have the potential to grow up to become leaders or people of great stature. The second stanza has a similar meaning to the first stanza. It carries the message that prepares children for the duties that they will have to perform later in life. In the Zulu tradition, girls are the ones expected to perform the task of drawing water from the river.

From an early age, little girls become acquainted with domestic duties and older brothers and sisters would pass on to them their knowledge and skills... Young girls soon learnt how to carry water, skilfully balancing small gourds of water on their heads” (Weinberg, 1979: 25).
This indicates the value that the Zulu invest in teaching their offspring to perform their respective tasks from childhood.

4.5.5 *Isilandelo* teaching natural simulation and moral lessons

Some game songs do not necessarily employ the question and answer mode, used in the examples provided above. They are instead recited in an ordinary manner but regardless of the difference in rendition the end-product yields the same results. The use of words and the manner in which they are presented adds to the fun as they are accompanied by physical movements that imitate birds. This is very entertaining for children. Songs of birds including simulations of sounds using sound-making objects can be recited either individually or by individuals competing in a group for the most accurate simulation (Kunene, 1961: 44). The following *isilandelo* about birds will be discussed below:

Yaqhamuka inyoni  
Yandizela phezulu  
Yabhula izimpiko  
Bhengu bhengu yandiza  
Yandizela phezulu  
Bhengu bhengu yandiza  
Yandizela phezulu  
Kunyonini lokhuya  
Okundizela phezulu?  
Kufana noheshane  
Inyon’ edl’ izinkukhu.  
Izinkukhu zonkana  

Zisala ziphithiza  
Zizihlom’ ezingcweni  
Selokhu zazingelwa  
Amakhosi osheshane  
Zakubon’ okukhulu  
Zakubeleth’ emhlane.

(A bird appeared  
It flew high in the sky  
It flapped its wings  
Flap flap it flew)
It flew up in the sky
Flap flap it flew
It flew up in the sky
What kind of bird is that
That is flying high in the sky?
It looks like a hawk
A bird that eats chickens.

All the chickens
Scurry about
And go blindly into a fence
Since they have been hunted
By hawks the kings
They have had a terrible experience
Which burdens them.

The poem is about the enmity that exists between some birds. The composer’s aim was to teach children about two different types of birds: the hawk and a chicken. Both the birds can be found in the child’s environment. A hawk is a bird that can fly high in the air. A hawk represents bad behaviour. It is not particularly liked by men because it snatches their chickens and eats them. Children do not know about hawks and they therefore need to be taught about their predatory nature. Chickens are domestic birds that children are familiar with and they will thus sympathise with them. The underlying moral lesson in the lullaby is subtle and cannot easily be interpreted by small children unless it is explicitly explained. The message is to warn children to be careful of people who look like them but who behave differently because their behaviour could put their lives in danger. This is clear in the following lines:

All the chickens
Scurry about
And go blindly into a fence
Since they have been hunted
By hawks the kings
They have had a terrible experience
Which burdens them.
The following example has a moral lesson for the children. Like the lullaby entitled “Baby don’t cry”, this game song can also be found in Busi Mhlongo and Twasa’s album entitled “Babhemu”.

We mfaz’ ongaphesheya
Uthi bhubhu ini na?
Ngithi bhubh ‘isidwaba
Isidwaba yini na?
Amanqamula feceza
Amaland ‘adl’ubulungwe
Ashiyel uJejane
UJejan’ akanandaba
Indab’inoViyoyo
Viyoyo Viyoyo.

(blet, lady from over there
What are you beating (shaking) out?
I am shaking out a leather skirt.
What is a leather skirt?
It is that which stops gossip.
The herons eat dung
They leave some for Jejane
Jejane does not matter
The matter concerns Viyoyo
Viyoyo Viyoyo.)

This game song is one of those whose meaning is difficult to fathom as it was composed a long time ago. The dialogue seems to have taken place in a certain domestic area. According to Kunene, the conversation is directed to a woman who had vexed her neighbour. Apparently, the neighbour attacked her verbally while teaching children. Owing to their lack of comprehension of the poem and their naivety, the children enjoyed it and unwittingly became the ‘newspaper’ of the place. Kunene explains the funny side of the spreading of the story:

Children would get so enthusiastic over these rhythms of the poem that they would recite them everywhere. The person concerned would be tormented by the thought that the words of the satire were directed at him or her (1961: 41).

This lullaby reflects the fact that children’s poetry may have a hidden meaning and that may be satirical. The moral lesson is aimed at adults as well. The
lesson in this *isilandelololo* aligns with Fraser’s (1996: 28) view that the “content of some *imilolozelo* praises or reinforces certain behaviour patterns, while other poems highlight inappropriate behaviour.”

4.5.6 Entertainment and socialisation

As a part of Zulu oral tradition, *imilolozelo* were told not merely to keep boredom at bay; they had a vital role to play. They were an oral art form that carried a message and preserved a culture. The message depended on the developmental stage of a child. As indicated in the discussions above (4.5.2), *imilolozelo* have various functions including the upbringing of a child and teaching her/him to walk. Through learning to perform the poems, the children also learnt more about the reality of the world and how the rhythm of the language of the poem was organised (Bill, 1988:189). The following game song serves as an example of entertainment because although it is illogical, it is comical, fun to mimic and to listen to. It gives children joy. It reveals the creativity in the imaginery play-world of children:

*Ge! Ge! Ge!*
*Inkom’ iyokh’ amanzi*
*Umakot’ ugoyile*
*Ikati liyapheka*
*Lipheka nenj’ encane*
*Ge! Ge! Ge!*

(Ha! Ha! Ha! The cow has gone to draw water
The bride is shy
The cat is cooking
It cooks with the little dog
Ha! Ha! Ha!)

The poem not only paints a hilarious picture, but is entertaining and satirical. The first line starts on a “laughing note” and introduces a humorous scene. The rhythm and the repetition of the “k”, “e” and “o” sounds in the following words appeals to children, and makes them happy:
This repetition will make the game song easier to memorise. Children will laugh when they imagine a cow going to the river to draw water and a cat and a small dog cooking in the kitchen. This is a duty which should be performed by women, not animals. The poem lampoons the new, shy young bride who is supposed to be industrious to prove that she is worthy of the herd of cattle that was given to her parents as ilobolo (bride price). The composer of the poem has employed hyperbole, or exaggeration, and sarcasm to ridicule the lazy makoti (bride) who seems oblivious of the duties of a bride at her in-laws’ home. Reading the poem, young girls will be made aware that duties like drawing water and cooking are to be carried out by women, failing which, things will fall apart and not go according to the conventions of the marriage institution. Regarding the function and values recognised in this poem, Norton observes the following about such children’s poetry: “The rhyme, rhythm, and exaggerated comparisons of Mother Goose verse foster language and enjoyment of literature” (1983: 139). Indeed, this kind of oral poetry, although nonsensical in nature, will encourage young children to play with words and enjoy literature.

4.5.7 Stimulation of oral language development and a game of caution

Imilolozelo and izilandelo promote language development. In the oral tradition, language teaching is automatic and informal but the teaching of children’s poetry expedites the process and carries with it a sense of teaching with some form of purpose. This is facilitated by imitation, rhythm and repetition. The performer’s demonstration of reciting or singing the lullaby over and over again reinforces repetition and imitation which leads to learning and understanding. This can also be achieved by the appropriate modification of the tone of the voice. As a result, the performance will yield the desired results. It highlights the contextual clues which are loaded with layers of meaning and facilitates understanding of the meaning of the articulated words or expressions which
may previously have been unknown to the audience. This can be seen in the following lines of *isilandelolo*:

\[
\begin{align*}
Yabhula izimpiko \\
Bhengu bhengu yandiza \\
Yandizela phezulu.
\end{align*}
\]

(It was flapping its wings
Flap, flap it flew
Flying high in the sky.)

The children might be accustomed to the word “*bhula*” (beat), for instance, to beat a hide, a fire (i.e. to extinguish). But this word can also be used when a naughty child is beaten with a stick. Thus, when the performer flaps her arms to demonstrate the action, children will understand the new context in which the already known word is being used. It becomes entertaining and fun for them to imitate a bird flapping its wings. This will be followed by the raising of their arms to portray a bird flying high in the sky. The tone of the performer’s voice will grow louder and louder as it complements the action. In this *umilolozele*, the ideophone “*bhengu*” or “flap” is put to effective use when children are taught new vocabulary and shown novel ways of using the Zulu language in the performance of *imilolozele*. Because this is done as a game, children enjoy it without even noticing that they are being instructed. The repetition and rhythm found in children’s oral poetry thus stimulates and reinforces language acquisition and development in young children.

In the last two lines of the poem about the hawk and the chickens:

\[
\begin{align*}
Zakubon’ okukhulu \\
Zakubeleth’ emhlane.
\end{align*}
\]

(They had a terrible experience
Which burdens them.)

The “za” sound at the beginning of each line and the sounding of the “u” vowels coupled with ”ku” creates a joyful, rhythmical beat that enlivens the children as they put their hands behind their backs, with their back and heads bent as if
they are carrying a baby or a burden. In the process of playing games, children will also imitate the sounds of the birds they are singing about. This does indeed “…facilitate language play and promote imagery and visualisation” (Wright and Maley, 2010). Furthermore, the choice of the Zulu idiom Zakubeletha emhlane, loosely translated as “they are carrying it on their backs” (that which they have experienced) is a fitting one because it corresponds with the hovering action of the hawk as it prepares to pounce on the unsuspecting chickens which, as is their nature, do not look up to see the oncoming danger. Chickens must always “watch their backs” because of this heavy burden which will always attack them from behind.

Mabuya provides a sound reason for the diction and images that are sometimes found in children’s poetry:

*Ehhene, yikho kanye lokhu esithi izithombe kanye namagama emilolozelo kungase kuliphakamise izinga layo ngaphezu kokuba thina sicabanga nje ukuthi lokhu kuyizinto zasezweni lobungane elingasho lutho!* (1990: 9).

(Yes, that is why we say that images and words of lullabies can elevate their standard beyond where we think they belong in the world of children, the world that does not have any meaning.)

4.5.8 *Imilolozelo and izangelo introduce the child to poetry and song*

As already discussed in 4.3.2, through the repetition of *umilolozelo* that encourages a child to stand, the child is indirectly introduced to simple poetry and song. In the following example, the inculcation of an appreciation for poetry via rote memorisation is combined with the singing of the relevant songs with their accompanying actions:

*Yedwa, wama yedwa, Umntwana!*  
*Yedwa, wama yedwa, Umntwana!*
(On her own, she is standing on her own, 
The child! 
On her own, she is standing on her own, 
The child!)

Kunene explains how this appreciation is induced and stimulated and he remarks on the outcome when he points out that: “At first his appreciation stems from an emotional response to the pleasant rhythms of the language, later from the discovery of meaning … their knowledge gives individuals with a poetical inclination an opportunity to learn poetical devices of the language” (1961: 45). In relation to bird songs, Kunene says that the imitation of their songs teaches the individual to copy their sounds creatively.

4.6 Conclusion

The chapter has presented the genre of Zulu traditional children’s oral poetry as a form of performance that is based not only on words, but which also employs songs and/or chants interspersed with rhythmical movements to relay a message. As has been indicated in the discussion, “The sounds and rhythms of words and their connotative as well as their denotative meanings are used to convey the intellectual or emotional content of the poem” (Stott, 1984: 224). Also, it has been demonstrated that, from an early age, a child is initiated into her/his rich Zulu tradition of verbal art and song through a type of a game. The performance of children’s poetry is regarded as the original indigenous home-based or informal education. It is thus not surprising that Africans seem to have a natural flair for singing, rhythm and dance.

The differences that exist between imilolozeno and izilandelo were explained; revealing that they are performed at the child’s various developmental stages. Relevant examples were provided as illustrations. It was also observed that “children’s game songs represent the first level of direct musical participation by children. It is also the first use of music as a learning tool in the socialization process” (Kgobe, 1997: 386). Zulu oral children’s poetry was contextualised by commenting on its elementary features such as theme, content and meaning.
The examination of the content of *imilolozele* has revealed that its themes are drawn from the child’s environment. Although it was pointed out that some of them are nonsensical it was established that children love them and are delighted by the rhythm and the repetition of the sounds. Form was also briefly discussed. In the discussion of informal teaching of Zulu children’s poetry, it was found that these poems perform several functions besides that of bringing pleasure to the ear and to the whole being of the child. Other roles include feeding of the imaginary world of a child, teaching the child the use of language and, through play, assisting in the child’s physical development.

Lastly, unlike folktales, original lullabies and children’s poetry have stood the test of time as some of them are still in their original form, untainted by the influence of the missionaries. The Zulu have many children’s songs, some of which can also be found in urban areas, which goes to show that culture is not static but dynamic because it moves with the times. This has been witnessed in the above example where small bottle tops are tied around a child’s ankles and where they have been sung and recorded by Zulu musicians like the late Busi Mhlongo.
CHAPTER 5

ZULU READERS AS MODERN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

5.1 Introduction

An idea, concept or talent is not alive while it is still in the mind because it is abstract, obscure and unknown to the outside world. Unless it is conceptualised and given birth to by the owner, it is rendered useless and might end up being forgotten or aborted or die with the possessor. The researcher believes that there are numerous tales that were unfortunately not captured on paper by the missionaries who were not available to each and every creative or gifted storyteller of the time. There are also many tales which have remained unpublished, poems that were never recited, songs that have remained unsung, drawings and paintings that were never appreciated and creative ideas that were never projected to the world. This may have happened because people lacked the relevant platform or someone who could kindle the spark into a fire. This may have been the result of specific circumstances prevailing during the era, such as ignorance, lack of education, censorship or racial discrimination.

Modern South African children's literature has a comparatively short history. In contrast to the earliest published children’s book in the West, which appeared in the seventeenth century, the first written children's narratives in Afrikaans were produced in South Africa only in the first half of the nineteenth century. These texts related African folktales which were collected, translated and published by missionaries and travelers. Very few contemporary children's books in the African languages appeared in the twentieth century. In South African children’s literature, examples in the nine official African languages seem to have remained on the periphery when compared to Afrikaans and English literature.

Reasons for these circumstances may be found in the colonial history of South Africa. The African people of South Africa were first exposed to missionary
education in the colonial era and later to an inferior education system in the form of Bantu Education Act of 1953 which was the result of the policy of apartheid advocated by the South African government. This act was repealed in 1979. Besides stories from the Bible; the missionaries also published school readers in indigenous languages. So, when reference is made to readers in this chapter it means school textbooks first written by missionaries and later, by African authors. These can be regarded as the first indigenous African written children’s literature, initiated by the missionaries. These textbooks were prepared and arranged according to age and cognitive developmental stages. Their contents were drawn chiefly from a child’s surroundings. The themes included family members, home, birds, animals, livestock, folktales, school, religion, rural life and so on. From the contents of these school readers, one can conclude that they laid the foundation for literacy and the delineation of African modern children’s literature into different genres.

These readers were moralistic and even though they introduced black Africans to literacy they were prepared with an ulterior motive. Many scholars view them as a tool, prepared chiefly by the missionaries, to introduce black Africans to Christianity. When asked in an interview to comment on the contributions made by the missionaries to the development of Zulu children’s literature, Nxumalo remarked that:


(The way I see it, or to my knowledge, there was very little contribution concerning this type of children’s literature. Everything appears to have commenced during the introduction of the complete/comprehensive education. What seems to have been dominating them, but not in a bad way, was what was uppermost in their minds it seems as if it was that
people should read spelling books, learn to write and learn to read the Bible. They had met people who were elderly and who had to repent. If they brought their children along, the catechism would be the essential thing. Thereafter, the children would attend school in order to learn how to read and write. However, this occurred because there were probably more adults than children.

Nxumalo’s point of view, although resonating with other scholars’ observations, is more insightful because it alludes to the fact that the catechism was probably the first book that found its way into the hands of African children. In addition, the final point as to why adults were first taught about literacy instead of children holds some water.

This chapter discusses readers as printed children’s literature in Zulu. It briefly explores some of the first Zulu readers written by the missionaries and the role these played in influencing some Zulu authors to develop authentic readers. The transition from lullabies, game songs and folktale to modern poetry and children’s stories will emerge from this discussion. In the following section, examples of readers published in various periods will be examined. The uses and value of these books will also be discussed.

5.2 Background information regarding Zulu readers

As already mentioned (in 1.7.1), the writing and development of Zulu literature, as well as literature in all indigenous languages, owes its development largely to the efforts and contributions of the missionaries, and it is greatly indebted to them. This is attested to by Ntuli and Swanepoel (1993:18-19) who acknowledge the profound “five-fold contribution” of the various British, American and European mission societies. They see this contribution as the spreading of the Christian message, the introduction of literacy, the development of languages as written languages, the establishment of printing presses and the development of religious literatures. They indicate that the first printing press to print Zulu books was established at Umlazi in 1837. About the
significance of the work that was done by the missionaries in Zulu literature, Ntuli and Makhambeni have this to say:


(The Zulu language started coming out of the mouths of the people and flowed via the pen till it landed on papers approximately in the years 1830-1841 and was recorded through the hands of the missionaries like J.W. Colenso, S.B. Stone, H. Callaway and Lew Grout.)

In the same breath, these researchers provide reasons for the missionaries’ work:


(The Zulus knew nothing about writing therefore it is not surprising that the first writings started with the white missionaries who were the messengers of the gospel. As their main aim for living in KwaZulu was to spread the gospel, it was difficult to execute this task among people who were illiterate. Therefore, they made efforts to teach people how to read and write, especially the holy books.)

Their efforts to teach people how to read and write is laudable. Despite the challenges they encountered during the collection of the stories, they gave authors like Nyembezi an opportunity to transmit Zulu traditional stories into the written mode and also to write new, original works of literature. Callaway, in providing a record of his collected Zulu tales, mentions that the collection and recording of these tales had its own challenges:

> *It has been no easy matter to drag out the following tales; and it is evident that many of them are fragments of some more perfect narrative. One cannot but feel that one has here put together a great deal of what is supremely ridiculous, and which considered by itself may as well be regarded as utterly unworthy of being perpetuated. Yet ridiculous and worthless as it is in itself, it will have its uses in many...*
It is true that some of the tales could have been “fragments of some perfect narrative” because indeed, unlike written material, information from the spoken word has a dynamic nature that changes through forgetfulness and lack of creativity, amongst other things. However, the reference to the tales as “supremely ridiculous and worthless” makes the researcher wonder how Callaway came to this conclusion. One could deduce from his remarks that, compared to folktales in his own culture, the Zulu folktales seemed to him somewhat bizarre and senseless. This forces one to ask pertinent questions: What was the author’s level of understanding of the Zulu language, culture and symbolism at the time of recording? What was his attitude towards the people with whom he was interacting? What were the perceptions of the time about Africans? In spite of his comments, one is appeased by the importance and value that has been discovered in African folktales.

Despite the mould-breaking works of the missionaries, the Zulu idiom “akusoka lingenasic”, which means literally “no man is blemish free” has an element of truth as everyone is prone to mistakes. This is seen in criticisms levelled at some of the initiatives taken by the missionaries in trying to teach Africans to read and write. The first scholar to show some disgruntlement was B.W. Vilakazi in 1938. Much as Vilakazi acknowledges the great works and mammoth task performed by the missionaries in developing written Zulu, in his article “Modern poetry influences in Zulu poetry” he voices some of his dissatisfaction:

History takes a new turn in South Africa when Black meets White. The advent of a White man, which marks a new epoch in the History of the Zulus, has had far-reaching effects on his new outlook on life. His contact with the so-called western civilization has changed even the spring of his emotions. The first “feel” of the new epoch came through religion. The religion system of the Zulus does not differ very much from the highest forms of religion found in European civilization. But owing to misinterpretations by some writers the real facts have been lost, and the informants in both social and political systems of the Zulus are very subjective, i.e. they give what the White anthropologist wants them to give, and not what they know to be truth. The diverse interpretations of
a Christianity given by the White man have brought dissatisfaction among the black races ... (1938: 124).

In another article entitled “The Conception of the Development of Poetry in Zulu”, Vilakazi notes that besides the work of the church, children were not only introduced to the daily school routine but to hymns also. English was the vehicle used to teach even though children did not know the meaning of the words. Vilakazi labels this as “the beginning of the Native educational fallacy” (1938:126). This he substantiates by adding that: “There was implanted in the Native mind that to be educated was to assimilate European standards without gradual absorption or discrimination. Not until lately, when the educational standard was raised, did the Zulus feel the responsibility they had to their culture. They began to look back to the izibongo” (1938:126).

Another writer and scholar, D.B.Z Ntuli, takes a swipe at book publishers, board members and missionaries alike for the role they played in stifling literature by authors from the indigenous languages of South Africa:

With regard to literature, censorship constitutes the imposition of restraints on the publication and distribution of material. Writers feel it is their calling to point out the wrongs and to praise the commendable deeds of their fellow men... As artists they must operate without constraints. It is the right of the reader to select what suits him. Censorship of literature, no matter in what guise it comes, is regarded by writers as an offence against the reader’s intelligence... At one stage it was estimated that in South Africa two thirds of the banned material had political content. It is likely that if someone reviews such material we may find great works of art (1985: 2, 3).

In this discussion, Ntuli elaborates on parties who were involved in the censorship of manuscripts. Among others, he mentions the State and the missionaries. Although Ntuli commends the missionaries on the role they played in "condensing these languages", he nevertheless blames them for "cramping" the talent of the writer:

In fact education was in the hands of these missionaries. They also controlled the publishing firms... The latter’s main interest was the propagation of the Christian faith. Obviously whatever was not contributing towards this aim would not get immediate attention (1985: 4, 5).
The third Zulu writer of interest here is C.T. Msimang. In his unpublished article titled “The status of African literature in the South African Literary History”, Msimang, despite acknowledging the invaluable contribution made by missionaries to the introduction of literacy and to the committing of African languages to writing, levels a scathing attack on some of their motives:

…we cannot turn a blind eye to restrictions which they imposed on the development of African literature. … In the first place the Africans were indoctrinated into disowning their traditions and customs which were dubbed heathenish. Secondly, they discouraged, delayed or even downright refused to publish materials, which were at variance with their gospel teachings (1995:3).

No amount of criticism or disgruntlement can gainsay the innovative intervention by missionaries in introducing black Africans to literacy. Despite the thorny issue of missionaries turning Africans away from their own culture, when one is literate it is very difficult to understand some of the problems that illiterate people face!

As already mentioned in the first chapter (1.1), almost nothing has been written about the development of Zulu children’s literature. A few examples of missionaries who did the spade work by contributing to the writing of children’s readers are discussed below.

In the 1800s Adams and Mrs Charlotte Grout were two missionaries who paved the way in the writing of Zulu children’s books. Although there are some uncertainties about the exact year in which Mrs Grout’s book was written, it was entitled Incwadi yabantwana (18..?) (A book for children). Adams’s book, entitled Yincwadi yokuqala yabafundayo (A first book for learners) was published in 1838. It has 48 pages and each page bears a black and white illustration. Although the stories are written in Zulu some pictures depict white children, Western/European flags and the Bible. There are 18 lessons, starting with the letters of the alphabet and numbers. The letters of the alphabet are written in both capital and small letters and the numbers go from one to 10. There are also lessons about pronunciation, such as the following sounds which incorporate vowels and consonants:
Lessons about alphabets and sounds are followed by individual and meaningless sentences designed to teach children how to read and spell. Some sentences are comprehensible, such as ikati likhala kakhulu (The cat cries loudly). Others are designed to teach children how to ask and answer questions.

Although some sentences are short, they obviously preach the gospel and lay bare one of the primary aims of the missionaries:

Icala lezoni likhulu yekani ukona (Adams, 1838: 11).
(The guilt of sinners is huge, stop sinning.)

As the lessons progress and children learn how to read and spell, sentences become longer and more didactic. Stories appear to be contrived, told in sayings and mantra-mode, like the following story entitled Izityo ezilungileyo (Good sayings):

Umntwana olungileyo uyuqunqaba ukuqamba amanga.
Intombazana elungileyo iyakuphatha kahle intombazana yakwabo.
Abantwana abalungileyo bayakungqaba ukulwa.
Abebayo bangamashinga, bayakulahlwa yiNkosi.
Musani ukweba, nomamuyinto encinyane njengesipeletu.
Lalelani abazali benu, nabadumise.
Hlanzani ubuso nezandla ekuvukeni kwenu (Adams, 1838: 37).

(A good child will refuse to speak lies.
A good girl will treat her sibling (girl) well.
Good children will refuse to fight.
Thieves are wrongdoers; they will be forsaken by the Lord.
Thou shall not steal, even if it’s a minor thing like a pin.
Listen to your parents, and praise them.)
Wash your hands and face when you wake up.)

In spite of the biblical and moralistic nature of the sayings one can see that they are all-inclusive instructions very necessary in the upbringing of any child. They mostly have to do with basic hygiene. This might explain why hygiene studies were part of the syllabus in all African schools in South Africa. However, some teachings seem to focus on girls and turn a blind eye on how boys should interact or relate to one another. Fortunately, on page 41, there is a song that instructs children to love one another, and to stop fighting all the time. Beside stories about how to care for animals, especially dogs, there are few songs and poems. The following is a short poem about the Bible:

_Incwadi engcwele_  
_Ivela eZulwini;_  
_Ngayo sikhonjiselwa,_  
_Indlela eNkosini_ (Adams, 1938: 45).

(The holy book  
Comes from Heaven;  
Through it we are shown  
The way to the Lord.)

Adams’s children’s books also introduce children to arithmetic by writing numbers in words from one to 10, followed by 10, 20, progressing to 100s, 1000s, up to a million.

The year 1938 saw the publication of a Zulu reader by G.R. Dent entitled _Incwadi yokuqala yesiZulu_ (Zulu reader for infants). The book has 31 pages and simple illustrations. Like Adams’s book, the first lesson deals with letters of the alphabet. The letters are written both in print and cursive, indicating both the capital and small letters. The themes are the family, e.g. _ubaba_ (father), _umama_ (mother), etc. Other topics cover shops, schoolchildren, seasons and fruit. Some stories are about rural life, like drawing water from the river, fetching wood, herding cattle, taking cattle to the dip, livestock, being kind to animals, a traditional hut and a modern house. The last page of the book contains a folktale, thus introducing folktales as a literary genre.
In 1939 the editor W.G. Bennie published the graded Stewart Zulu Readers. In his publications he collaborated with G.B. Molefe and B.W. Vilakazi on the titles Izincwadi ZesiZulu zabafundi: Elandela Eyokuqala (The Stewart Zulu Readers: the infant reader) and Izincwadi ZesiZulu zabafundi: Eyendima Yesibili (The Stewart Zulu Readers: Standard II) respectively.

Stewart’s infant Zulu reader, Izincwadi zesiZulu zabafundi: Elandela eyokuqala (Zulu learners’ books: the one that follows the first one) consists of 63 pages and 33 black and white illustrations. Resembling traditional oral literature, the contents of the reader are based on the immediate environment of the child and reflect the traditional setting that was prevalent during that era. It is made up of 40 very short topics and has various themes. There are stories about different types of birds, nature, animals, rural life and culture, heroes and ploughing the fields in Amasimu kaNhloyile (Nhloyile’s fields). In addition, folktales and realistic stories are included, e.g. Inja yami uShongololo (My dog Shongololo). This story is about a wonderful relationship between a young boy and his brave dog that is killed by a snake after having saved its master’s life. There are stories about twins, stories about how to plant a vegetable garden in Isivande sikaFani (Fani’s garden), stories reflecting a semi-rural life, education, school life, and the need to build more schools. There is even a story about the results of disobedience in Iphikankani liphelela enkanini (A disobedient person learns the hard way).

However, some of these stories do not seem to be related to children; for instance, Isigcawu (The arena) is about men waiting to be addressed by their king. It seems to have been included to teach children about customs, hierarchy, etc. The stories vary in length. There are those that contain an average of twenty lines while others are a bit longer. Some folktales are so long that they have been divided into two or three parts, e.g. Ulwandle I and II and UNwele Zelanga I, II and III. The story entitled Indlu yokuthengela (The store) is about culture and describes people’s norms and values. It teaches the learners about the culture of ubuntu:

(We children from our area love our shop owner because he is a kind person. He gives us sweets after we have bought the things we have been sent to buy. Other shop owners are not like that. Some of them are short tempered, but this one has ubuntu.)

Unwelezelanga (Sun-hair) is not a Zulu folktale but has been adapted from a European story. Stewart does not hide this fact and starts the story as follows:

Inganekwane yaphesheya ithi: Kwesukela intombazana ihlala nabazali bayo ehlathini. ... Le ngane yiyihlakaniphile, iyinle, inezinwele ezibomvu, zifana negolide, zikhazimula njengemisebe yelanga; yase ibizwa ngokuthiwa uNwelezelanga (1939: 39).

(A story from overseas goes: once upon a time there was a girl who lived with her parents in a forest. ... This girl was clever, beautiful and had red hair that looked like gold, as bright as the sun’s rays; and she was called Nwelezelanga ‘Sunhair’.)

It is difficult to say why Stewart included this story in the collection. Some of the reasons could be to expand Zulu children’s horizons by introducing them to stories which were outside the confines of their world; to reciprocate the gesture made by the Africans in having shared their stories with him; or to show how an alien story can be successfully retold to people of different cultures without distorting or alienating their tradition. This last point is reflected in his substitution of appropriate Zulu terminology when explaining some items and animals that are not indigenous and also where he introduces bears into the story:

Kanti kule ndlu, engazi nje uNwelezelanga, eyamabhele; amabhele-ke yizilo zehlathi ezinolaka (1939:42).

(But Nwelezelanga did not know that this house belonged to the bears; bears are ferocious animals of the forest.)
UMnyamana neMpi (Mnyamana and the hyena) is another European tale retold in traditional Zulu mode.

Many of the themes in other stories deal with characters found in Zulu folktales and in modern children’s books and the aim seem to be to make children aware of the world around them.

Zulu authors followed in the footsteps of the missionaries and wrote a number of Zulu readers. This section will discuss some of these that were written by Nyembezi.

5.2.1 C.L.S. Nyembezi’s contribution: The Igoda reader


This section explores and analyses the contents and themes found in Igoda: isigaba A (Sub A), Igoda ibanga B (Sub B) and Igoda iBanga 1 (Grade 1). The printed Zulu game songs discussed here, however, have been taken from various Zulu readers written by other authors. The purpose of this analysis is to determine the value and uses of these readers and game songs in a classroom situation. Two folktales and poems in Igoda Grade 1 will be discussed in depth. This is because a handful of folktales have already been discussed in chapter three and their themes are slightly different. Furthermore, the grade chosen is appropriate as it caters for schoolchildren who are at the junior primary level and who have a fairly extensive vocabulary and adequate reading and writing skills. Canonici (1985) agrees that the vocabulary is “all well within the range of the experiences of an eight or nine-year-old child.” Canonici, in his research study entitled C.L.S Nyembezi’s Use of Traditional Zulu Folktales in his Igoda
Series of School Readers, provides a summary of the contents of all grades from Sub-standard A and B to Grades 1-6:

The situations are drawn from family life during the children’s summer holidays. The vocabulary is that of games, illness in the family, pets and domesticated animals, house tasks for girls and the herding of cattle for boys and forays to the shops and a visit to Durban. ... A few simple poems are introduced at regular intervals, generally poems which have some bearing on the topic discussed in a particular chapter (1985: 19).

As Canonici has already provided this summary of the contents and themes of stories found in Igoda Ibanga 1, except for the folktales and poetry, these stories will not be discussed. The content of the stories from Sub Standard A and B readers have also already been analysed.

Igoda Isigaba A is a beginner’s spelling book illustrated by G.M.M. Pemba. It consists of 34 pictures and the illustrator has used greens and browns to brighten the black and white drawings. The illustration(s) accompanying each lesson complement the text and help children who cannot yet read to understand better what is being taught. Each lesson is age-appropriate and contains simple examples. Characters are children and immediate family members. As it is a spelling book that introduces learners to the sounds and pronunciation of Zulu words, the teacher plays a huge role in the teaching of the learners. Unlike the readers by his predecessors, Nyembezi’s reader does not commence with the alphabet.

On the first page a mother is shown weaving an icansi (traditional mat), sitting beside her baby and a young girl. The girl is pointing at the mother while the baby is watching the girl. The words Mama/umama (Mother) appear several times at the bottom of the page. It is apparent that the children are taught how to spell, pronounce, and read by repetition and observation, as portrayed in the picture. Basically, the book introduces children to reading by starting with words that teach them about familiar names of family members. This is seen in the next lessons where the following vocabulary is gradually introduced: unana, (the baby), usana (the baby), mana (stand up), lala (sleep), unana ulala emini (the baby sleeps
during the day), *ubaba nomama* (mother and father), *ugogo* (grandmother), *umalume uyalima nobaba uyalima*, (uncle is ploughing and father is ploughing), etc.

The book is centred on the baby, her developmental stages, and the things she does and learns from her family as well as from her siblings. As in the first readers written by missionaries, in this book the theme of hygiene has been included. There is a lesson introducing the theme of music, and children are seen singing songs while washing in preparation to go to school. As already observed, the vocabulary introduced here is used later on to form short, meaningful sentences which reflect the life of a growing child, people and her environment.

At the end of some lessons a form of simple poetry is subtly introduced using vocabulary learnt from the lessons:

*Suka nana*  
*Uye edamini*  
*Ubone idada*  
*Idada nofudu*  
*Ufudu nesele*  
*sele kaselesele* (1962: 40).

(Be gone, nana  
Go to the dam  
And see the duck  
A tortoise and a frog  
frog of selelesele.)

The rhythm produced by the emphasis of the “da” and “de” sounds in the poem cannot be missed as they are typical of *imilolozele*. This shows a faint trace of the transition from the verbal to the written. Some of the animals used in the short poem are typical Zulu folktale animal characters, such as the tortoise and the frog. Some poems are longer:

*we bafana*  
*wozani bo*  
*nizobona*  
*inunu bo*  
*iwe*  
*iwe*  
*iwe*  
*iwe*
neso layo
edamini
likababa
inunu inunu inunu.

(Hey, boys,
Come here,
And see,
A monster,
With its ugly eye,
In my father’s dam,
A monster, a monster, a monster.)

This game song has been slightly altered from the original oral one. This has been done to suit some themes, not discussed in this study but that have been discussed in the reader. The traditional oral children’s poetry shows the dynamic nature of folklore. In addition, it reveals its fluid nature and provides a bridge that can be used to make the beginner learner feel comfortable with the new subject matter which is not entirely foreign to what s/he has been taught at home.

Igoda isigaba B has 34 lessons. The first three stories are about the family. Canonici summarises this reader as follows:

The first simple reading book. Vocabulary and situations reflect the experiences of a young child in an ordinary rural family: the home and the family, friends and games, early school life and home tasks. To bridge the gap between country and town, the second part of the book deals with the exciting visit of the rural family to the father in Johannesburg to spend Christmas with him (1985: 18).

The first story, Ubaba (Father), portrays the father, head of the family, as a home provider. The story is about respect and it reveals the fact that respect is accorded to seniority, even when food is served. The father; grandmother; and then the mother (umama) are the ones who are provided for first.

Ibhola likaFana (Fana’s ball) teaches children how to pronounce words that have the bh sound. The following words are listed at the beginning of the textbook and precede the text: bhala (write), ibhala (the wheelbarrow), ibhola (a ball) and bhema (smoke). Other lessons are about the home, school, a trip to
Johannesburg and Christmas time. In some lessons, learners are taught how to ask and answer questions.


(Why is the baby crying? She wants a cake, mother. Give her a cake and sweets.)

After responding to her mother’s question, Zine, the older sister, in keeping with Zulu culture, pacifies the baby by singing her a lullaby:

\begin{verbatim}
Oya tana, oya tana,
Thula wena tana,
Thula wena tana.
\end{verbatim}

(Oya baby, oya baby,
Be quiet, baby,
Be quiet, baby.)

During the reading lessons, the performance of familiar songs will excite the young learners with a sense of recognition and understanding. Short modern poems are also found in this book.

5.3 \textbf{The role of the teacher in the teaching of oral reading skills}

In the previous chapter it was mentioned that the Zulu child’s introduction to and experience with poetry starts very early in life when s/he is first introduced to \textit{imilolozelo} and \textit{izilandelo} through oral performance. It was observed that the performance of these poems assists in the holistic teaching of meaning. In this chapter it will be revealed that when it comes to written literature, the focus is not necessarily on deriving meaning from a demonstration of what is performed but from the reading or listening to the written text. In the classroom, the reading is done first by the teacher as she demonstrates the method and explains the meaning to her learners. After gradually learning how to do this, learners are given an opportunity to read to their classmates and, ultimately, independently on their own.
Because reading is initially alien to children, the teacher teaches them to read by starting from what the child knows and is already familiar with, and then moving to the new and the unknown. As a result, the teacher will build upon their roots, for instance, children’s oral poetry. She can start from the familiar and enjoyable oral poetry from the past. Bamman et al. (1971: 7-12), in the section entitled “How to read orally”, provide guidelines, principles, techniques and insight on how learners can be taught to read and to express themselves. They include the following three sections: “Situations involving oral reading”, “The skills of oral reading” and “Integrated application of the skills”. The authors believe that in order for literature to be orally interpreted it is vital to start by developing children’s oral reading skills through a series of reading exercises (Bamman et al., 1971: 5).

These authors regard the following six skills as necessary, in this order: clear and distinct pronunciation of words, the adjustment of the rate of reading, phrasing, emphasis and intonation, subordination and continuity. When analysing texts, the discussion will however, focus on the rate of reading, phrasing and the emphasis and intonation. In Bamman et al. (1971: 14), the authors suggest that the oral reading of poetry or prose requires that these skills be applied in an integrated manner. The following oral reading skills will be described according to the principles and techniques that purport to “aid children to learn to express themselves happily and effectively through the medium of literature” (Bamman et al., 1971: vii).

5.3.1 Clear and distinct enunciation

In chapter four it was observed that, as a child develops, s/he passes through various stages of growth. The mother, nursemaid and family members are instrumental in teaching the child about his/her immediate environment, the home. However, when the time comes for a child to go to school, s/he is ushered into a new environment where things are done differently. At school,
the child is expected to learn to read and write and do everything according to certain rules, techniques and formal methods demanded by the school environment. In the classroom, the teacher is the most important person and has the power to select suitable books, stories or poetry that suit the cognitive levels of her/his learners. Furthermore, she is the one who has experience and the necessary skills to teach learners the art of good reading.

Concerning pronunciation, even though it is common knowledge that children come to school knowing how to speak, Bamman et al. (1971:5) emphasise the fact that “children need numerous lessons that will teach them to say each word separately and distinctly”. This is certainly true as this helps children to pronounce words clearly. When using examples from English words, Bamman et al. (1971) believe that words that end with d, t, b, p, k and the hard g require special attention and they suggest that teachers use short rhymes that contain words featuring these letters. During Zulu lessons, it will be quite different because attention is given first to the the vowels before the consonant sounds are added. This is because all Zulu nouns begin and end with vowels and all verbs end with vowels. In order to corroborate this, the following responses taken from the questionnaires completed by teachers in the foundation phase are included:

**Question:** Ngabe esiZulwini yiziphi izinhlamvu nomfa imisindo ebalulekile okumlele umfundli afundiswe yona kuqala futhi kungani le misindo ibalulekile?

(In Zulu, which sounds should first be taught to a learner, and why are these sounds regarded as important?)

- *Kufanele [uthisha] afundise onkamisa* (vowels): a, e, i, o, u, kanye nongwaqa (consonants) bokuqala: m, b, n, l, s, d. *Iyona misindo (sounds) yokuqala umntwana afundiswa ngayo ukwazi igama e. g. m + a = ma*
(S/he [the teacher] should teach the vowels a, e, i, o, u, and the first consonants like m, b, n, l, s, d. These are the first sounds used to teach a child in order for her to know [how to read] a word, for instance: m + a = ma.)

e + b + a + l + e + n + i : ebali

Other responses, translated into English, echoed the one above:

- The Zulu language starts with the vowels o, i, a, e, u, because they are easy to write and are the ones that combine with the other sounds when sounds are learnt so that a meaningful word can be formed. The sounds (consonants) which are first learnt are m, b, n, l, and s, d.
- It is easy for the learner to write these sounds. These sounds are used mainly to refer to people whom children are close to, for instance, umama (mother), ubaba (father), ugogo (grandmother).
- These sounds are frequently used in Zulu. ... We start by teaching sounds about family members: fathers, grandmothers, uncles, siblings, etc.
- The sound “b”: ubaba, for instance, should be learnt first because the child’s father is close to the child. The next sound is “d”; idada (duck), then the sound "g" ugogo follows. The grandmother is very close to a child’s life.
- The teacher should use teaching aids relevant to the lesson. The book to be chosen should have illustrations and letters that children will quickly recognise in order for them to be able to enjoy reading the story.
• The method of using a picture and the word is used.
• Learning aids like charts applicable to the lesson so that it will be easy for the learner to learn/ read what s/he sees and then follow with writing.

This shows that not only the sounds, but sounds with vowels complemented by appropriate pictures are vital in teaching children how to read and write. Additionally, it is important when teaching a child to read or write to use familiar and easily recognisable sounds and pictures that are drawn from a child's environment.

5.3.2 Rate of reading

The rate of reading has to do with the tempo or speed employed by a reader when s/he is reading a text. Some sections of the text can be read at a slower pace while in others the speed should be increased. Bamman et al. (1971) point out that the tempo of the reading should be varied to suit the action and the mood of the situation represented by the word. The authors make the following remarks in this regard that should be taken into consideration during the classroom practice lessons:

Similarly, the tone of voice should be suited to the atmosphere of a selection: for instance, a state of excitement would call for a very distinct tone from one in which peaceful contentment or stealthy action prevails. In the effort to convey meanings – whether a major point or more subtly different details – the oral reader must be truly skilful in giving emphasis to key through inflections and intonations of his voice, through strategic pauses, through perfect phrasing of words, and through artistic subordination of ideas (Bamman et al., 1971: 5).

It is apparent that during reading lessons, the tone of the voice of the skilled and proficient reader is one of the most important instruments and, when used effectively, it is able to capture the atmosphere of the text and give insight into the story actions which assist in deriving meaning from the story. The following
examples, taken from two folktales that will be discussed towards the end of the chapter, will be used to demonstrate various reading rates and tone.

Example 1


(The little mouse then tiptoed towards the opening.)

During practice lessons, the above sentence should be read in a quiet tone and a slow, unhurried pace. The tone of the word “*lanyonyoba*” (it tiptoed) would be low and quieter to reflect the slow, cautious and silent movements of the mouse and the tension that is palpable inside the hole.

Example 2


(The cat leapt. It leapt once and landed on top of the little mouse.)

These sentences would be read in a high-pitched tone, full of vigour and at a faster pace to show a change in actions and events which will rouse excitement and mark the climax of the story.

5.3.3 Phrasing

Bamman et al. (1971) make another important observation that should be heeded when children are taught to read. They say that during preliminary reading, children should not be permitted to read word for word but should be taught how to place the words within sentences in order to form meaningful groups. Furthermore, they offer the following advice to a learner during preliminary silent reading: “He should seek the ideas that the words express, note the word-groupings or phrasing that will keep key ideas intact …” (1971: 9). Furthermore, they advocate that the sentences be written on the board and
lines be used to “divide them into thought units” (1971:10). The following example gives an idea of how this could be done.

Example 3


(The Creator spoke to the lizard. He said, “Lizard, run as fast as possible/. Run and get to the people/. When you get there/ tell them that I said they should die.)

The dividing lines are important because they will teach the learners to pause when they reach them.

5.3.4 *Emphasis and intonation*

According to Bamman et al. (1971), the human voice uses four levels or pitches. In their discussion they provide examples of how level one to level four can be spoken. The different pitches projected by the voice are explained below:

Most of our words are spoken at level 2; but when the key word in a phrase comes, the voice rises to level 3 to give emphasis. In times of great stress or excitement, the voice may occasionally rise to level 4. In ending a statement of fact or in concluding an order, the voice fades away to level 1 and into silence (1971: 10).

This suggests that, should teachers allow sufficient time for learners to read and practise these techniques, they will produce competent young readers who will read with understanding and, as a result, enjoy what they are reading. This will in turn inculcate a love for reading, brought about by the novel discovery of stories and information hidden in books. The new experience will encourage some learners to read on their own. Bamman et al. (1971) believe that the easiest and most effective way of encouraging children to get to grips with
intonations in oral reading is to allow them to read lively dialogues in stories and poetry.

Still on intonation, Bamman et al. (1971) explain the following vital, sometimes neglected, factor in the teaching of good oral interpretation of children's literature to those in elementary school:

For children in the elementary school, a good book often needs more than just a sound plot and interesting characters. It needs the voice of a teacher or a parent – vital, warm, and expressive – to transport the child-listener into the book or the poem itself; to stir his emotions and stimulate his mind; and to make the characters and scenes as real as the people and places that are so familiar to him in his own life (1971: vii).

This underlines the fact that teachers at the foundation level should be specialists in imparting reading skills to children.

5.4. Written children’s literature and performance

The transition from the oral performance of children’s literature to the reading of written texts encompasses many phases and distinct points of difference. Traditional folktales, lullabies and game songs exploit the dynamism of oral interaction, employing multifaceted forms of non-verbal communication. Although the written form is fairly static, reading for children can achieve the same degree of verbal dynamism as oral performance. In the classroom, the teacher replaces the *ugogo*, or any other adult, in her role as performer. When reading to the class, the teacher becomes the reader and the possessor of knowledge that is transmitted from books to the learners via the eyes (while reading) and ears. Learners at times become participators and at times readers, depending on the situation. In the classroom, performance of any genre of literature may be employed in many different ways by both the teacher and the learners. Stimulating an interest in reading at school is vital as it creates a love for books and reading thus becomes a habit or a culture.
The following section explores some of the genres found in selected readers written by Zulu authors. It starts by examining Zulu children’s literature texts as a form that can also be performed at school, izilandelo in particular. Original modern poetry and written folktales will also be examined but emphasis will be on content.

5.4.1 Written izilandelo

The poems to be discussed in this section are modern literature because, since izilandelo were passed down orally by our predecessors, they have now been written down by various authors. These authors have inherited some of these izilandelo from the original composers of Zulu children’s poetry. This proves true in Okoh’s (2004:2) comment about the content of Nigerian stories: “The content of most of the contemporary children’s fiction in Nigeria reveals heavy borrowing from the oral tradition of its people”. However, some of the game songs have been adapted while others have been newly created to reflect a modern setting or themes. Unlike traditional literature, modern literature cannot be randomly passed on from one generation to the next. This is because when the composition was conceived, it was directly written down and thus frozen in text form. Original published material that does not belong to the community has copyright and hence cannot be reproduced for financial gain unless permission has been obtained from the publishers. Failure to receive this permission can have serious consequences.

Imilolozelo and izangelo, as children’s literature, do not comprise a static body of poems. New poems are constantly being added by creative artists who have a natural talent for composition and who stand out in their ability to express themselves beautifully and effectively (Fraser, 1996: 16). Fraser’s description is corroborated by the discussion in this section. Just as izinganekwane; imilolozelo and izilandelo can be adapted, altered and transmitted to the next generation in a “new” mode, so the new umlolozelo or isilandelo will bear some resemblance to what is regarded as the accepted written version of the original
oral form. Okpewho in his discussion of the training in different genres explains that informal training:

...entails a kind of loose attachment whereby the future artist happens to live or move in an environment in which a particular kind of oral art is practised and simply absorbs the skill in it as time goes on. It is possible, of course, for a person to live forever in such an environment and not to develop the skill; one’s mind or nature has to be predisposed towards art before the skill can successfully take root (1992: 21).

As with oral children’s poetry, Zulu written poetry for learners in the foundation phase stems from and has links with the child’s environment. The content of this poetry assists in determining the period and milieu in which it was composed. Some written izilandelo have similar themes as those discussed in oral game songs. According to Bamman et al. (1971: 20): “Poetry for young girls and boys should reflect lively action and themes centred about animals, other children, animate nature, fairies, and the world close at hand”.

Zulu written poetry can be read, recited or mimicked in or outside the classroom. Depending on the age of the children, it is advocated that teachers should first teach some of the poems through rote learning and thereafter introduce performance. This discussion now proceeds to reveal how izilandelo could be employed to inspire and encourage learners to practise and read Zulu in class and to motivate pupils to make the language learning process an enjoyable experience.

It will strive to portray the dynamic nature of game songs which is demonstrated when they are used in the classroom as a didactic tool to teach children how to read. The discussion of izilandelo will borrow from a book by Falvey and Kennedy (1997) entitled Learning Language through Literature. These authors move from the premise that focus must fall on assisting pupils in using language rather than on providing pupils with knowledge about language. They explain that “this involves a ‘whole language’ approach in which pupils are exposed to meaningful ‘chunks’ of language” (Falvey & Kennedy, 1997: 29). Examples of
izilandelo found in Zulu readers will be provided. Some of them have been derived from Zulu oral children’s poetry.

In the following excerpt, Makina (2009: 49-50) provides sound reasons for game songs being part of the school curriculum:

Song directly answers this call because it is indigenous to its place of creation. It reflects a particular social environment and transmits a culture in which it is created. Accordingly, one of the ways in which education systems can remain grounded in the lives and aspirations of those they seek to serve is by exploiting using song as a pedagogical tool. The intention is to strengthen the link between what goes on in the classroom and life in the outside world.

As a result, seven examples are discussed at length to illustrate the manner in which Zulu game songs can be performed.

**Luph’ ulwandle?**

*Luph’ ulwandle?*

*LuseThekwini. x2*

*Lwenzani?*

*Lugubh’ amagagasi. x2*

(Ndlovu, 1994: 57.)

(Where is the sea?  
It’s in Durban.  
* x2)

What does it do?  
It makes waves.  
* x2)

This is a short question-and-answer game song which is chanted by children. It stems from the children’s environment, that is, the KwaZulu area which boasts the Indian Ocean. However, Zulu-speaking children from other provinces who have chanted it at home and who read it later will know that the ocean in question is located in *eThekwini* (Durban). Perhaps one day when some of them undertake a school trip to Durban, they will see it with their own eyes instead of reading about it in a poem. As an introduction to the poem, the teacher will read it with clear and distinct diction as she helps them to memorise
it. In some cases learners may already be familiar with the poem, having learnt it from their friends and siblings.

The poem will be repeated several times so that those who are unfamiliar with it will have the opportunity to memorise it. Later on, the teacher could divide children into two groups. She may open the game by chanting alone and then asking the two groups to copy or perform the call-response chant on their own. The teacher will also make comments about swimming in the pool, river or dam. She will illustrate swimming by repetitively moving both arms together in front of her and sweeping them backwards. In this manner, children perhaps also have their first swimming lesson!

For young learners, this short poem gives a satisfying feeling which can be used to acclimatise them to the new school environment they suddenly find themselves in. The rhythm of the chant will be enhanced by accompanying actions used to help children to understand the meaning. With their backs bent, stamping their feet to simulate the sound of the waves and “digging” with their hands, they will mimic the movement of the waves.

Some words in the poem that contain the sounds and/or syllables \(lu\), \(ph\), \(the\) and \(gu\) will need to be highlighted and repeated over and over again until children master the pronunciation. During this kind of practice, Bamman et al. point out that:

> Words that end in \(d\), \(t\), \(b\), \(p\), and hard \(g\) can be put on practice charts, the chalkboard, or dittoed copies. … Sometimes the children are called on to read excerpts in which several successive words begin with the same sound, this alliteration causing them to stumble and stammer. Enjoyable practice materials for achieving clear and distinct reading of alliterative passages are provided by the tongue twister (1971: 6).

The following are examples of Zulu tongue twisters:

\[Idada \ liduda \ edamini\]
(The duck is swimming in the dam.)

Amaxixo ayaxokozela.
(The frogs are making a noise.)

Besides the modification of words, these authors also suggest the adaptation of the original version of the poem. When making changes, it is important to retain the general purpose of the chant. The following are amended versions written by the researcher:

**Amended version 1**

_Uph’ uSipho?_
_UseThekwini X2_

_Wenzani na?_
_Ubhukuda olwandle X2_

(Where’s Sipho?
He is at the sea.

What is he doing?
He is swimming in the sea.) X2

When the children have mastered the chant the teacher can introduce the amended version by dividing them into different groups. After the children have learnt how to pronounce the words correctly, the pace of the chant could be accelerated to make the game more fun. Thereafter, the teacher might want to involve the children in a question and answer competition where one asks the whereabouts of one of the learners in class and that learner is then required to give various answers:

**Amended version 2**

_Uph’ uSipho_

_Uph’ uSipho?_
Uses' koleni  X2

Wenzani na?
Ufunda izincwadi  X2

(Where's Sipho?
He is at school.  X2

What is he doing?
He is reading books.)  X2

or

Uph' uthisha?
Useklasini  X2
Wenzani na?
Ubhala ebhodini  X2

(Where's the teacher?
She's in the classroom.
What is she doing?
She's writing on the board.)  X2

With each new version, a group of learners or an individual may be requested to innovate and make up new performances. A discussion of the next game-song follows:

Izinyoni ezinhlanu

Izinyoni ezinhlanu
Zazihle' emthini
Yathi eyokuqala:
Nibonani laphaya?
Yathi eyesibili:
Indoda nesibhamu.
Yathi eyesithathu:
Asicasheni. Yathi eyesine:
Masibalekeni
Yathi eyesihlanu:
Asesabi lutho thina.
Qhu! Sasho isibhamu,

(Five birds
Were sitting on a tree
The first one said:
What do you see with your own eyes?
The second one said:
It is a man with a gun.
The third one said:
Let’s hide.
The fourth one said:
Let’s run away.
The fifth one said:
We are not scared.
Bang! The gun exploded.
Bang! The gun exploded.

The teacher will read the poem at a fairly consistent pace and slowly enough to match the actions and relaxed mood of the setting so that the learners can follow without difficulty. However, at the fourth line, the tone of the voice will rise to portray a change in the situation. The emphasis will fall on the last word, lapheya. The voice will become slower and fade into silence. This will be in contrast to the next section which will be accelerated and high-pitched to indicate a different mood. The word asicasheni will be stressed to indicate fear.

While I was at primary school, when the original version was chanted the teacher would introduce the poem by shouting out its title. All the children in the class would respond and recite the poem to the end. Later on the teacher would randomly call on a group of learners to chant and mime the poem. Sometimes it would be done individually or in pairs to establish whether learners had grasped it. During the performance, every line of the poem would be chanted, complemented by gestures: firstly, with the open right hand raised in the air we would mime the question and answer game song in an effort to sketch all the events of the story. The interesting part was when we shouted: “Masibaleke” (let’s run away), while trying to “fly”. The climax came when the fifth “bird” daringly challenged the gunman. At this stage we would put our hands on our hips and sway with confidence from left and right. The last words, “Qhu sasho isibhamu” (Bang! The gun exploded!), would be chanted in a staccato mode and this would result in a change in the rhythm of the poem to indicate what was seen from a distance. Then the other group, pretending to be holding long
guns, would shoot at the poor birds: “Qhu! Qhu! Qhu!” (Bang! Bang! Bang!). The teacher put emphasis on voice projection, pronunciation, tone, confidence, and the accompanying movements of the “birds” and the “gunman”. For older children, the poem can be adapted by starting from a higher number such as ten or twenty. Once the children have mastered the game song it will be easier for them to read and understand the words in the book. They will know that different words have different meanings which require different stress and reading rates.

Furthermore, this example has the characteristics of a modern game song because it has to do with a subject that forms part of the syllabus. Secondly, it also introduces a gun, which is alien to the traditional setting. The presence of the gun indicates the contact of the Zulu with their white counterparts. The main aim of the poem is to teach children to count and to subtract. When reading this poem, the skills that are called for are phrasing, emphasis and intonation. The first line of the poem will be read at a normal pace and the tone will rise with the reading of the demonstrative pronouns to indicate emphasis. The last sentence will be read with a falling tone filled with composure to indicate the ending. Additionally, the story has a moral that teaches learners about safety skills and to ignore the advice of friends. They should run away from danger before it is too late.

The following poem could be used to teach children about the parts of the body:

**Ithibothi**

*Mina ngiyithibothi * X2  
*Nasi isibambo sami*  
*Nanku umlomo wami*  
*Thulula, thulula, thulula* (Nhlumayo, Ntombela & Khathi, 1994:106).

(I am a teapot X2  
Here is my handle  
Here is my spout  
Pour, pour, and pour.)
When I was a child, we were taught to touch our chests during the performance of this game song to illustrate a person in the shape of a teapot. Our mouths represented the spout of the teapot and our hands mimed the handle. We would act as if the body was tea inside a cup. This was an easy way to link our body parts with familiar things used at home. The game song could thus be used to make children more observant and to teach them to name things that surround them, and to understand their functions. The use of the word “teapot” points to the modern milieu as *ithibhoti* (teapot) is a loan word from English.

5.4.2 Original written poetry

Sibusiso Nyembezi, a composer of modern poems, and illustrator G.M.M Pemba are discussed in this section. These poems are original works. Nyembezi’s aim in writing poetry was that it be read and taught at schools. In the classroom the teacher replaces the *ugogo* (grandmother) or any other adult in her role as performer. The teacher is the reader and the possessor of knowledge that is transmitted from the books to the learners via their eyes (while reading) and ears. Unlike oral performance, the book is a source of information written by someone who may not be physically present in the classroom. While the teacher acts as the subject who relays the message, the learners are both the receivers and co-participants in deciphering meaning in a formal classroom situation. In the classroom, performance of any genre of literature may be employed in many different ways by both the educator and the learners.

In defining children’s poetry, Stott says that it is that poetry which can be understood and enjoyed by children, either reading or listening, and does not necessarily need to be written (1984:224). Poetry is different from prose: Stott, in an effort to explain the difference between the two genres, mentions some distinctive characteristics of poetry:

Rhyme is one of the elements of poetry, even though not all poems have rhyme almost all poems have an element of rhythm, more than in
prose, poetry employ words to create vivid, specific pictures to imply a number of connotations, it uses imagery, a term used “to describe those words which evoke sense perceptions (1984: 225).

In *Igoda ibanga 1* (Grade 1) there are nine modern poems - however only five will be analysed. Their themes concern nature, disobedience, God, truth, laziness and school. The titles to be discussed are: *Ilanga seliphumile* (The sun has dawned), *Umoya wobusika* (The winter wind) and *Ngizimisele* (I am determined), *USonkanise* (The cheeky one) and *Nwabuzela manwabuzela* (Move slowly, you slow one), *Ubuvila* (Laziness), abstract things such as insects, *Mpukane suka* (Go away, fly), *Iqiniso ngiyalithanda* (I like the truth) and education, *Isikole* (School).

The first poem to be discussed, “*Ilanga seliphumile* (The sun has dawned), is a short and simple poem about nature, specifically the dawn and the passing of the day:

**Ilanga seliphumile**

*Ilanga seliphumile,*  
*Imini seyigqamile*  
*Abantu sebevukile.*  
*Ilanga eloMdali,*  
*Imini eyoMdali,*  
*Nabantu aboMdali*  
*Masibonge uMdali,*  
*Sihlale simdumisa*  
*Ngezipho zakh’ezinhle.*

(The sun has risen,  
The day is bright  
People are awake.  
The sun is the Creator’s  
The day is the Creator’s  
And people are the Creator’s.

Let us give thanks to the Creator,  
And praise Him always  
For His good gifts.)
The poem has three stanzas which consist of three lines each. All the lines contain two words except the last one which has three words. The first stanza is about the breaking of the new day and people who are already awake. The second stanza foregrounds God as the owner of everything mentioned in the first stanza: the sun, the day and people. The third stanza urges mankind to give thanks and praise to God for His beautiful gifts. Young learners are made aware of the existence of God as the creator of the things that fill their lives. The last stanza has been used to teach a message that people should acknowledge God, thank Him and have reverence for everything He has done. The language is simple and age-appropriate. The form has been constructed to produce rhyme at the end of the first and second stanzas, with the following sounds: -ile and -ali. The presence of rhyme is indicative of the Western influence. The device has been used with success because it is not only pleasing to the ear but also facilitates memorisation of the poem.

The second poem in Nyembezi’s book, Ngizimisele, is about the speaker’s determination to learn how to conduct his life from nature:

Ngizimisele

Ngizimisele ukuvula amehlo
Ngizifunde izifundo ezinkulu
Ezibonwa kuyo indalo yoMdali.

Entuthwaneni ngithola isifundo
Sokuba ngenze izinto ngesikhathi
Ngikhumbule nokubekel’ ingomuso.

Nakuzo izinyosi ngiyasifunda
Isifundo sobuhle bokukhuthala
Nokubekela izinsuku ezimbi.

(I am prepared to open the eyes
And read the big lessons
Which are seen in the Creator’s creation.

From the ant I learn a lesson
About the good of working hard
And persevering in bad times.)
I also learn from the bees  
A lesson of the good of working hard  
And saving for the bad times.

This poem has a serious tone. Again, God is invoked and highlighted as the one who has created nature. The influence of the missionaries can be detected in the second stanza where the poet quotes a parable from the Bible. As in Zulu children’s oral literature and the first Zulu children’s books written by missionaries, laziness is discouraged. In the poem, insects are used to teach children to be diligent and to take their school work seriously from a tender age.

Lessons taught by parents at home are transferred into the school syllabus to bridge the gap between home teaching and school education. Moving from the known to the unknown is beneficial because children will not perceive the school as an alien environment. Linking the two allays children’s fears and they realise that they have some answers and can provide examples at school by drawing on their home experiences and environment and from their own languages. Ants are used as examples which human beings can learn from to make provision for the future. In the same way, bees are used as industrious insects which save for rainy days. This poem will inspire children to observe things in their environment and to learn by example. The poem teaches that although one learns from one’s elders, one can also gain knowledge from nature. In order to inject meaning and allow it to sink into learners’ minds, after reading the poem in class the teacher may ask learners to memorise it and perform it in class after a few days.

Another poem using animals as an example to mankind is USonkanise, the third poem in the book which appears immediately after the folktale about the disobedient mouse.

**USonkanise**

*Kwakukhona igundwane  
Phansi emgodini othile,*
Lihlala nabantwana balo
Kuwo lowo mgodi walo.

Kukhona noSonkanise,
Indodana enguthunjana,
Eyayiphuphuma inkani,
Yenza eyayo intando.

“Ningalokothi niphume,”
Kusho unina ebayala,
“Niyovelelwa yizingozi
Ezingaveza usizi.”

Kodwa yen’ uSonkanise
Akazange nje azinake
Izeluleko zikanina,
Wabona ziwubuwula.

Waphuma enganakile,
Wadela umyal o kanina,
Enza intando yenhliziyo
Yon’ ehlala ikholiswa.

Ngokuphazima nje kweso
Ayesengene amazipho
Kuyo inyama ethambile
Ikhanjana lafahlaka.

Onke amaphikankani
Afela khona enkanini,
Bonke abala ukutshelwa,
Njalo babona ngomopho.

(The cheeky one)

Once upon a time there was a mouse
Down in a certain hole,
It was living with its children
In the very same hole.

Cheeky was there too,
The last born son,
That was overflowing with stubbornness
And following his own will.

“You mustn’t dare go out,”
Says their mother warning them,
“You will come across dangers
That will bring pain.”

But Cheeky
Did not heed
His mother’s advice,
He saw it as foolishness.

He went out without her noticing him,
He disregards his mother’s advice
Following the desires of the heart
That always deceive.
The small head is crushed.

All stubborn people
Die from their stubbornness,
All those who reject advice
Realise it when they bleed.

In the poem, the mouse is called uSonkanise (Cheeky or Father of Cheek). The name Sonkanise comes from the Zulu noun inkani (cheek); the prefix -so is a formative that denotes the male gender and means “father of”. Sonkanise thus has the meaning “Father of cheek”. The poem tells of how the little mouse comes to an untimely death. The story has been reduced to seven stanzas. The first stanza opens in a typical storytelling form: “Kwakukhona igundwane” (Once upon a time there was a mouse). In the third stanza the prosaic form of writing has been employed because the mother’s advice has been directly quoted. The message is the same as that of the tale and ends with the same proverb. The idea of placing the poem immediately after the folktale seems to be deliberate. This short poem will help the learners, who are in the early grades and starting to learn to read, write, and speak coherently and understand the formalities of school, to understand the story better. Secondly, learners are introduced to modern poetry, different from game songs, as a new literary genre. As a result, some learners learn that any story can be told in verse form.

The poem lends itself to marvellous re-enactment. The teacher can read the poem or, alternatively, a learner can be asked to recite it. In the recitation of the poem the learner will show that s/he understands it by starting in a slow, tiny
voice to indicate that the incident took place a long time ago. A hand will be used to portray the smallness of the mouse. A puffed up appearance and non-verbal cues will describe its stubbornness. With a pointed finger and a voice like that of serious and concerned mother, a warning will be uttered. The voice and the speed of reading or recitation will be rapid and mocking. The performer will accompany the verbal cues with gestures showing the mouse creeping out of the hole. The performance will end up with the cat crushing the mouse to death: the performer will jump quickly, clap his hands together to demonstrate the crushing. The poem will close on a sad note to send home the message that those who do not listen when they are warned will end up hurt or dead. In the performance of written literature, compared to oral literature, the tone of the voice of the teacher is very important. Even without acting, when the tone of the voice is used effectively learners, as the audience; understand what is read because the words, pronunciation and the tone of voice of the reader create pictures in their minds. Performing the poem illuminates and reinforces the meaning of what is read. This means that in reading a book, the words chosen by the writer are vital. After reading the poem, children will know that home is a safe place to be as the outside world has dangers of its own. As such, they will learn that it is important to listen to their parents and heed their advice.

Another vice is brought to the fore in *Ubuvila* (Laziness):

*Ubuvila*

*Maye umubi buvila,*  
*Ungiphendula inuku,*  
*Ungifundis’ amacebo*  
*Nokugula ngingaguli.*

*Ungenza ngenqen’ amanzi*  
*Ngejwayelwe yimicanda,*  
*Yona phela iminoyi*  
*Ikhanda libe mhloshana.*

*Impuyo yami zintwala*  
*Ezidla ihlathi lazo,*  
*Zidla zingenqene lutho*  
*Ngoba sengibanukela.*
Ngilandelwa ngamaphunga,
Ngenyanyeke kubo bonke,
Baval’ amakhala abo
Ngoba sengibanukela.

Sengikwenyanya buvila
Ngenhliziyo yami yonke,
Ngeke ngiphinde ngiboshwe
Ngezibopho zobuvila.

(Laziness
Oh laziness, you are bad,
You turn me into a sloth,
You teach me some tricks
Even though I am not sick.

You make me shy away from water
And be befriended by lice,
I mean lice indeed
The head turns whitish.

My livestock are lice
That eat its forest,
Eating without any fear
Because they are at Lazy girl's place.

I'm being followed by bad smells,
I am disliked and hated by all,
They close their noses
Because they sense my odour.

Laziness, I now hate you
With all my heart,
I will never again be bound
By the bondage of laziness.)

This poem about laziness is the fifth in the book and, like the tale about the disobedient mouse; it has also been placed immediately after a tale about the rock-rabbit that lost its tail because it was too lazy to fetch one from the Creator. Nyembezi has again juxtaposed the genres in order for children to learn about the parallels and links that exist between them. The message shows the appalling nature of laziness and it drives home some facts about the results of idleness and slothfulness. According to the voice in the poem, laziness begets
tricks, lies, dirt, stench and filth. The standard of this poem is elevated by the use of imagery in the following stanza:

*Imfuyo yami zintwala*
*Ezidla ihlathi lazo,*
*Zidla zingenqene lutho*
*Ngoba zikwaNomavila.*

(My livestock are lice
That eat its forest,
Eating without any fear (zingenqene lutho)
Because they are at Lazy girl’s place.)

Livestock has been used as a metaphor for lice. Hair is referred to as a forest where lice find food because they know that at NoMavila’s place they will not be drowned by water or destroyed by a comb. The name Nomavila is a Zulu girl's name, indicated by the formative prefix no-. Amavila is the plural form of the noun and means “lazy ones”/“girls”/“women”. This name suggests that this message is directed mainly at girls. The first line of the fourth stanza is a personification: “Ngilandelwa ngamaphunga” (I am followed by smells). Nyembezi has given the bad odours human characteristics. The smell has been given feet that are instrumental in following the lazy person - everywhere she goes.

The images have been effectively used because they will appeal to school children. Norton considers imagery as a primary element in poetry because:

> It encourages children to see, hear feel, taste, and touch the world created by the poet. A writer appeals to the senses directly through words, sounds, and rhythm and indirectly through the images that recreate the experience and help suggest an emotional response. Poets use figurative language (nonliteral meanings) to clarify, add vividness, and encourage readers to see things in new ways (1983: 327).

Although learners will as yet not know anything about figures of speech such as metaphor, simile and personification, the pictures created by the words will help
to add meaning to the story. As a result, some learners will avoid laziness because they realise that they be despised by everyone if they are lazy. They will adopt a positive attitude and the point of view of the speaker as illustrated in the last stanza. This poem is in keeping with the values of cleanliness that are preached in different modes in the culture and language of the Zulu, that is, from oral tales and poetry to written modern children stories and poetry.

Christian virtues are also the focus of the following poem about truth:

_Iqiniso ngiyalithanda_

_Iqiniso ngiyalithanda_
_Lingumhlobo wami njalo_
_Ebuhleni ebunzimeni,_
_Yisihlangu sami njalo._

_Amanga ngiyawazonda_
_Aysisitha esikhulu_
_Isihlangu seziwula,_
_Ihlathi lenkohliso._

_Yinto enamenze munye_
_Engenakho ukuzimela,_
_Efunu ukuphaswa njalo_
_Ngenye eningi inkohliso._

_Kuyisifiso sami njalo_
_Ukuhlala eqinisweni,_
_Ngingalithengisi nanini_
_Ngokuyengwa yinkohliso._

_(I love the truth)_

_I love the truth,_
_It is always a friend of mine_
_In good and in difficulties,_
_It is always a shield of mine._

_Lies I hate_
_They are a big enemy_
_A shield for fools,_
_A forest of deceit._

_It’s a thing with one leg_
Which cannot stand on its own,
That always needs to be supported
By many more deceits.

It is always a wish of mine
To adhere to the truth,
And never to sell it
By being deceived by treachery.)

The poem is made up of four stanzas, each with four lines. The opening stanza is about norms and values. Speaking the truth is considered to be a virtue. The speaker regards the truth as his/her best friend; in good times and during difficult times. This is indicated by the use of the word “always”. The closing stanza seals the poem by making the wish of the speaker known; s/he wishes to adhere to the truth and not to sell it by being led astray by deceit. On the other hand, stanzas three and four are about lies and have been symbolically sandwiched or fenced-in by the truth. The speaker starts by stating that s/he hates lies and proceeds to give her reasons in metaphors. S/he regards lies as an enemy, a shield for fools and a forest of deceit.

Although children may not readily understand the hidden meaning in the choice of words, they are indirectly accustomed to using the language beautifully in written form. The meaning of the poem is not far-fetched or confusing because, as already mentioned in the previous chapter; children’s poetry employs objects that emanate from the child’s environment. In fact, such terms have already been used by Nyembezi in the other chapters of the series, which are unfortunately not expanded upon in this research. A shield is not a very useful tool to a fighter if s/he has no experience in using it to prevent an enemy from harming her/him. Like lies, it provides temporary protection because truth has a way of always prevailing. The word “forest” indicates the darkness of lies as opposed to truth which sheds light on all matters. Telling lies pushes one deeper and deeper into the forest. The second stanza makes the picture more vivid when lies are called a “thing” that has only one leg and cannot stand on its
own, needing support from more lies and deceit. This simple but beautiful poem preaches the gospel to children without actually using the Bible.

From the poems provided, the overall observation here is that the influence of the missionaries runs like a golden thread through the school readers penned by African authors. The themes of Nyembezi’s modern children’s poetry echo the voices and propagate the mind-set of his predecessors. These poems are generally moralistic and elevate Christian standards. Besides the theme of laziness, there is no poem about norms and values that mirror African cultural ways of living and beliefs.

5.4.3 Written folktales

Considering that the following tales to be discussed were published more than forty years ago, the researcher will examine how written tales differ from oral ones. The titles of the stories to be discussed are *Igundwane elingezwa* (The disobedient mouse) (1962: 40-44) and *Sibambe elentulo* (We are sticking to the lizard’s word) (1962: 67-70). The complete folktales and English translations are found in Appendix A.)

The first story is about a naughty, stubborn little mouse that refuses to take advice from his mother and lands up in the jaws of a cat. While the story is intended for the reading pleasure of school children, Nyembezi opens the story in such a way that it reflects the characteristics of the performance of oral Zulu stories. The narrator of this story is the *ugogo* (grandmother). Canonici (1985: 88) mentions an important fact about Nyembezi’s style in writing this series. The writer has described the social context of folktales and has mentioned reasons for the telling of the story. In the story itself, the grandmother is the storyteller or the performer and her audience is made up of Sipho, Thoko, Deleni and the children who belong to the homestead. The story is told in the bedroom belonging to one of the children. The location of the story has been decided by the storyteller and this decision came about because Sipho, one of the children in the family, was ill in bed. In an effort to reclaim the traditional manner of
storytelling, both *ugogo* and the children are sitting on traditional grass mats. Canonici comments as follows on the author’s rationale for this setting:

This forms a sort of traditional frame where folktales use a cultural medium of entertainment and education in a modern written form to educate children in a school situation. The author’s stated aim is to preserve forms of traditional culture. His artistic creative objective is to retain the vividness and freshness of an oral transmission for the entertainment and the education of his readers (1985: 28).

Despite the fact that the story is in the form of a written text in a modern setting, the way it is told provides learners with an opportunity to reflect on the traditional manner of storytelling. The act of sitting on a mat could also generate questions from learners to whom the related experience is alien.

Unlike the performance of oral tales, where the grandmother is an active performer who uses verbal and non-verbal cues to entertain her audience, written stories are told from the perspective of the writer who uses pen and paper, or a computer, to relay the message. The story is read to the learners by the teacher. The teacher is the storyteller, taking over Gogo’s role, and the learners are the audience. When the learners begin to read (aloud) themselves, they become teller and audience combined. Canonici’s explanation makes this difference clear:

As far as dramatic performing devices are concerned, Nyembezi does not “record” gesture, facial expressions, pantomime, impersonation or mimicry used by performers to make the narrative an artistic and dramatic event. Since this is written work, dramatic performing devices should rather be identified in the vivid descriptive style, in the use of ideophones and alliteration, in useful repetition (1985: 89).

Canonici’s words highlight the most important aspects that indicate the difference between performed oral folktales and written stories: the style of conveying an artistic work. The writing style used by Nyembezi to paint clear, graphic pictures in words for the reader will be demonstrated in the following discussion and analysis of the tales.
The folktale *Igundane elingezwa* (The disobedient mouse) is an adventure story which warns against spontaneous and impulsive behaviour in young children who have an innate urge to explore the world around them. Unfortunately, their curiosity sometimes lands them into trouble. In this story, animals are made to enact or represent human beings. Typical to children’s stories, animals in the story speak like humans even though they retain their animal traits. The mouse has been portrayed as small and inexperienced, but nonetheless daring and bold. Its courage compels it to disregard its experienced mother’s advice and as a result, it pays dearly by losing its life prematurely. This story teaches children about the virtue of following their parents’ advice.

The story has a traditional oral mode and opening: “Kwakukhona umgodi. Emgodini kwakukhona umuzi wegundwane. Unina wayehlala nabantwana bakhe.” (Once upon a time there was a hole. In the hole there was a mouse’s home. The mother lived with her children.) The setting is a mousehole or burrow. However, the setting of the story is a modern one because words like *isinkwa* (bread) and *itafula* (table), loan words derived from Afrikaans, are used. The story takes an exciting turn when the little mouse decides to leave his safe haven, despite his mother’s warning about dangers lurking and his siblings’ efforts to dissuade him from being disobedient. The mouse’s desire for freedom is expressed as follows:


(Besides, I am tired of staying inside the home. I want to stretch my legs. I want to explore the land.)

The suspense builds when, having eaten the bread, he throws caution to the winds and starts playing around:

(It started playing on the floor. It ran to one end. Then it turned and ran in another direction.)

This sentence supports Canonici’s observation that: “Since this is written work, dramatic performing devices should rather be identified in the vivid descriptive style … and alliteration, in useful repetition” (1985: 89). The use of the “la” “le” and “li” creates beautiful and poetic sounds, pleasing to the ear. The repetition of the excited actions of the mouse creates a vivid picture in the mind of the reader. This corresponds with Norton who says that: “Younger children enjoy listening to words that create vivid images. … Children can visualize and recreate the actions during activities designed to encourage their own creative interpretations …” (1983: 161). This is because they can appreciate it from different levels.

It is therefore apparent that this style of writing does indeed substitute actions that in oral performance would be mimicked by the performer in an effort to demonstrate the mouse’s action to his audience.

Canonici (1985: 85) ascribes the little mouse’s falling prey to the waiting cat to “sensual excitement” and this he expresses beautifully as follows:

The little mouse first puts out his head in order to see, then his little nose to sniff the air for any sign of danger; he then listens with his ears. … His sense of smell is soon aroused – by the clean air (umoya omnandi) and by the smell of the fresh bread; his sense of taste is then satisfied by gorging himself with bread; finally his touch is excited by the perception of open spaces – as opposed to the restrictions of his hole. This final perception drives him mad with excitement (1985: 86).

The story shows that in some situations and environments, people, especially children, should learn to restrain themselves as failure to do so could be fatal. Although the disobedient mouse talks and thinks like a young child, its actions are those of a mouse. The mice in the story express human emotions; they feel sad and cry in sorrowful situations. Because the children are reading the story in book form, performance and mimicry do not form an essential element and children have to use their imagination. It is for this reason that the body
language of the storyteller and the listeners are not described. The written
words which are read in class, as uttered by the characters themselves instead
of being mimicked by the performer, take precedence and create pictures in the
mind of the reader. In this context, it is very important for the educator or reader
to use different tones artistically to mimic various characters.

The story reaches a climax with the appearance of the cat that pounces upon
the “clever” mouse. The story ends on a sad note when the mother is seen
hopelessly watching her child hanging from the inescapable jaws of death - as
depicted in the only black and orange illustration. This well-written tale is very
entertaining for children but at the same time it may be rather disturbing
because it not only teaches them about the facts of life but also about
premature and painful death. The effect of death would, however, not be felt as
deply as it is a mouse that dies, not a person. The story is age appropriate and
this increases the enjoyment of the children.

At the end of the story, when mother mouse and her children cry over the
demise of one of their own, Nyembezi, as the writer and external narrator,
informs the reader about the feelings of the children who are told the story in the
bedroom. This is typical of what would happen after the oral performance of a
tale. The children are seen responding on different emotional levels. Zine feels
pity for the mouse and this is expressed when she remarks:

“Awu gogo, yaze yamnandi indaba yakho. Mina sekuthi angikhale.
Ngihawukela umntwana wegunzwane” (1962: 44).
(“Oh grandmother, your story is a wonderful story. I just feel like crying.
I feel so sorry for the baby mouse.”)

On the other hand, some children like Thoko, show no sympathy:

“Mina gogo angilihawukeli igundwane elincane. Amagundwane
(“Grandmother, I do not feel pity for the little mouse. Mice are a
nuisance. Even here at home we are bothered by them.”)
The theme of the story is appropriate to a modern setting where children are faced with various dangers. Unlike oral tales, the moral of the written folktale in *Igundane elingezwa* has been implicitly stated by Mother mouse and *ugogo*.

The mother laments:

(“My child, if you had listened to me you would not be in that situation.”)

In contrast to oral folktales, at the end of the story Gogo explicitly cautions children in ordinary language which is highlighted by the use of the idiom:

(“My grandchildren, it is not good to be disobedient. The little mouse died because it was disobedient.”)

The teacher reading the story to children in the classroom may reinforce this moral lesson by providing other real life examples found in their own community.

Nyembezi very cleverly makes the children reiterate the instruction as they participate as the audience by responding to the moral of the story. They agree with their grandmother when they remember what they learnt previously at school from their teacher:

“*Nasesikoleni gogo uthisha wethu uthi asibolalela abazali bethu*” (1962: 44).
(“Even at school our teacher says that we must listen to our parents.”)

In her response, Gogo emphasises the importance of the proverb. She explains its meaning and foregrounds it by repeating it twice:

("Your teacher is right when she says that you must be obedient. I (grandmother) will tell you about a beautiful saying. Do not forget it. It says, ‘The one who does not listen, sees by the bleeding of his own blood (i.e. s/he learns by being harmed).’")

Gogo’s endorsement and the teachings at school of proverbs learnt at home underlines the importance for Africans of teaching their offspring the age old wisdom of their ancestors.

At the end of the story Gogo chases the children away and tells them to go and play. They thank her for a wonderful story and ask her to tell another one on the following day. Again, the ending has been interwoven to imitate and mirror the traditional oral ways of tale performance: “Yaze yamnandi indaba yakho.” (“What a wonderful story.”)

The second story to be discussed is Sibambe elentulo (We are sticking to the lizard’s word), which is about how death came to mankind. It tells of how God sent the chameleon to tell mankind that they would never die. Unfortunately, the chameleon did not relay the message on time and instead of focusing on the main task, it dawdled along the way. It indulged itself on the wild berries that it loved. Its gluttony and the resulting delay angered God who sent a lizard with the message that people would no longer live forever, but would die. When the chameleon eventually arrived to deliver his message, he was chased away by the people who told him that they had already received a message from the lizard. This story is about the origin of things, in this instance, how death befell mankind.

The story starts when the chameleon agrees to do as it has been commanded. Despite the fact that it is slow by nature, its determination is seen when it walks a long distance to accomplish the mission. The slow pace of the chameleon
affects the pace of the story and makes it slow too. The movement of the chameleon is painstakingly described by Nyembezi, both at the beginning and towards the end of its journey:


(Its eyes looked forwards and then backwards. Indeed it turned around. The leg trembled and went forward. It placed it on the ground. It then lifted the other leg. It trembled too and went forward. There went the chameleon, lifting a leg and shaking along. The eyes kept on looking forward and backwards … When the chameleon saw the lizard a hint of fear struck. It remembered that it was on an errand. It stopped eating the berries. It trembled again and followed the lizard.

It is important for the teacher to establish whether all the learners are familiar with the appearance of the animal characters. This will help learners to form images as the story is read or later performed in class. Before reading the story, the teacher should start by describing the animals and/or showing pictures of them to the children.

The manner in which Nyembezi has depicted the slowness of the chameleon has an effect on both reader and listeners. They are enveloped by a sense of apprehension, and they will wonder whether the chameleon will reach his destination. In its slow progress, Canonici sees its resoluteness and remarks that: “The determination of its movements adds an atmosphere of mystery and magic to the scene” (1985: 87). Although the reader is excited by the wonderful message of immortality that has been given to the chameleon, s/he will wonder why God sends such a slow, quavering animal. Such questions will create suspense and some readers may skip to the end of the story to see whether
this trembling messenger ever reaches its destination and delivers the good tidings from the Creator. (Obviously, this is something that will not happen in a performance of the story, but some in the audience may occupy themselves with guesswork.)

The story reaches a climax when, while eating the wild berries, the chameleon sees its competition whizzing by and realises his mistake and what God may have done:

(When the chameleon saw the lizard a hint of fear struck. It remembered that it was on an errand. It stopped eating the berries. It trembled again and followed the lizard.)

The story ends on a sad note with the chameleon’s unhappiness at the fact that humans have been condemned to death instead of being given everlasting life. His late delivery of the message is the cause of this calamity. The people refuse to accept his message and say that they will hold onto the lizard’s message. Gogo, as the narrator of the story, concludes by explaining the origin of the idiom which is the title of this story:

(The chameleon was disappointed. It turned and left. Today there is a saying we know very well: “We are sticking to the lizard’s word”. This is how this idiom came about.)

Reading this story, children will learn that they should not behave like the chameleon but like the lizard. They will realise the importance of paying attention and carrying out instructions from their elders or from an authoritative figure; failure to do so could cause harm or disaster.
5.5 **Written children's literature as a pedagogical tool in class**

This section will examine the value of the content of some Zulu readers as an aid to teachers in the classroom environment. The discussion will focus on *izilandelo*, children’s poetry, folktales and other stories used in the classroom.

5.5.1 **Written izilandelo**

Following the discussion of written Zulu game songs, it should be clear that they have various roles to play. Commenting on the role of Shona children’s game songs in education, Makina says that:

>Song in its various forms is important for its cultural, aesthetic and ideological contributions. In this respect, the rhythm, rhyme, and songfulness that characterises children’s songs in particular, is a vehicle for transfer of societal knowledge, skills and values (2009: 49).

Written *izilandelo* act as a vehicle of transition from orality to written compositions. They help children to adapt by bridging the gap between the home and school setting. The following example seems apt:

**Kuleziya zintaba**

*Kuleziya zintaba*  
*Kuhlez’ othisha*  
*Bahlez’ nabafundi*  
*Sesibabonile*  
*Bayafundekela*  
*Shaya thishela*  
*O lasho ixhegu*  
*Lidlula ngendlela*  
*Elathi shaya thishela*  
*Elathi shaya thishela*
(At the mountains over there
Teachers are sitting
They are sitting with the learners
We have seen them
They are nagging
Hit (them), teacher
Oh, said the old man
Passing along the road
Saying hit (them), teacher
Hit (them), teacher.)

The poem functions as a transition between home and school. Children are no longer in close proximity to their dear ones, their family members. They have moved from the safety of their home environment to formal school surroundings where they are expected to perform new, unaccustomed tasks. They are at a new stage of development where they must learn a sense of responsibility or face the consequences. Used to playing and being with their mothers or child-minders, some of them resort to crying. This does not solve their problems because the “old man”, possibly their grandfather, shows no mercy but encourages teachers to punish them. This game song appears to have been composed to acclimatise learners to what happens at school.

Because game songs have various themes, they are fun and amusing; they also help learners to see school as a place where they not only learn new things but where they are also entertained. The following is an entertaining game song about nature:

**Woza wemvula**

*Woza wemvula.*
*Uzosichela we!*
*Ngawo amathonsi*
*Abandayo qa!*
*Siyakuthanda*
*Thina bantwanyana.*
*Uma sidlala ucbabhayiyane*
*Umoya uyasitshela*
*Ukuthi asilindele,*
*Uma usuzofika.*
*Co! Co! Co!*

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Come rain

Come rain.
And sprinkle/wet us
With the raindrops
That are icy cold!
We love you (the rain)
We, little children,
When we play (the game)
Jumping in the rain.
The wind tells us
When you are about to come.
Drip! Drip! Drip!
Rivers become full
Ravines become full
Where are we going to cross?
We are going to sleep in the trees
And eat black berries.)

In this poem, children show their love for rain and plead with it to fall. The rain brings relief from the scorching sun and heat and takes part in their game. It brings joy and happiness to children’s lives. However, its function is double-edged: problems can result if it rains too heavily.

These types of game songs encourage children to be attentive, as observed by Norton who remarks about nursery rhymes: “Rhymes also develop auditory discrimination and attentive listening skills” (1983: 136). Children learn how to read and memorise poetry; the game songs also help children to learn by imitation and this gives them confidence. Fraser supports this when she notes that the child feels pleasure when s/he experiences success and is praised for her/his attempts. She sees this as contributing to the emotional development of a child:

During the performance of imilolozelo, the outgoing, extroverted child has an opportunity to release some of his pent-up energy, while the
introverted child benefits from a situation where he can participate in a non-threatening, supportive environment (1996: 149).

Bamman et al. (1971) suggest that when a child learns how to read clearly, in a tone that will portray the emotion of the poem, s/he exhibits physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. Fraser (1996: 149) says that in the process of social development a learner must cooperate and listen carefully to the teacher until s/he is able to participate and s/he must also be taught to respect the efforts of other children because “learning tolerance and compassion for others is important for healthy interpersonal relationships and success in interacting with others” (Fraser, 1996:150).

Moreover, game songs teach children to concentrate not only on the gestures and pleasures brought about by the poems but also to attach meaning to this. This function is in keeping with the developmental function already mentioned, which Fraser calls “perceptual-motor development”. This is reflected when a child learns by observing the action, internalising it and “thereby integrat[ing] the visual, verbal and motor stimuli” (1996: 143). Fraser puts it succinctly when she comments on the important function of imilozelo in developing children’s visual motor co-ordination:

Their eyes and muscles must learn to work together and for this to happen it is important that children develop a healthy body image. Body awareness is essential for normal psychological and physical development (1996: 143).

Most of the poems discussed above illustrate the importance of this function, for instance Luph’ ulwandle (Where’s the sea?), with its adaptations, and Ithibothi (the teapot). The following poem has a different function because its purpose is to warn children not to talk to strangers:

We Nomathemba

We Nomathemba
Ushaywe ngubani
Yileya ndoda
Ibize ize lapha  
Hhayi ngiyesaba  
Ehla amathambo  
Ebhake ezansi  
Enyuka amathambo ebheke phezulu (Mthembe et al. 1991: 79)

**Hey, Nomathemba**

Hey, Nomathemba  
Who hit you?  
It is that man.  
Please call him and tell him to come here  
No, I am afraid  
Down went the bones  
Taking the downwards direction  
Up went the bones  
Taking the upwards direction.)

In the above poem, a young girl is seen crying. When questioned by an adult she points to a man who has hit her – and not a young boy. Coming from a child, in different contexts, the word “hit” can mean different things, including being violated or abused in one way or another. In modern times where sexual abuse of children is rife, the poem may also allude to this. The last four lines where the offender is seen running away “Taking the downwards direction … (and) taking the upwards direction” seem to suggest this. In the classroom, after the teacher has read and explained the poem to the class, s/he can divide the class into a boys’ group and a girls’ group and ask them to enact it. This could be followed by the reading of a modern poem that has a similar theme or a relevant modern story. Moreover, the teacher could also link this poem to a folktale carrying the same message as “The disobedient mouse”. Children may also be asked to relate their own experiences or those that they have heard about or seen, e.g. on television. Integrating one theme and associating its lesson with what children already know helps children to understand the interconnectedness of the school and home environment and the holistic nature of learning at school. By adapting and amending a familiar poem (as witnessed in *Luph’ ulwandle* and *Ngineminw’ emihlanu*), children internalise the art of creativity and of composing their own short poems.
Some game songs introduce children to counting and addition and subtraction, as can be seen in the two poems *Izinyoni ezinhlanu* (Five birds) and *Ngineminwe emihlanu* (I have five fingers). In *Ngineminwe emihlanu* the learner also learns to name the different parts of the body. The following questionnaire response from one of the Grade R teachers attests to this:

*Umntwana uyakwazi ukufunda izinto ezithile ngokucula noma ngomlolozelo. Iculo liyakhuluma ngelitheresi nangenyumeresi. Kuba lula noma umntwana esebhala phansi ngoba akulula ukuba akhohlwe uma ecula nama esho okuthile kuba wumlolozelo (Mbonini Junior Primary school, 14 October 2010).*

(A child is able to learn some things by singing or via a lullaby. A song speaks about literacy and numeracy. It thus becomes easy even when a child is writing down something for it is not easy to forget when s/he sings or says something in the form of a lullaby.)

The following game song underlines some of the points discussed above:

*Ngineminwe emihlanu*

*I have five fingers
Which I call by their names
This is my Thumb
My fat one
This is my Pointing one
The one who tries cases
This is the longish one
The very tall man
This is Promise*
This poem can be used to link the written word to children's body parts and their functions. It will not be difficult for learners to learn this poem as the vocabulary is not entirely alien: it uses everyday vocabulary but also introduces new words. The poem has been composed by naming the fingers according to their appearance. The learner is able to differentiate between the hand and the different fingers which have different names, e.g. *uThembisile* (Promise), and shapes, such as *uThuphazane lo, isidudla sami lesi* (This is my Thumb, my fat one), size and length as in *uMdanyana lo* (This is the longish one) and functions, *uKhombisile lo, umthethi wamacala* (This is my pointing one, the one who scolds). The naming of things is in keeping with Zulu culture where children are given names according to events that occurred before or at the time of their birth, or according to their particular attributes. If a girl is born on a rainy day she may, for instance, be named Nomvula (Mother of rain), or, if born on Sunday, Nomasondo (Sunday). In the same way, the poem can be changed in various ways to teach other parts of the body. Some Zulu poems, like the following, seem to have been used as an effective tool for discouraging girls from being lazy:

**UNomtopoyi**

*Ngihelezi ngiwabon’ amavila,*  
*Kodwa hhayi uNomtopoyi.*  
*Kuyathezwa*  
*Ngiyafa, ngiyafa.*  
*Kuyasengwa*  
*Ngiyafa, ngiyafa*  
*Kuyalinywa*  
*Ngiyafa, ngiyafa.*  
*Kuyaphekwa*  
*Ngiyafa, ngiyafa.*  
*Kuyadliwa*  
*Qhwi umlenzana,*  

(Nomtopoyi)
I always see lazy people,
But no one like Nomtopoyi
When firewood is to be collected, “I’m tired, I’m tired”
When there is milking to be done, “I’m tired, I’m tired”
When there is cooking to be done, “I’m tired, I’m tired”
When it is time to eat
The tiny legs hurry
The tiny legs hurry.

After the teacher has explained the theme of the poem and the learners have performed it in class, they will clearly understand what it means. They will see the satire and ridicule that is directed at Lazybones, with her tiny legs suddenly strong and rushing to fill her ever-hungry and not so lazy tummy. The poem would probably encourage lazy ones to be more diligent both at home and at school, and the hardworking ones to continue doing good work.

Lastly, from a short questionnaire in Zulu, prepared specifically for teachers in the foundation phase, the researcher extracted the following responses concerning the functions of game songs:

- Lullabies teach a child to learn by repetition till he feels it in his senses and then he will move the body to indicate what he says. This helps him to chronologically follow the events of the lullaby. They also train children not to mix things up but say them in order.
- Repetition found in them enforces and accelerates knowledge of concepts, pronunciation, listening skills and the appreciation of the poem. They teach children how to be engaged in a dialogue or communicate face to face with someone. A shy and timid child ends up gaining confidence.
- Game songs help in discovering children who have a gift of reciting poems. A child can end up being a poet or a musician or an editor of poetry.
- While learners become physically engaged, they are also enabled to respond to the poems from the sensory level, for instance, portrayal of the feeling of joy or criticism. Every child is also able to participate in physical activity. Even the learner who has a learning problem shares in the delight by jumping and laughing.
- While entertaining, lullabies also teach about culture and inheritance and they preserve history. They also teach in the relaying of a message and warning children about things they should avoid in life.
The functions mentioned here complement those already discussed. Furthermore, they are indicative of the interconnectedness that exists between oral and written poetry. The lines are sometimes blurred. This information is particularly important because it has been derived from people who observe and deal with children both at home and at school.

5.5.2 Original modern children’s poetry

In this section, original modern poetry found in the readers by Nyembezi will be discussed, in particular that in the Grade 1 reader. A very brief comment on poems for the lower grades, influenced by lullabies, is included. Modern poems for the lower grades are meant mostly for the child’s enjoyment because they are rhythmical and use nonsensical words which are pleasing to the ear, such as in *Suka nana* (Go Nana). These poems were written to make children aware of nature, the holy Bible and of God as the creator of all things.

Poems found in *Igoda* Grade 1 have various functions. The poem entitled *Ubuvila* (Laziness) discourages laziness and at the same time encourages children to mend their ways and to be better people. Also, the poem teaches learners to use the language creatively through the use of figurative language. Norton puts it aptly:

> Poetry allows children to experience the world with new understanding and to share feelings, experiences, and visions with the poet. Poetry encourages children to play with words, interpret the world in a new way, and realize the images that are possible when words are chosen carefully. Through poetry, children may discover the power imprisoned in words; a power that the poet can release (1983: 321).

This can be seen in a poem where a forest is used as a metaphor for a lazy person’s hair and the bad smell is personified by being given “feet” that follow a lazy person, *Ngilandelwa amaphungu* (I’m being followed by smells). This personification has been used successfully because the word “smells” is used in a new way: although it cannot see and walk, the poet has given it these
qualities to highlight the effects of being lazy. The diction helps to drive home the effects and the ugliness of filth and the value of cleanliness.

The poem *Ngizimisele* (I am determined) teaches children to observe nature and to learn from it, for instance, from bees and ants they learn to be industrious, to work and study hard and to plan ahead in order to succeed at school, encouraging them to be better people. Poems like *Iqiniso ngiyalithanda* (I like the truth) teach norms, values and trustworthiness. *USonkanise* teaches learners to heed advice from parents because parents have experience and wisdom.

In conclusion, most of the poems in the old readers were indirectly designed to introduce Christianity to school children and to teach them how to behave and conduct themselves in life.

5.5.3 The content and structure of written folktales

Taylor (2000), in his book entitled *Using Folktales*, describes the characteristics that qualify folktales for effective use in the classroom. The researcher draws heavily on Taylor’s chapter “What makes folktales so good for language teaching?” Of the eight characteristics mentioned, the researcher examines six. These are: time-ordered story structure, repetition and redundancy, repetition of main themes, predictability, simple grammar and concrete vocabulary.

(i) Time-ordered story structure

As previously mentioned, written folktales stem from oral tales and their structure mirrors that of traditional tales. Irrespective of nationality and creed, when it comes to the narration of folktales

All cultures seem to do the same thing: tell about events in the order they happened. *First ... then ... after this ... finally....* Time provides a structure (Taylor, 2000: 28).
To children in the primary grades, this way of relating events will not be new or alien and, according to Taylor, this familiar and recognisable structure makes a text easier to understand and remember than many other types of literature. The following events in *Ikati elingezwa* attest to this:

*Kwakukhona umgodi. Emgodini kwakukhona umuzi wegundwane ... Egundwane elingezwa lalifuna ukuphuma ... Lasuka igundwane elincane lanyonyoba laqonda entubeni ... Lase liphuma emgodini ... Lalingacabangi nakancane ngengozi ... Kanti nali ikati ... Wakhala unina lapho ebona umntwana wakhe esekefeni ... Ikati lahamba negundwane elincane. Lalibulala lase liyalidla* (Nyembezi, 1962: 40-43).

(Once upon a time there was a hole. In this hole was a mouse’s home ... The disobedient mouse wanted to go out. ... The little mouse then tiptoed towards the opening ... It came out of the hole ... Not even once was it thinking about danger... However, there stood the cat ... The mother cried when she saw her child in the claws of death ... The cat went away with the little mouse. It killed it and then ate it.)

The above events, although briefly presented, are easy to follow. Short, meaningful and age-appropriate sentences have been woven into a story from the remote past.

(ii) Repetition and redundancy

Taylor (2000: 9) believes that stories that have their roots in the oral tradition are more inclined to employ repetition and redundancy than those that do not. This can be seen in the repetition of key themes, main ideas or in a word-for-word repetition of some sections of the story and sometimes in refrains. The replications appearing in these stories have their own functions and are not there simply to elongate the story. Taylor provides a number of ways in which these redundancies could be of assistance to learners:

Repetition is important in helping new vocabulary stick in the mind. Repetitions also give students many examples of a particular grammatical form in context. ... Repetitions also help students become more automatic in their recognition of language – an important part of
becoming fluent. Finally, repetitions make the story easier to understand for at least two reasons: they make the story more predictable and they give students less language to process (2000: 10-11).

In view of the various repetitions and roles, an examination of the following examples of repetition found in the two Zulu tales is provided. Children learn by repetition; not only in the story, but also repetitions in the classroom by teachers and their classmates.

(iii) Repetition of main themes

In the story about the disobedient mouse the key theme has been foregrounded by repeating the small size and the disobedience of the mouse eleven times, as can be seen in the following examples:


(One of the little mice was disobedient. It was very naughty. It never took heed of the mother.)


(The naughty mouse wanted to go out. It wanted to see what was going on outside.)

Sentence (i) above, introduces the little mouse as the main character in the story and directly provides the theme of the story by describing its character: it is disobedient, naughty and it does not listen to its mother's advice. In sentence (ii) the diminutive size of the mouse is highlighted and the next sentences show that it is not only little and disobedient but also inquisitive because it wants to see the world outside. Sentence (i) has an important function "in helping new vocabulary stick in the mind" by using short sentences containing words that carry almost the same meaning: "elalingezwa", "laligangile", "lalingalaleli" (disobedient, naughty, never took heed). This repetition gives students an
example of how to use vocabulary to emphasise a point when portraying a character. This also helps learners to develop automatic recognition of the language. In addition, the repetitive use of “la” in both examples fine tunes the student to recognise the tense in which the story is told.

In the subsequent sentences where the theme is further developed, attention is drawn to the diminutiveness of the mouse by repeating “Igundwane elincane” (The little mouse) word for word nine times. The frequent repetition of the theme is helpful to small children as helps them to draw their own conclusions on what the story is about and that it alludes to small, disobedient children. Since the theme has been clearly mentioned in the story, the learners will quickly comprehend it, helped by the revealing title. Norton mentions the fact that the repetition of single words in a sentence develops stronger oral interpretations. “This writing style is found often in African folktales; words are repeated several times to give them stronger meaning” (1983: 161):


(Its eyes looked forwards and then backwards. Indeed it turned around. The leg trembled and went forward. It placed it on the ground. It then lifted the other leg. It trembled too and went forward. There went the chameleon, lifting a leg and shaking along. The eyes kept on looking forward and backwards ... When the chameleon saw the lizard a hint of fear struck. It remembered that it was on an errand. It stopped eating the berries. It trembled again and followed the lizard.)

The repetition of words and short phrases corroborates Taylor’s comments on the importance of folktales as vehicles for language learning. Some words have been repeated twice or three times, for instance, “amehlo” (eyes), “wqonda phambili” (went forward), “umlenze” (leg). The meaning of the verb “thuthumela” (tremble) is reinforced by being mentioned three times. If a learner
does not understand it the first time it is read, or the second time, by the third
time s/he will have formed some idea about what the word or phrase means.
This style enhances not only language acquisition and development per se, but
also teaches learners about antonyms and that, in Zulu, the same word can
have different meanings, depending on the context.

(vi) Predictability

Taylor (2000:11) says that the ability to guess what is going to happen next
makes it easy for one to deal with difficulties. He ascribes the predictability of
folktales to two aspects: firstly, repetition of main events and, secondly, the
moral or ethical quality that lies behind many folktales. Concerning the moral
nature of folktales:

Folktales have been used to teach moral values in many societies, and
we often find characters in folktales that clearly demonstrate particular
moral qualities. We find lazy and hardworking sons, the wicked
stepmother … and the like. There is no subtle character development
and no subtle working with moods and feelings. Although in real life, life
doesn’t always seem fair, in folktales it usually is. … The proud sons
who fail to help the old beggar by the road will fail in their task, while the
young simpleton who helps the needy will himself in turn be helped
(Taylor, 2000: 11-12).

This is also true of many Zulu folktales. The moral lesson found in chapter
three, i.e. the folktale about the weasel and the lion bears, echoes Taylor’s
observations. The story Igundwane elingezwa (The disobedient mouse) follows
this pattern as well; the other mice did not die because they were teachable and
listened to their mother. After the disobedient mouse had ventured out of the
safety of home, the learner can guess what is going to happen when the cat
appears, unnoticed by the mouse. Similarly, in the story about the chameleon
and the lizard, when the slow moving chameleon stops eating the wild berries to
follow the lizard, we can envisage what is going to happen when the he finally
arrives at his destination.
Another apt example is found in Nyembezi’s folktale entitled *UMamba kaMaquba* (Mamba of Maquba), found in *Igoda iBanga 2* (The Rope, Grade 2). The story is about two sisters with very different characters and moral values. The elder sister is a quiet, diligent, respectful and obedient girl while the younger one is proud, lazy, jealous and disrespectful. One day, while the older sister is on her way to get married to Mamba kaMaquba, she meets an old woman on the road who asks her to lick the discharge from her eyes. The girl quietly obliges. The woman is grateful and wishes her well on her quest to be betrothed. Again, continuing on her journey, the girl meets a person who asks for help with a load. Again, the girl obliges. She receives a second blessing. When the younger sister realises that her sister is married, she grows jealous and goes on a quest to become the second wife of Mamba kaMaquba. However, the proud daughter fails to help the people she meets along the road, the same ones who asked for help from her elder sister. Furthermore, at Mamba kaMaqumba’s place she fails to perform the tasks given to her, chores which her elder sister has performed with ease. In this story, we find repetition of main events and the moral lesson that the arrogant and conceited will be humbled while the humble will be elevated and rewarded.

(v) Simple grammar

Taylor (2000: 13) observes that the simple grammar of folktales, particularly those closest to oral folktales, are easier for low level students to understand. He points out that this is because of their short sentences and the fact that the simple past and present tenses are used most commonly. The following examples indicate this:


(The cat went away with the little mouse. It killed it and then ate it. It started with the head. It ate everything except the tail. After it had finished it licked its whiskers. It shut its eyes and took a nap.)

(The people kept quiet and listened to the chameleon. The chameleon continued and said, “Listen people. The Creator says people should not die.” The people said, “Oh, you have come to tell us that? Where were you all along? We are sticking to the lizard’s word.”)

These two stories by Nyembezi that appear in full in the appendix feature short sentences with an average of three words per sentence.

(vi) Concrete vocabulary

Concrete vocabulary refers to something physical, real, tangible that can be seen, while abstract refers to something that is theoretical, intangible and cannot be seen. Taylor (2000) illustrates concrete vocabulary with examples like “table” and “lamp” and, in addition, he states that: “Concrete language is easier to grasp than abstract language … most of the words are things you can see, feel, taste, touch, and smell” (2000: 13). In the story about the little mouse the author uses nouns like “hole”, “table”, “bread” and verbs such as “see”, “climb”, “play”, etc. The mouse can smell, touch and taste the bread on the table. In commenting on the benefits of this attribute of folktales, Taylor remarks that folktales are good for the building of vocabulary, adding that “the concreteness of the vocabulary helps students understand new language more easily, which in turn helps them understand the story as a whole more easily” (2000: 13).

5.5.4 Additional functions and values of written folktales

Although this discussion of the use of these tales has included their functions, the researcher will further highlight the value of folktales for children.
The values of oral and written folktales are similar and their functions seem to overlap with those already discussed in chapter three. This is because when a writer decides to write folktales he draws on examples from the oral tradition. Iyasere (1975: 107) puts it thus:

The modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind.

The following are some functions and values specific to the selected stories:

The aim of the author in writing the story was multipronged. Nyembezi wanted

- to warn children about the realities of life as experienced in the modern context, as seen in *Igundwane elingezwa*, and to impart wisdom through the use of Zulu verbs and idioms as indicated in the discussion of the two folktales;
- to stimulate the imagination of the learners and to encourage them to observe life around them. The children’s minds will be stimulated when they experience through their mind’s eye the unfolding of the stories. This will unleash their creative skills and make it possible for them to apply them to writing and life. For instance, a learner could be heard using a metaphor to address a classmate, calling her “unwabu” (a chameleon), someone who is naturally slow;
- the two folktales, *Igundwane elingezwa* and *Sibambe elentulo*, will help broaden the children’s horizons by inspiring them to read stories written in their own languages. This will develop their language, vocabulary, idioms and proverbs and kindle an interest in writing their own stories later in life. Lastly, this will indirectly instil in learners the habit of reading for pleasure.

Besides these functions, Canonici unreservedly states the following aims and functions as the ones that made Nyembezi produce Zulu folktales in print:
It is clear from these selective examples, that Nyembezi wants folktales to be used as educational tools; by satisfying the children’s curiosity and their longing for the unusual and the fantastic contained in the tales, he encourages them to improve reading skills and to acquire the command of good and correct Zulu vocabulary and of grammatical structures. At the same time Nyembezi creates a social frame for his folktales, fitting them naturally into the life of a family and of a school (1985: 79-80).

Nyembezi’s aims overlap with those mentioned by Bamman et al. (1971 and Taylor 2000).

5.5.5 Other stories

Functions of readers seem to be varied. Some readers for the foundation phase teach learners about the letters of the alphabet. Later they progress to the spelling and pronunciation of words. Because a child learns by hearing and seeing or demonstration, illustrations are used to supplement the written information and to facilitate understanding. The early readers by missionaries were also designed to teach children to count from one to 10, and later on to bigger numbers, as seen in Adams’ (1838) *Yincwadi yokuqala yabantwana*. Also, the missionaries used the readers to introduce themselves to African children. This is seen in some folktales with content which was alien to the African child, e.g. *Unwelezelanga* in Bennie (1939). This idea was also transmitted through the use of pictures and objects of Western and European origin. The stories were moralistic and preached the good news of the gospel. Most of them emphasised the love for animals, especially dogs. This showed that missionaries loved dogs dearly and regarded them as a man’s best friend. This, according to African practice and culture, is not necessarily true.

Contents and themes of stories written by black authors like Nyembezi seem to have been derived from and influenced by stories by missionaries. There are a number of similarities. However, their stories do reflect the way of life of indigenous people. There are stories about family life, livestock, heroes, duties performed by boys and girls and folktales that portray the culture of the indigenous people of Africa. This is reflected particularly in the use of proverbs
and idioms. The function of these stories was to teach children about the beauty and the use of the Zulu language.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to trace the development of Zulu written children’s literature since its inception by the missionaries. An attempt was made to determine whether stories, folktales and poetry found in some old Zulu readers are still suitable as a vehicle for imparting knowledge and reading skills to the modern learner. Works contributed by missionaries were found to have served as a foundation for the writing of Zulu children’s literature. The missionaries also paved the way by introducing literacy to black Africans and by motivating black authors to simulate them and write their own books.

Game songs were found to be very useful and appropriate because as an educational tool for learners in the foundation phase, they bridge the gap between home and the classroom. Their language and rhythms render them appropriate for reading aloud in the classroom. Moreover, their inherent attributes of repetition, rhythm and song make them particularly suited to teaching as they not only educate but entertain, bring joy and cater for children’s physical, mental and emotional needs as well. On the other hand, modern poetry in readers was found to introduce learners to a different genre that uses words to stimulate the child’s imagination. In addition, poetry was found to be a different genre from folktales which fall under the category of prose. The use of a word in poetry is loaded with meaning: “Poetry allows children to experience the world with new understanding and share feelings, experiences, and visions with the poet” (Norton, 1983: 346).

Research by Bamman et al. (1971) shed light on how learners could be taught to pronounce and read well in order to discover the meaning of the text. Folktales found in readers were also found to be very useful in teaching children about pronunciation, speaking, listening and reading skills, amongst others.
They also teach the good use of the language and the meaning of proverbs and idioms. Children learn to concentrate in class, understand what is being read and to retell it in their own words or to perform it. Learners become skilled in narrating stories according to the sequence of events. Children may even learn to write or rewrite their own stories. Folktales are a reflection of life as they contain various moral lessons that could benefit the learners socially. Finally, written folktales open a window for learners to see life as it was lived in the olden days and as it is lived now.

Now the question to be asked is: do traditional readers still have a place in the life of the modern child? The answer is both yes and no. Yes, because themes found in the folktales transcend time and will be relevant to all humans forever as they are the carriers of the culture, norms, values and wisdom of our ancestors. Secondly, like folktales, izilandelo are still relevant and can continue to be used as they can be adapted to suit the syllabus and children’s needs. Makina’s statement is true for all nations:

Song is a powerful tool for personal expression among the Shona people. It plays a vital role in shaping them because, on the one hand, it is intertwined with their history, and on the other, it embodies the future (2009: 56).

African authors should thus be encouraged to write anthologies of new game songs and modern children’s poetry which suit the age of the child.

On the other hand, traditional readers can be considered ill-suited to modern children. Despite the fact that this chapter did not comment on themes of other realistic stories found in Igoda Grade 1, they were found to be hackneyed and no longer relevant to modern times. Topics about how to milk cows and to draw water from the river would be unfamiliar to most children who have grown up in the townships or in urban areas and who do not have any experience of farm life. Nonetheless, it could be argued that such children would still be interested and could benefit from learning about the source of milk, for instance. The old readers also contain too many words and very few illustrations to challenge the
child’s imagination. The solution to this is to rewrite folktales, such as the one about the disobedient mouse, in storybook mode, with the inclusion of colourful pictures. Children’s story picture books should be prescribed for all schools and should be written in the learners’ home languages. This will help to portray different facets of South African life and culture to all children. Illustrated storybooks could bridge the gap and portray, verbally and non-verbally, various settings and lifestyles of both the rural and the urban child.
CHAPTER 6

PICTURE BOOKS IN CONTEMPORARY ZULU CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

6.1 Introduction

Writing this chapter on picture books in the African languages is like entering uncharted territory, where one has to set foot on untested ground. The trepidation felt comes from the fact that from primary to high school, I do not remember ever seeing or reading picture books written in my home language, Zulu, or in any other African language. The books I am familiar with are school textbooks which were used in the classroom for study purposes. As young children, most of us were denied the pleasure of reading children’s books. In fact, during my primary school career the majority of people I knew were so poor that only the teacher could afford a textbook. As a result, teachers had the daunting task of writing pages and pages of notes on the blackboard. As this board was not very big and time was limited, slow students suffered when the teachers rubbed off the notes to make way for new ones.

This practice had a negative impact on the time some teachers spent teaching. The end result was that most of my classmates became experts in note writing and rote learning. Many lessons were learnt by heart and sometimes without fully understanding what was being taught. There were no teaching aids, additional reading books or school libraries. Teachers were untrained “writers” and “illustrators”. Many of us grew up quiet and well-behaved, but never truly acquiring communication skills. Looking back, one wonders how our education and academic life would have been transformed if the government had introduced us to picture books written in our home languages. With hindsight, it seems it would have been adequate even if books were in English as this would have expanded our horizons and bred in us a culture of reading. When we grew up there were a number of children who were fortunate enough to have one or
both parents who were literate or educated. Most of these children loved reading and were regarded as intelligent at school. They visited the public library and borrowed books. So, contrary to the sweeping statement uttered by Khumalo that Blacks were not in favour of reading books (1.1), there was a substantial number of high school children who loved reading all sorts of books and other reading material, including English and even Afrikaans magazines, short stories and novels. Some of them also read fiction written in their own indigenous languages.

Despite all the constraints and challenges, the researcher has this deep-rooted sense of great expectations and excitement propelling one to continue journeying into the land of new discovery, the land of picture books.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of picture books. Attempts will be made to show that this contemporary children’s literature genre may have far reaching effects on a child’s life, particularly if introduced at a tender age. Various types of picture books and their functions will be discussed, using examples from original Zulu books and from those translated from English. This chapter will also be informed by responses drawn from interviews and questionnaires.

Just as in traditional oral literature where folktales were divided into different kinds, picture books also fall into different categories or types, mostly according to the age of the reader or the audience. They can be divided into toy books (Norton 1983) or baby/board books (Hancock 2008), alphabet books, counting or number books, concept books, wordless picture books and picture storybooks. The discussion of picture books in this chapter is illustrated by definitions and explanations from various researchers.
6.2 Picture books defined

According to Hancock:

Picture books are a child’s first invitation into the world of literature and the potential start of a lifelong adventure with reading. … picture books should be written about topics children find interesting. The ultimate evaluative criteria for a picture book is whether children will be engaged, entertained, and encouraged to continue on their lifelong reading adventure (2008:87).

Picture books are commonly known as children’s books that contain pictures/illustrations or photographs. This genre is described by two words: picture and book. The word “book” generally indicates the most important element found in a book, that is, words. However, the word “picture” indicates that this is not an ordinary reading book but a book that has illustrations. This explanation may seem obvious but when one examines different types of picture books one realises some striking differences. Reading the following definition of picture books by Norton may help identify what makes picture books different:

The term picture books covers a wide variety of selections ranging from Mother Goose books and toy books for young children to picture storybooks that contain sufficient plot development to satisfy much older children. Younger children respond to stories presented visually as well as verbally. … Because of this reliance upon both text and illustrations, picture books have a unique requirement: the illustrations and narrative portions must complement each other (1983: 136).

These words emphasise that there are picture books for younger children as well as for older children and both have specific roles to play. Fayose (2004), discussing books published in Africa, mentions realistic stories and points out some of the following important elements:

Current trends in children’s literature are emphasising stories which reflect life as it is really lived in the societies in which they are set ... and
as a result realistic stories of family life, the school and society abound in many. The home and family constitute the second big genre of books published in Africa. ... This is not surprising since it is in the home and within the family that the human personality is nurtured and shaped for the future (2004:5).

Fayose’s observation on themes found in African children’s storybooks is important. It underlines the point that it is very important that black African authors write books in their own languages and that these reflect their culture.

Picture books for younger and those for older children are discussed separately by Norton as picture books and picture story books. That is, books with pictures and books that have a story to tell. This study will follow the same pattern as Norton’s.

On the other hand, in her definition of a picture storybook, Hancock explains a difference between the two:

The type of this picture book generally associated with the term picture book is the picture storybook. The picture storybook shares a story with a reader through well-written text that is blended with effective illustrations. In contrast to a picture book, the continuity between the language and the illustrations takes on even more importance as pictures help tell the story, showing action, character expressions, well-defined settings, and plot development (2008: 68).

Hancock’s definition of picture storybooks highlights a vital double role played by illustrations. It reveals that pictures are words in motion because they also help “tell” the story, portray the non-verbal actions, show children the setting of the story and assist the reader to seeing how the story progresses. All this highlights the mutual, reciprocal and complementary nature that is inherent in the words and illustrations in picture books, especially in picture storybooks. This makes it imperative for the researcher to provide a brief outline of Norton’s view of some features of the illustrations and devices used by the writer. Norton calls the illustrations the visual elements of picture books and refers to them as
the “grammar of the artist”. Although she describes the four visual elements of line, colour, shape and texture, for the purpose of this study the researcher will discuss only the first two.

Norton believes that lines are used by artists to suggest direction, motion and energy. She says that these lines vary in shape and appearance and may be “thin, wide, light, heavy, feathery, jagged, straight, or curved and can suggest mood as well as movement” (1983:106). Stewig explains that artists use lines in different ways to achieve a “final effect”. A line may be thin to enhance subtle colour or it may be heavy and dark to boldly define forms and create shapes (1988: 59).

When it comes to colour, Norton feels artists use it to convey moods and action. She says that warm colours like red, yellow and orange are associated with fire, sun and blood while cool ones like blue, green and some shades of violet are related to ice. She suggests that when the reader evaluates colour, s/he should ask whether the colour is suited to the mood, setting, characterisation and theme of the story (1983: 107). In picture books this means that it is very important for the artist to mesh and marry together these two aspects of picture books in such a manner that they complement one another.

6.3 Picture books in the African languages

In his discussion of African children’s literature, Meniru describes it as "literature written for African children by African authors either in the vernacular or in a foreign language" (1992: 43). This material has an African-based story but is read by children from many different backgrounds. The difficulty is that African children’s literature tends to be written more in a non-African mode than in the indigenous form. Up to now, there has been a shortage of original indigenous children’s fiction by African writers and of picture books in particular. Many African authors also prefer to write in English for financial reasons. It is sometimes difficult, though, for African authors to produce works in a second or
third language which they have not fully mastered themselves. Writers who do attempt to write in their mother-tongue again at times struggle to create compositions designed specifically for a juvenile audience since they lack any formal training. The use of concepts outside the experience of children or disconcerting adult language attests to this. Most African writers also still avoid taboo subjects such as divorce.

One possible reason for this scarcity of writers could be cultural gender stereotypes. According to Susina, “… children's literature historically has been more open to women as authors and illustrators because it has been considered less significant than adult literature and because publishers have regarded women as more capable of teaching and raising children” (2003: 181). Despite the perceived lack of status in writing children’s literature, writing for youngsters seems to be much more difficult than writing for adults.

In a personal interview, Nxumalo ascribes the rarity of children’s books to the fact that missionaries were concentrating mainly on literacy and neglected to teach Africans about the importance of reading for pleasure:


Kodwa-ke sengisho ukuthi kulaba abanye ababesebenza indaba yobuMishini zazibakhona izithonjana noma amashadi anazo izithombe zabacwebileyo; njengoJesu, uMaria noJosefa nabafuleni bakaJesu. Ngaphansi kwamanye amabandla babethanda kakhulu ukusebenzisa amashadi (Nxumalo, 2009).
(There was a lack of composing relevant material, that is, children were not given things that they could read. The missionaries did not think of giving children a book that could arouse in them a hunger (for reading), a passion which their children already had. Their children had books that they read at home, starting from books that contained two or three words. It did not dawn on them to also take this into the African communities. In my opinion, what reached the black people was the mission of teaching people how to read but not the thought of having leisure time where their minds should be entertained, or for children to be happy whilst viewing things about animals or animal characters. We do not know whether this was caused by the lack of proper ways of learning. Maybe it was because there was no electricity and the mode of lighting was the traditional one.

But I am saying that those who did missionary work had small pictures or charts that had illustrations of the holy ones. Pictures like these of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and Jesus’ disciples belonging to other denominations, which loved to use charts (Nxumalo, 2009).

Nxumalo’s response puts the blame on the missionaries’ eagerness to teach adults to read in order to spread their Christian message; as a result they forgot about children’s need to read for pleasure. Although this is difficult to understand today, it could be ascribed to the fact that their “students” were not functionally literate and were thus unable to write or translate books into the indigenous languages. Secondly, the matter of a lack of proper lighting is a valid one because even in this day and age there are children from poor families who cannot study because they have inadequate lighting at home.

Nxumalo’s final comment on the missionaries’ use of charts to illustrate and reinforce their teaching is an important observation. The use of charts may be regarded as one of the missionaries’ important contributions. Even if one cannot read, one can deduce the message from the pictures. Charts are one of the most basic aids, still used today by teachers in the classroom, as already observed from teachers’ comments in the previous chapter. Despite this, the harsh reality is that many black South African children still lack a culture of reading for pleasure, even those who come from affluent backgrounds. Fayose makes an important observation in this regard:
The reading habit of children can only be adequately addressed in the context of the society’s reading culture. Culture connotes a way of life that is learned, shared and is capable of being transmitted from one generation to the other. Reading cannot be said to be a way of life in many African countries, the present generation of school children are the first to learn to read. There is no cultural support which encourages children to read and enjoy books. Whatever little incentive there is for reading is purely mercenary – to pass examinations and obtain certificates which might fetch good jobs for the owners (2004: 10).

It is true that culture is a road map for people’s lives. This was particularly clear in the discussion of folklore which was orally passed on by parents to children. However, as reading was unknown and alien to them, it is perhaps not surprising that Africans were slow to subscribe to the culture of reading. Sisulu (2009) believes that the buying of books, an act essential in encouraging children to love books, is relevant here:

Black parents, literate or not, have always known and believed in the importance of educating their children. However, their reason for not buying books is genuine and understandable. It is unusual for an unenlightened poor parent to be persuaded to buy a children’s book whose functions and values they are ignorant of and which is not a school textbook – a book that s/he probably does not know about (Sisulu, 2009).

Inversely, in many parts of Africa there are parents who are highly educated but nevertheless have not succeeded in teaching their children about reading for pleasure. This underscores the need for African parents to be informed about the importance of reading and/or buying books for their children as well as the role and value of picture books.

Not many South African black children know what picture books are, other than those who went to crèches or attended multiracial schools. Sometimes mothers would bring their children books from their employers who had young children, but these picture books were mostly written in English or in Afrikaans. Many African children do not have any experience of reading a picture book written in their home language, and some do not even know what their own language looks like. Low readership in most of the African languages, low purchasing
power of parents, high costs of production and inadequate financial gains for publishers, writers and illustrators all contribute to the stagnant state of indigenous African children’s literature.

This sad state of affairs has resulted in African children failing to master their home language because they are not exposed to early language and literacy in this language from a tender age (birth to nine years) either at home or at crèche, primary school or via the media.

In the past two decades, several black authors have written enthusiastically and have published prescribed school texts which have generated a significant income for them. Driven by this momentum, various writers’ guilds were established catering for various indigenous African languages. At present, most of these are inactive and some are even defunct, with the exception of Usiba Writers’ Guild which caters for Zulu writers and which is going from strength to strength. This guild has been sustained by the dedication of its founder members who hold regular workshops, meetings and seminars in an effort to keep their members abreast of new developments. Usiba also motivates its authors by holding annual competitions where they can receive awards for works submitted in various genres. These have, over the past few years, included children’s literature.

Despite these efforts, reading materials written in the African languages are still mostly aimed at the school market. African scholars at both primary and secondary level have for a long time been educated via folktales and traditional fiction. Although folktales are regarded as the progenitors of all stories, the content of many of these readers is outdated and no longer suitable for modern children. With the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education, readers started to contain folktales which had been given a facelift, yet innovative and modern texts are still few and far between. Fayose (2004: 4) acknowledges that anthologies of folk stories form the bulk of the total output of creative writing published thus far for African children; the rationale being that “… when a society turns from an oral to a reading or literary society, there is a strong
tendency for the folktale not only to be a model for the written stories but the tales themselves to be collected and translated or transcribed in the lingua franca of the countries and other languages”. This being the initial stage of literacy, it is time for South African black writers to move on, accelerate the pace and produce more relevant, age-appropriate and interesting books for African children.

As has been noted above, there is a shortage of African writers of authentic indigenous children’s fiction. Most books are translations from English, and many of these are badly translated or have other language related mistakes. As children’s books reflect the ideologies of the culture in which they were written and embody that period's assumptions about children and appropriate behaviour, these books, especially those prescribed for teenagers, tend to be highly moralistic and blatantly didactic. As a consequence, surveys of library usage amongst African children indicate that the majority only read for the purposes of formal education and the minority for recreation (Children’s Literature Organisation).

It was expected that the change in government in the country and the elevation of the African languages to official status would lead to the development of children’s literature in these languages, but for several reasons this has not yet occurred. It has been revealed that many African children prefer to read in English, as the children’s books in this language tend to be more modern and have strikingly illustrated content. Chinua Achebe labels these books “the beautifully packaged poison” (Okoh, 2004: 1).

### 6.4 Types of picture books

Before a child goes to school and into the outside world, home is the place where s/he is socialised into how to do things; it is where s/he learns by seeing and imitation. After a child is born, s/he goes through developmental stages of physical and cognitive growth. As children grow up, they learn new things about
their new world. They learn how to sit, crawl, talk, sing, run, dress themselves, and are socialised into their culture. Eventually children are taught to read and write. Children cannot do many of these things if they are not taught by their parents, adults or other family members. In the same way, different types of picture books are required to gradually introduce children to literacy and the world of books.

Literacy is the ability to read and write. Research has shown that children who are introduced to books early in life are better prepared for future school and academic life than those who lack this experience when they start school. This is particularly so in today’s modern world where children are bombarded with visual media and technology. Reading often fails to take centre stage. The following section will discuss different types of picture books such as toy books, alphabet books, concept books, counting books, wordless books and picture storybooks. Their characteristics, functions and value will be discussed to determine the vital role they play in both a child’s book literacy and also, his or her visual literacy, as well as other skills related to reading. Visual literacy is defined variously. Emslie et al. (2005: 3) provide a simple and succinct definition: “The interpretation of images, signs, pictures and non-verbal (body) language”. The following information provides both the definition and some examples:

Visual literacy is the reading and writing of visual texts. ... A visual text makes its meanings with images, or with meaningful patterns. Visual texts range from diagrams to documentaries. They can be printed (such as an atlas) or electronic (such as a DVD). They can be fiction (such as a movie) or nonfiction (such as a street map). Visual maps are everywhere: on street signs, in books, on television news and packaging. Even the buildings we inhabit and the clothes we wear convey visual images. http://k-8visual.info/whatis_Text.html p1 (2010-11-05, 09h15).

Relevant books will be used to show the functions, values and importance of introducing children to picture books early in life. As these books are of different types and for various age-groups, their characteristics will be discussed separately.
6.4.1 Toy books

Like lullabies and game songs, which are regarded as the first type of oral literature which introduces children to poetry, toy or baby books are regarded as the books that introduce babies to early reading. Commenting on their characteristics, Hancock notes that they are made of thick cardboard, plastic, or cloth “to withstand the wear and tear of eager hands” (2008: 61). Two examples of such books are *Lo mntwana* (This baby) and *Ingane imatasatasa* (Busy baby), written by Carole Bloch and illustrated by Beverley de Meyer. The Zulu translation is by Zulu author Nakanjani Sibiya, some of whose novels and short stories have been prescribed at schools. Both books are age-appropriate and are made of thick cardboard and feature bright and beautifully lifelike illustrations. They comprise ten pages each. *Lo mntwana* (This baby) is for infants, and the cover page reflects a happy baby with his toys. In the book, children from various cultural backgrounds have been depicted in order to portray the diverse nature of South African people. The content covers various behaviours of children in this age group. The following words make up the text of this very short book:


(This baby listens and this baby looks. This baby stirs and this baby digs. This baby rolls and this baby flies. This baby shares and this baby cares.)

The illustrations complement the sentences, for instance in the sentence, “This baby rolls and this baby flies” the illustrations show a young child rolling on the grass and another child “flying” as an adult holds her up above her head. The illustrations appeal to children because they depict the day-to-day events or activities in a child’s life. The mother or adult holds the child on her/his lap and reads and talks to the baby, while pointing at the pictures and moving her eyes from left to right, and the baby listens, watches and learns something. Not only
is the baby listening, but it is also learning by imitation. As the book is read at a particular time every day the baby becomes used to “reading” and may soon be heard saying the words and pointing at the pictures of the setting, characters and objects in the book.

Nxumalo supports this in his remarks about the writing of children’s books in indigenous languages which can be read to children in hospital and in orphanages and which children appear to be reading on their own:

_Vele umuntu angathi ingane yami iyakwazi ukufunda kanti indaba ukuthi umuntu uqala ngofundelwa, engakafundi yena, aze abone izithombe abesexoxa indaba ngazo. Kube sengathi uyafunda kanti ubona izithombe, kumbe ukhumbula into ethile._

(Yes, a person would say that “My child is able to read” while the matter is that s/he first starts by being read to before s/he can read on her/his own to the point where s/he sees the illustrations and starts telling a story about them. It will appear as if s/he is reading when s/he is in fact looking at the pictures or remembering something else.)

Nxumalo’s observation points to the importance of introducing a child to books early in life because they help develop the child’s language. The “toy” part of the book is also both subtly implied and highlighted by the various age-appropriate toys for boys and girls like tiny cars, dolls, teddy bears and, of course, toy books! Children need toys to play with because they also form part of learning and are used as instruments to teach them about their needs and the environment.

In the book _Ingane imatasatasa_ (Busy baby) the illustrations depict children involved in various activities in the home environment. A small baby waking up; another dressing up; a boy drinking from a tap while watching the dog which is also drinking from its dish; a little girl wearing her mother’s shoes and pushing her doll in a pram and so on. This reflects another stage of growth where the illustrations of toy books show children’s nature and curiosity in the things around them.
These toy books are appropriate for babies because they are durable; they show babies and family members as characters close to the child at this stage in its life. The toys and objects depicted are also suitable for babies and for use in the home. Even though the child cannot read, the words that appear in the book are read by an adult and appeal to the ear of the child and complement what s/he sees. Later on, when the child has learnt to read, s/he can read the book on her/his own.

6.4.2 Alphabet books

Alphabet books are designed for young children. They are an important part of children’s literature because, like toy books, they are picture books that can be used in an informal or formal way, to introduce children to the world of books and reading. This has been discussed in the previous chapter in the section dealing with readers written by the missionaries. According to research study, some alphabet books may also be useful for older children: “The books are attractive and they present interesting concepts and things to talk about” (Tiedt, 1979: 42). Alphabet books are aimed mainly at preschoolers, children who are at crèche and those who have just entered school; for those who are at the foundation level “… the ubiquitous alphabet book forms part of the environment of every nursery school and kindergarten” (Stewig, 1988: 89). It is for this reason that they may be associated with toys because in her discussion of toy books, Norton classifies them as board books, and mentions them in this category: “Board books range in content from identifying baby’s clothing to exploring the neighbourhood and alphabet and counting books” (1983: 142).

On the other hand, even though Hancock agrees that alphabet books were initially associated with young children she believes that contemporary alphabet books:

...have appeal across all age levels. Picture, format, content, and text form the structure of an alphabet book. The illustrations are the inherent feature of these books as artists create intriguing and interesting visual displays built on single letters. ... Most alphabet books have a
predictable organizational manner, are concise, and rarely exceed a 26-letter presentation (2008:63-64).

When the researcher considers some of the functions of toy books she arrives at the conclusion that alphabet books, like counting books, are types of picture books that may fall into the category of toy books – depending on where they are used. As a result, alphabet books can be used by children with the assistance of teachers and adults. This is the case when they are used in a formal learning situation. In the classroom they are used in a formal way, forming part of the syllabus because they are used as a foundation and as stepping stones to teach young children about the letters of the alphabet and literacy. Children can also help their classmates to learn the alphabet. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to find any alphabet books written in Zulu.

Commenting on the functions of the alphabet, Stewig notes that teachers use them to teach children about letter sequences and concepts. However, he makes a very important and valuable remark about the tendency of educators to be rather myopic when teaching children about literacy. He laments the fact that language specialists focus on assisting children in attaining literacy: but their efforts are not holistic because they do not encompass two important components of literacy, that is, visual and verbal literacy. He goes on to describe these two types of literacy:

Visual literacy is the ability to decode and to utilise what is decoded. To be truly literate today, children must be able to decode the messages in pictures and encode their findings in language. … Verbal literacy is the ability to put coherent thoughts into words, words into sentences, and sentences into larger units (1988: 98).

Because alphabet books are among the first books introduced to children by teachers to teach them about reading and spelling (visual and verbal literacy) and as such literacy, Stewig could not be more correct when he lays emphasis on the fact that the teaching of picture reading and oral communication ought to commence with the youngest children who, while enjoying alphabet books, are able to learn to verbalise what they see (1998: 98). However, Norton (1983:
makes another impotent point when she remarks that “picture objects should not have more than one commonly used name or use pictures that are difficult for children to understand”.

The teaching of young children in this all-encompassing manner will surely raise children who are able to verbally name, explain, express, describe and compare what they see in picture books as well as what they have heard and learned in the classroom from their teacher.

Many South African speakers of indigenous languages have never experienced the delight of using picture books to learn about the alphabet at school. The teacher was usually the only person to have a book in the classroom. Parents were too poor to buy books, and many still are. Together with the blackboard, the teacher has generally served as the illustrator.

6.4.3 Counting books

Like alphabet books, counting or number books, as they are sometimes called, are important for younger children and have their own specific purposes. Hancock observes that children respond to these books by counting aloud, pointing to objects and associating the number with the illustration (2008: 66).

The Zulu counting book entitled *Jasper bala nami: izinombolo* has been translated from Weber’s book *Jasper, count with me: numbers*, and is a simple little counting book designed for younger children. The numbers are sequentially arranged from one to five. The book also includes the concepts of “a few” and “a lot”.

The bright and beautiful illustrations by Meyer depict all sorts of fruit but unfortunately, the name of the translator is conspicuous by its absence. Numbers are written with their corresponding words, e.g. the number 2 is placed at the top of the page and the word *kubili* (two) is at the bottom with two red and yellow apples illustrated in the space in between. On the opposite page an apple tree is illustrated with two children standing on either side of it, each
holding a red apple. At the bottom of the page the following sentence appears, “Kupakishwe amahhabhula amangaki?” (How many apples were packed?)

Kubili

From Bala nami by Weber L. Illustrated by Meyer N.

The Zulu sentence has been wrongly translated because in the English book the sentence is “How many apples were picked?” The correct Zulu translation should have been: “Kukhiwe amahhabhula amangaki?” Secondly, the Zulu translation of the English name “Jasper” would have been more apt if the translator had conformed to the African way of pronouncing words by translating it as Jaspa. Such flaws, minor though they are, tend to taint this otherwise beautiful and age-appropriate book. This is an indication that the book was not properly edited. As such, blame cannot lie solely with the translator but should be laid at the door of the editor as well. Despite this, the Jasper books will appeal to children because of their size, and their bold and bright colours. The Jasper series is also available in the following titles: Yimina lo (This is me), Ngingenza umdwebo (I can make a picture), Asisize ekhaya (Let’s help at home), Abangani bami (My friends) and Ukudlala epakini: okuphikisanayo (Fun in the park: opposites). In each series, the theme appears at the bottom of the
front cover, for instance the title “fun in the park” has the theme *Okuphikisanayo* (Opposites).

### 6.4.4 Concept books

Concept books are books that teach young children to name, identify and understand the meaning of some basic and necessary words or terminology. These include concepts like colour, e.g. green, yellow, blue, or opposites like big or small, full and empty, inside or outside. According to Hancock, “concept books share shapes colours, sizes, and objects with children in a creative picture book format” (2008: 66). Norton adds that like counting and alphabet books, concept books may be pitched at various levels of difficulty. Children’s understanding and the book’s level of abstraction should be considered when appropriate books are selected (1983: 151).

Large, beautiful, bright and colourful *Amagama ayikhulu okuqala* (The first hundred words) from Macmillan is a concept book translated into Zulu. It is a hardcover book that features different themes on each page. Various themes showing photographs with their related concepts or words are illustrated. The first page starts with photographs illustrating colours of different objects and their corresponding concepts which are written under the objects e.g. *ipheya eliluhlaza* (a green pear), *izicathulo ezibomvu* (red shoes), *idada eliphuzi* (a yellow duck) etc. Other pages feature different modes of transport, food, children’s clothing and furniture. All objects depicted emanate from the child’s environment.
This book may be used for preschoolers, for Grade Rs and beginners in Grade One where the child minder or teacher could, in a playful manner, interact with the child and teach new vocabulary and different colours.

The Zulu version of Mhlophe and Magona’s *Umntwana nami* (The child and I), translated by Sibongile Khumalo, is a good example of a concept book. This brightly illustrated book consists of eight pages depicting the concept of opposites. It shows the differences between the bodies of two siblings. Surprisingly, the blurb mentions the name of the younger girl as Ntuthuko, whereas in the book no such name appears. The illustrations show small and large hands, heads, mouths, feet and, lastly, a little child and her food on the table. Actions take place in various rooms of the house and use objects like hands and gloves, slippers, boots, a mirror, etc.

The book *Ukweqiwa komgwaqo* (Crossing the road) has been written by Khumalo, Magona and Mhlophe and illustrated by Robert Hichens (2007). It is used to teach young children about the concepts of right and left. A father gives his young son money to buy ice cream. Before the boy leaves the father
teaches him to think before he crosses the road. He tells him to look right and left first. In this interaction the father is the teacher and the boy becomes the student. Teaching happens in an informal home environment to prepare the child for his future safety. This illustrates the importance of buying picture books and using them at home before children go to school. In this case, the boy will know some essential rules of the road and the concept of left and right before he goes to school. At school, he may be a step ahead of other learners who did not have the benefit of picture books being read to them.

The illustrations in this book clearly depict the boy doing exactly what he was taught before he crosses the busy road. However, when he crosses the road on his way home he is not holding anything in his hand. The illustrator seems to have forgotten to show the child holding his ice cream. It is thus surprising when we see the boy enjoying his ice cream on the last page. This omission may confuse children. This is another reminder that the writing of picture books requires meticulous care to ensure that the pictures reflect and complement the text.

6.4.5 Wordless picture books

Thus far, the discussion has been on the types of picture books that use two modes of writing to enable children to decipher the meaning of the story: words and illustrations. In this section, books without any words will be the focus of the discussion. The title of wordless picture books tells the reader that one element is missing and that element is “words”. The name of this type of book is thus self-explanatory: words are not used to narrate the story. Instead, the illustrations “do the talking”; they tell the story. Wordless picture books are thus visual and children respond to what they can see, and to non-verbal cues. Norton defines a wordless picture book as a new type of picture book that “uses a different format in which the illustrations tell a story without the addition of words” (1983: 153).

In a multiracial and multilingual country such as the “new” South Africa, or the “rainbow nation”, wordless picture books may be an advantage. This is
particularly true in a country where the writing and illustration of children’s literature in the indigenous languages has been neglected. The advantage is that wordless picture books do not necessarily need to have been illustrated by or for a White, Black, Coloured or Indian person. They can be used by any child, as long as they are for children and reflect their life, and the diverse nature and setting of the country.

The characteristics of wordless picture books are succinctly defined by Norton as follows:

Although they have no text, various levels of detail and plot complexity are found in wordless books. Some develop easily identifiable plots, some have considerable details, and others are suitable for a wide range of age and interests levels. In addition, some of them are large, making them appropriate for sharing with a group, while others are small and lend themselves to individual interpretation, or a lap reading. All these characteristics should be considered when choosing wordless books for children (Norton, 1983: 153).

Despite these characteristics and the fact that they are ideal for promoting oral language development, Norton says that some wordless books are difficult to understand and may frustrate a child when asked to tell the story (1983: 154). As a result of this, Norton advises that adults should consider the following five questions when choosing wordless books: is there a sequentially organised plot that provides a framework for children who are just developing their own organisational skills? Is the depth of detail appropriate for the children’s age level? Do children have enough experiential background to understand and interpret the illustrations? Can they interpret the book during individual reading or would adult interaction be necessary? Is the size of the book appropriate for the purpose? And lastly, is the subject one that will appeal to children?

Two different wordless picture books are discussed here. In their examination, an effort has been made to determine whether they display the features mentioned by Norton.
Lusted and Nan Wyk's book entitled *Ibhokisi lemilingo* (The magic box) (2002) is a fantasy story that centres on a preschool black African girl and a white boy and their magic yellow box. The title of the story reveals the theme and will thus draw children's attention and rouse their curiosity. The magical box allows them to explore their environment and provides the opportunity for new experiences. The many colourful but simple illustrations make it easy for young children to follow the plot of the story. The story begins with the two characters climbing into the box. Suddenly, they are seen flying up into the sky and there they see the things that inhabit the air: aeroplanes, helicopters, hot air balloons, clouds and birds. They are very happy and seem to be enjoying themselves. The illustrations continue to take the children on a journey and allow them to experience the wonderland. Each page presents different settings, objects and characters in the story. On another page the magic box becomes part of rail transport. They see mechanical things, the train and its cargo, passengers on the train; they see sheep and hear the sounds of the bleating goats transported on another type of train. They see the smoke that is emitted by a goods train. Some of the actions and sounds could be mimicked to the child with the help of an adult at home or teacher at kindergarten or school. A lively and active adult or teacher would bring added meaning to the story. In the classroom, children in Grade 1 for instance, could be divided into groups and asked to enact different episodes.

Suspense builds as the box takes the children to the river. There they see all sorts of animals that live in the water: a frog, a hippopotamus, and also a fisherman catching fish. Animals that live on land like cattle approach the river to drink water. The two friends are petrified when they are surrounded by water animals and they see a crocodile with its mouth wide open, advancing towards them. On the next page, they are suddenly in the sea and they see ships. The story reaches a climax; they almost drown and are frightened when all kinds of fish approach them. This episode touches the senses. It is very frightening as the waves threaten to topple their magical box. One can see only the little boy's feet and the little girl's red and white ribbon, still tying her hair, as they cower inside the box. Life on the sea can be very dangerous. In the next episode, they
are still in the sea; scared and adrift. This is illustrated in the pictures where only the tops of their heads can be seen above the water. On the opposite page, a helicopter appears from behind them, flying in their direction. Will it rescue them? This story evokes various emotions that children have to deal with: joy, excitement, fear, etc. Then the magic box is seen whisking them off and they find themselves on busy roads. They see cars, tractors, a van transporting a cow and also some chickens being taken to market. Being in familiar surroundings, they smile in recognition.

Their trip ends when the magic box takes them to the zoo. Whilst riding on the back of an elephant, they see a giraffe, an ostrich, birds at the top of a tree, a dog and many more. The story has a happy ending as they are seen smiling on the last page, the girl waving goodbye as they leave the magic box behind and go back to real life.

This is a wonderful modern story that has the trappings of a folktale, beginning with the following words: “Once upon a time there was a young white boy and his adopted sister”, or “a friend who wanted to go out to see the land out there … “. In fact, this could be another interpretation of the story by a child who comes from a different background – as indicated at the beginning of this section. The story could trigger oral discussion. This story has many pictures of animals, birds, objects and other details and lends itself to rewarding discussion, whether at home, kindergarten or at school. The age of the children concerned will determine the type of interaction and the assistance and intervention needed from an adult. Older children could be left to make their own interpretation individually, in pairs or in groups, sharing ideas.

The illustrator, through the use of colourful and simple illustrations, has successfully told a children’s story that appeals to both young and older children. Its appeal lies in the fact that all the animals, birds, people and objects in the story are characters familiar to most children. It will stimulate children to guess and make inferences about what is happening in different pictures. The setting caters for children from both rural and urban backgrounds. Children will not only enjoy the book but will also learn lessons about the dangers one may
encounter outside the safe and familiar home environment. Although it is wordless, the book is laden with information in the multiple pictures. On almost every page there is a different theme on which stories based on the characters could be written.

A very nice day by Ann Walton and Natalie Hinrichsen (2006) is another example of a fantasy-based wordless book. The researcher was unable to determine whether the title had been translated into Zulu, however. But this is not important because, firstly, the book is wordless and it lends itself to interpretation in any language. Secondly, the milieu is typically South African and the character in the story is a young African girl. The translated version of the Zulu title of this book would be Usuku olumnandi kakhulu. Usuku olumnandi kakhulu is a very small book that could be interpreted by one or two individuals at a time rather than by a group of children. The story begins early one morning with the sun shining into a small shack home of a young African girl. She starts her day as follows: she wakes up, takes off her nightdress, combs her hair, washes her face, and puts on her clothes. After eating, she brushes her teeth and with a yellow basket in her hand, goes shopping. At the shop she buys a couple of things. Then she sees a nice toy and thinks, “M-m-m-m ... there’s still enough money for a toy.” She buys the lion toy and has a new friend called Leon. She makes lunch for her new friend and herself and they eat. She cleans up and then when it’s time for bed, she reads Leon a bedtime story. Then she puts on her nightdress, brushes her teeth and off to bed she goes with her friend.

On the final page of the book a half-moon is seen shining over her tin house to indicate night-time. This story can be interpreted in various ways by children from different backgrounds.

In the case of young children, this story is different for it deviates from their usual daily activities. A typical story would show children living with their parents and siblings who look after them. It would also show children who go to crèche
or school and who are dependent on adults to take care of them. This story deviates from the norm: the little girl lives alone and the houses of the neighbours have not been illustrated. The child has been portrayed as an independent girl who knows exactly what she should do. She even has the money to buy groceries and toys. Some children will not believe this story and it will only make sense to them in a world where children play “house”, a world of make-believe. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as portraying the scourge of HIV/AIDS in Africa where child-headed homes exist and children are left to fend for themselves. But this would be incongruent with African culture where, in the absence of parents, children would be taken care of by other members of the extended family. However, as a typical children’s book, this story highlights the fantasies of young children. It is a make-believe world and a child would love to have an independent day - all to herself!

Events in the two wordless books, consequently, without doubt concur with Stewig’s following assertion when he compares story picture books with pictures without words:

...many picture books with words intended for the youngest readers deal with everyday events, people, and places that children know or empathize with. In contrast, few wordless books describe in realistic ways places and experiences with which children will be familiar. More often wordless picture books deal with unusual main characters doing unusual things in unusual places; in other words, they are fantasies (Stewig, 1988:173).

The above description underlines that this is indeed a fantasy story. The story is as silent as the character herself. Its plot is easy to follow and it would promote discussion.
6.4.6 Storybooks with pictures

In her book, Norton divides books with pictures into two categories: easy-to-read books and picture storybooks. She makes the following distinction between the two:

Another specialised picture book is the easy-to-read book, designed to be read by children with beginning reading skills. Like picture storybooks, these books contain many pictures designed to suggest the story line; unlike picture storybooks, however, the authors must use controlled vocabulary that the young reader can manage independently. The process of controlling the vocabulary to fit the beginning readers may result in contrived language; it is difficult to write stories that sound natural if all of the words must be selected from the easiest level of readability (1983: 155).

On the other hand, Stewig simply uses an umbrella term and labels these books “a book with pictures” and defines them thus:

A picture storybook is a book in which the story and pictures are of equal importance. The two elements form an artistic unit that is stronger than either of them would be alone. Sometimes such books have few words because they are designed for the very youngest readers … Other picture books are more complex … and are obviously appropriate for intermediate-grade readers (1988:123).

From the above definitions, it is clear that both these types of children’s books have a story to tell. In their telling of the story, they have one common characteristic: they both use words and pictures to tell a story from the beginning to the end. But in easy-to-read books the words are limited while pictures abound. Because of the limited words, which sometimes seem to be specifically planned or arranged to help the beginner reader, plentiful pictures delineate the story line. On the other hand, story picture books narrate the story mainly through the use of words and have a clearly demarcated plot that has a beginning, body and an ending. Picture storybooks are obviously for readers who are a little more advanced. Despite this, the researcher prefers to refer to both of them as picture storybooks because they perform the same function of
telling a story by using illustrations. Even though they can be differentiated they are very similar because they belong to the category of picture storybooks. In the researcher’s personal opinion, they could to a certain extent be regarded as similar to wordless picture books because they both tell a story, albeit in different ways, have characters, settings and a plot.

6.4.6.1 Easy-to-read books

The easy-to-read book *Umlilo* (Fire) by Khumalo, Magona and Mhlophe (2007), with illustrations by Pandora Alberts, is for beginner readers, and labelled for Grade 1 learners specifically. It is a small, colourful book with a soft cover. It teaches children about the uses and the dangers of fire. Fire is illustrated as being used for various things such as burning rubbish, cooking, boiling water, lighting, etc. At the conclusion of the book, children are warned to be careful of fire because it can be dangerous. The pictures are colourful and some of them reflect a family living in a traditional Zulu setting, in a house with a thatched roof. Outside the house there is a fire for cooking and a mother is seen dishing up for her family from a three-legged pot, with the dogs and chickens nearby.

This story, though short, appeals to children because they can see themselves, their family members and a place that they are familiar with. One illustration in the story appeals particularly to children living in the townships. *Ugogo* (grandmother) is a street vendor who sells mealies (corn cobs) to her customers. She uses a brazier to grill the mealies. She sits at the fire together with her grandson and some of her customers. The grandmother represents resourceful, independent township grandmothers who are able to fend for their children and grandchildren.

*Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa* (Musa’s big Day) is by Mhlophe and Magona (2005), with illustrations by Jean Fullalove. This easy-to-read book tells the story of Musa’s first experience of boarding a bus. She wakes up excitedly very early one morning, washes, puts on her beautiful clothes and eats as she prepares herself for the big day. She goes off with her mother. She can’t wait to give the bus conductor her ticket. The pictures are beautiful without being overly bright.
They are complemented by short sentences or a word that sums up the action in the picture. The illustration on the cover reflects Musa’s excitement on seeing the bus approaching, carrying some of her friends who are waving at her.

Life could be injected into both stories if, in the classroom, the teacher allows children to enact them. In the story about fire, for instance, learners could be divided into two groups, one group enacting how fire is used in rural life and the other, in city life. Another easy-to-read book entitled, *Izinsuku zesonto* (The days of the week) by Khumalo, Magona and Mhlophe (2007), illustrated by Tinny Rosser, is a beginner reader for Grade 1 learners. This is a small, colourful book with a soft cover. It teaches children about the days of the week. Some children are shown going to crèche while others are going to school, wearing their uniforms and carrying their school bags. The book has a total of 37 words and each page contains one sentence. The first picture shows children of different age groups; at the bottom of the page the following words appear:

*UMsombuluko usuku lokuqala lokuya esikoleni*

(Monday is the first day of going to school.)

### 6.4.6.2 Picture storybooks

Besides the fact that picture storybooks tell a story through pictures, Norton mentions five other elements found in these books: originality and imagination, plot, characterisation, humour and style. For the purpose of this study only plot and characterisation will be discussed. When describing plot, Norton says that in shorter picture books plots are simple, clearly developed and brief. She adds that owing to the fact that children cannot concentrate for too long, these books allow them to be involved with the action, identify the problem and quickly find a solution (1983: 157). She also observes that: “In addition to overcoming conflicts in fantasies, plots in picture storybooks frequently deal with children who overcome realistic family or personal problems” (Norton, 1983: 157, 158).
In her discussion of the plot she points out that children’s books should have a happy ending:

Another characteristic of plots in storybooks for young children is this happy and emotionally satisfying ending. Whether they are fantastic or realistic fiction, the stories have a rapid introduction to the action, a fast pace, and a strong, satisfying climax (1983: 158).

The notion of a happy ending in children’s storybooks echoes Daly’s advice that children’s stories should give hope.

The following two examples are of shorter picture storybooks. The examples are for Grade 2 learners and are by the same authors as the previous story. Illustrations are by Pinkie Wilson.

The title of this realistic story is *UBonke isichwensi* (Bonke the bully). The sentences are longer and the book contains 75 words. It has many pictures which complement the story. The story takes place at school. Fayose calls such stories “school stories” and says that many of such stories “portray the hero’s/heroine’s first day at school and how such characters settle into their new school positions” (2004:6). The characters in this story are human beings. Bonke, a fat boy, is a nuisance who forcefully takes food from the girl narrator (she is not named) and her friend, Linda. The young girl becomes fed up with this and tells her mother about their predicament. Her mother devises a plan. The girls execute the plan which puts the bully in his place and he is seen running away with the little girls and boys all laughing at him. From this day onwards, their problem is solved.

Wilson is very successful in portraying the characters through the illustrations in this book. The authors did not need to explain that Bonke is a big bully and that the girls are small; her illustrations demonstrate this clearly.
The expression of fear on the girls’ faces and the snarl, and later the wry smile, on Bonke’s face say it all. The girls’ retaliation and the bully’s reaction are also captured in the illustrations. The story has a happy and satisfying ending, satisfying because Bonke is seen sharing his food with his enemies, all of them enjoying each other’s company. This story should appeal to children because bullying is rife both at school and at home. This story will teach children how to deal with bullies.

In the second book entitled *Uspoti* (Spot) by Xaba (2007), with illustrations by Red M Studio Design, the characters are animals. A small dog named Spoti (Spot) is the main character and the title of the books is *USpoti* (Spot). Spoti is a beautiful little dog, born and bred in the affluent suburbs. He is well looked after by his African owners: he has his own kernel, is well fed and is allowed to jump into the family car. One day, while out visiting with his owners, he wanders off and gets lost. As he wanders along he comes across two big dogs that growl at him. But soon they accept him. His life suddenly changes for the worse. Used to
a better life and food, Spoti refuses to eat the food of other dogs. Things get even worse when he has to drink water from the river and sleep outside in the backyard of a dirty, dusty house. However, as he is very tired, sleep gets the better of him. Without any other alternative, Spoti eventually gets used to his new poor life and that of his new friends. Every day he learnt something new from playing with the other dogs. One day, Spoti sees the car belonging to his owners approaching; they are out looking for him. They drive him back home. He feels sad to leave his new friends behind.

Unlike the first book, this storybook contains very few pictures but many words. However, the pictures depicted complement the story. Although it is claimed that this book is for the beginner reader, a teacher or an adult would have read the story and explain it to the children. The book will appeal to children as it meets the demands of the short picture storybook. The theme is age-appropriate; it is about getting lost and acclimatising to a strange new environment. Children will relate to Spoti’s fear when he gets lost and finds himself in strange surroundings. Children will sympathise with him when his life changes drastically, while some may laugh at the “spoilt brat”. The book reflects different worlds in people’s lives and teaches children to accept their fate. For instance, when children start going to school they find themselves in new and unusual situations and surroundings. They have their own fears about crèches, school, new friends, food, etc. The ending is a happy and emotionally satisfying one because the dog is found safe and sound and is taken back home. The characters, though animals, are credible and have, to a certain extent, been made to behave like humans.

The final story is a realistic one by Ntuli (2007) and is entitled Ukuphi ugogo? (Where is grandmother?). It portrays the sacrifice, love and care that African grandmothers show to their grandchildren. It is about an emotional experience that a grandmother’s grandchildren, Njabulo and her little sister Nomcebo, have when they think that she has abandoned them.

In answering the question “What is real?” Tiedt says:
Children need books that present what is real. They need stories about people interacting with all the stress and emotion that accompanies human relations. They need to read about children like themselves who are coping with situations that are real to a child growing up (1979: 145: 146).

Tiedt includes multicultural realistic books:

Books that present what is real for children must be honest books written by sensitive authors who dare to treat controversial issues. These books must present non-stereotyped characters and situations that represent varied ethnic and national groups (1979: 146).

The story of Gogo and her grandchildren features some aspects of modern realistic stories as mentioned above by Tiedt.

One morning Njabulo wakes up to a deathly silent home. His grandmother is nowhere to be seen, his little sister Nomcebo is fast asleep. The thought of being late for school and of taking care of his sister confuses and frightens him. In her absence, the two children’s relationship and feelings about their loving grandmother surface. Feelings of fear and panic grip Njabulo when he realises that his grandmother has left home without informing them. Suddenly, he realises that he will not be able to go to school and leave his baby sister alone. Worry and bewilderment creep in when he wonders about grandmother’s whereabouts. Things grow worse when Nomcebo wakes up and demands to know about Gogo’s absence. They rush about, looking for Gogo in all the rooms, the toilet and outside but she is nowhere to be found:


UNomcebo athi ntinini aqonde esangweni. UNjabulo amlandele, kodwa uGogo do! Mina ngifuna uGogo wami; ngiyamfuna!” Kumemeza uNomcebo esekhala kakhulu (Ntuli, 2007: 11).
(They step out of the kitchen door. They go into the vegetable garden close to the chicken run. Even there it is dead quiet. “Gogo, where are you?” Nomcebo asks, wanting to cry. “Do not cry, Cebo, Gogo will be back just now. Let’s go back to the house.” “No, I want my grandmother!” says Nomcebo with the stubbornness of a frog.

Then Nomcebo runs to the gate. Njabulo follows her, but Gogo is nowhere to be found! “I want my Grandmother; I want her!” screams Nomcebo who is now crying loudly.)

In an attempt to pacify his sister, Njabulo resorts to a guessing game. Maybe Grandmother has gone to the shops? Maybe she has gone to the neighbours to borrow some sugar? Maybe she has gone to the doctor? All his suppositions are met with a definite “no” from Nomcebo: “Hhayi mina ngifuna uGogo.” (No, I want Grandmother). After a long tantrum Njabulo gives Nomcebo a pacifier and manages to lull her to sleep. Eventually, Gogo arrives and they jump in glee to welcome her. They become even happier when Gogo opens her handbag and gives them some sweets. She also gives Njabulo some fat cakes for his school lunch. As if Nomcebo is not convinced by the little sign of love that Gogo has given them, she enquires:

“Uyangithanda, Gogo?” kubuza uNomcebo
“Yebo mzukulu wami ngiyakuthanda.”
“Ungithanda kangakanani Gogo?”
“Ngikuthanda ukwedlula amaswidi.”
“Gogo,” kuqhubeka uNomcebo “ngicela usethembise ukuthi ngeke usasisi yiya sodwa. Mina bengesaba!”

(“Do you love me, Gogo?” asks Nomcebo.
“Yes, my grandchild, I do love you.”
“How much do you love me, Gogo?”
“I love you more than I love sweets.”
“Gogo”, Nomcebo continues, “I’m asking you to promise us that you will never again leave us alone. I was getting scared!”
“I promise you, my grandchildren, oh my poor children! I will in future ask our neighbour to look after you. I will never again leave you alone.”)

This dialogue expresses the love that both Gogo and her grandchildren have for one another. In the book, Gogo explains her absence and tells the children that
she had woken up very early to go and wait in the long queue to get her monthly pension. She thought that, as usual, she would be back before the children realised that she had gone. The events in the story support Fayose’s observations about realistic stories:

These stories give an honest and sympathetic treatment to current, social, economical and political issues with which children, especially teenagers, are familiar... (2004: 5).

In a simple but gripping manner, Ntuli has revealed the plight of African grandmothers who have to fend for their grandchildren. The reason for the parents’ absence is not mentioned. This mars the story somewhat because children are left with unanswered questions about their whereabouts. At the same time, this omission encourages learners to guess and to think of different reasons for the absence of the characters’ parents. In all this, the love of the children for their grandmother and their fear of losing her are highlighted, while Gogo’s love, devotion and concern for her grandchildren are foregrounded.

_UTristani noThobe baya eGoli_ (Tristan and Thobe go to Jo’burg) is a bilingual book written by Bronwen Jones, illustrated by Hyla du Plessis (1994). It has been translated from English into Zulu by Solomon Sikakane. The story was published in 1994, at the ushering in of the new democratic South Africa. It is a story about a little boy called Tristan and a little girl called Thobe, (her full name is Thobeka). In the story, the children come from different parts of the world and from completely contrasting backgrounds. Tristan and his mother arrive by plane from London to live in Johannesburg. Thobe, the little girl, lives far away in Ladysmith (Mnambithi) in KwaZulu-Natal. The girl and her mother board a taxi from Ladysmith and go and live in Johannesburg. The boy lives in a big house while the little girl lives in a small one. One day, Tristan and Thobe both go outside to play. The little boy runs along the lawn and so does the little girl, “Bump!” They crash into each other. A new friendship starts between them:

“Sawubona!” kusho umfanyana. “Wenzani lapha engadini yami?”
“Sawubona!” kusho intombazanyana. “Wenzani lapha engadini yami?”

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“Uma wena ucbanga ukuthi ingadi yakho nami ngicabanga ukuthi
ingadi yami, okusho ukuthi ingeyethu sobabili,” kusho umfanyana.
“Masidlale-ke”. (1994:12-14, pages unnumbered)

(“Hello” said the little boy. “What are you doing in my garden?”
“Hello” said the little girl. “What are you doing in my garden?”
“If you think it is your garden and I think it is my garden, then it must
belong to both of us,” said the little boy. “Let’s play”).

The two children play until they are tired out and introduce themselves to each
other. The girl says her name is Lokushaya while the boy gives his as Trouble.
These are, of course, not their real names: in the foreword it is stated that:

Tristan Delonno and Thobeka Kunene are real children living in South
Africa when this story was written. When they first met, they hardly
knew their own names, they were called “Trouble” and “Lokushaya” (in
fact it’s Ngizokushaya (which means: I’ll spank you).

This reminds us of what Daly observed in his interview: a writer can write a
story by taking some ideas from her/his own experiences or from what s/he has
seen, and intersperse this with fiction. The children’s mothers appear and call
their children. However, the children are enjoying their new found friendship. As
their mothers are happily watching them, Tristan and Thobe hold hands and
dance happily, enjoying each other’s company. The story has a happy ending
because the mothers watch their children bonding regardless of their
background.

This book has beautiful illustrations that complement the text. The pictures also
help to portray the different milieus, showing the children in clothes which
indicate their cultural and social background. The story reflects the innocence of
children and their lack of prejudice. Children, no matter where they come from
or the colour of their skin, can play together and share everything they have.
Children do not see the hue; they see people and friends to play with.
6.5 The functions and values of picture books

In the following section the functions and values of picture books will be discussed. Their role in the life of a child will be substantiated by examples from Zulu books or books translated from English into Zulu.

6.5.1 Toy books

Although these types of children's books carry the tag “toy” as a label they are very important because they signal an informal manner of teaching, learning and talking that takes place between a mother, adult, child-minder and a child. Hancock summarises the purpose of this wonderful experience:

They serve as important lap-sitting experiences as young hands begin to turn the pages, eager fingers point to bright colours, and a sense of story begins to take hold of bibliophiles. … Quality baby/board books emphasize patterns or familiar associations to encourage verbal interaction between an adult and a child (2008: 361).

In written children’s literature, as opposed to oral literature such as lullabies, the experience is rather different. In the use of toy books, while the mother or an adult is the initiator of the reading experience, she is no longer the sole centre of attraction and the vehicle for imparting knowledge. Toy books help to strengthen the bond between mother and child as they interact during various play and “reading times”. Bus and Jendoom confirm this:

Research into attachment security has shown that children’s feelings of trust in their parents are related to differences in adequacy of parental instructive interactions. The attachment relationship between children and parents (or other caregivers) may be a useful concept to explain differences in the frequency of parent-preschooler reading (1995: 998).

This can be seen on page six of Ingane imatasatasa (Busy baby) where the illustration depicts the father, with his baby on his lap, reading her a picture storybook.
The fact that the act of reading is taking place is indicated by the only word *Iyafunda* (Reading) that appears at the bottom of the page. This will help the child to grow up knowing the importance of books as a form of enjoyment and learning and later on as a source of interesting stories. Toy books also constitute a very important part of teaching, entertainment and learning. Both the adult and the toy book become the teachers and promoters of learning while the child becomes a listener and an active participator and an imitator. At this level, the visible, concrete, audible and the tangible is at the forefront; the sense of sight, hearing and touch are sharpened. Toy books also help a mother to interact with her baby.

Toy books, like other picture books, offer the child a delightful learning experience in constructing meaning from the illustrations. The lack of such experience could have a negative impact on a child’s life. The effects could be permanent, unless intervention measures are later taken. This is supported by Ntuli and Pretorius who make the following point about the role played by picture storybooks when they are introduced to a child early in life:

Success at school depends heavily on language and literacy skills. Research indicates that pre-school children whose parents read storybooks to them have a linguistic and literacy head start over other
children when they start school. In contrast, learners who come to school with few literacy skills are at a disadvantage (2005: 91).

Toy books as a type of picture book are part of the baby-steps tools utilised to introduce a child to visual literacy and a culture of reading. Children learn to name and point at various objects they see. According to Hancock (2008: 88): “Picture books induct the reader into the interplay of text and illustration because both contribute to comprehension and personal response – the ultimate goal of reading”. This initiation into interaction of play that occurs when reading picture books has already been discussed in Ingane imatasasa, where the father was seen indirectly coaching the child to read the actions presented through words and pictures. Also, on the following page, a sibling is seen playing with his baby sister. These examples indicate that children learn from an early age to look, listen and repeat what is said to them. Furthermore, through demonstration, they observe and learn how to hold books and to “read” them by looking at the pages from left to right and pointing at the objects they are “reading’ about.

Norton says that toy books are valuable to preschoolers because they help in the stimulation of their language, their cognitive, personal and social development. These functions are evident in the books already discussed, where various actions performed by babies are reinforced by the text and complemented by illustrations. In Lo mntwana, for instance, the first two facing pages indicate the different emotions of two babies: “Lo mntwana uyamamatheka … kanti lo uyakhala” (This baby smiles … and this baby cries). On page eight of Ingane imatasatasa social development is reflected when a young girl, dressed in her mother’s high heeled shoes, scarf and hat is seen pushing her own doll in a pram. Furthermore, Norton points out that toy books provide a happy experience with books that could continue as children gradually enter various stages of growing up (1983: 142).
6.5.2  Alphabet books

In order to show how important alphabet books are in the life of a growing child, Stewig says: “The alphabet book is a staple in every early-education classroom” (1998: 115). The main function of the alphabet books is to sequentially teach children about the letters from A to Z. As each letter of the alphabet goes hand in hand with a specific sound, another obvious function of these books is to teach young children to identify both the letters and their sounds. “Alphabet books can stimulate vocabulary development and item identification” (Norton, 1983: 144). Alphabet books also help children name, pronounce and know the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. This introduces children to literacy and prepares them for learning how to read. Tiedt (1979:31) discusses other similarly important functions of these books for toddlers:

The first experiences with books from the age of two, when parents share Mother Goose rhymes and the ABC books, through the initial use of books in school are crucial to a child’s developing attitude toward books and learning. Growth within a rich language environment shapes the child’s linguistic facility. This is the time too, when children are first exposed to much of their literary heritage. Books should be an important part of these early years.

In alphabet books the letters are complemented by a corresponding illustration. Stewig offers the following advice to teachers on how to share alphabet books with children who are having their first reading experience:

Once the teacher has selected alphabet books to use he must determine the specific methods of presentation, the types of questions to ask to encourage observation and discussion, the number of illustrations to use, and how long the session should be to a particular group. … The initial experience began simply with one illustration and a few questions: What do you see in the picture? What colours has the artist used? Where is it happening? How can you tell? (1988: 111: 112).

Responses from beginners will naturally be brief compared to children who have had substantial experience in describing and assessing the alphabet letters and their illustrations. The questions posed above may also be used during the reading of concept books.
6.5.3 Counting books

The titles of these books indicate that they are used to teach young learners how to count from one to higher numbers, according to the age of the children concerned. For instance, young children are initially taught how to count in sequence from one to ten. As already mentioned, in the Zulu counting book, *Jasper: Bala nami*, the numbers have been arranged from one to five. When teaching the child to count, the mother at home or teacher at kindergarten will teach the child to memorise the numbers one to five. Later on s/he will point at the objects in the picture and show the corresponding number. On page two of the book she will point to the two apples and say, “*Amahhabhula amabili*” (two apples) and she will then point at the opposite page and read the sentence:


(How many apples were picked?)

The same book could be used to demonstrate the concepts of “few” and “many” by using the last two pictures in the book, on pages eleven and twelve (pages unnumbered). The teacher could point to different types of fruit on page one and then to many of them on the opposite page. Children will respond by counting aloud while pointing to the fruit and associating the number with what is printed.

In addition to the primary function of introducing children to numbers, Norton observes that counting books for older children may develop the concept of sets of numbers or of addition or subtraction, or they may encourage children to search for many groups of the same. In the same *Jasper* counting book where children are introduced to the concepts of “few” and “many”, the concept of subtraction has been subtly introduced to small children. This is observed in the following words, supplemented by relevant pictures:
(There only a few grapes left. Who ate all the grapes?)

Picture books may be used in innovative ways by parents and siblings at home or by teachers at kindergarten, as the first steps in introducing children to counting.

6.5.4 Concept books

From the above discussion and the explanations of the illustrations, it is apparent that concept books can be viewed as tools to make children aware of their environment. By naming objects, children begin to learn their language. In Amagama ayikhulu okuqala (The first hundred words) children are taught about concepts and the vocabulary of their immediate surroundings. They learn about themselves and the verbs related to their actions, for instance, Mina (me), hlala (sit), khala (cry), hamba (walk), funda (read), etc. They also learn about eating utensils, names of their clothing, about toys, livestock, wild animals, domestic animals and birds and different modes of transport.

In the Jasper book entitled Ngingenza umdwebo (I can make a picture), the author and illustrator uses Jasper to teach children about colours and shapes. The series provides children with an opportunity to learn within a meaningful context. The illustrator has created bold pictures and these are complemented by the relevant concepts. Jasper, the character, appears on every facing page portraying a certain shape in a different colour. At the bottom of each page, the same two questions are posed which each require a different response:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ume kanjani umdwebo kaJasper? \\
Unombala onjani?
\end{align*}
\]

(What shape is Jasper drawing? \\
What colour is it?)
The Zulu translation of the first sentence is not accurate because it is ambiguous. It could mean “How is Jasper’s drawing positioned/standing?” The correct translation should be *Unasimosini umdwebo kaJaspa*? In the last pages all the shapes and colours have been put together and Jasper is seen cutting out different coloured shapes. The questions are now posed according to the action that is observed by the child. All the questions stimulate the child’s language and thinking skills in answering them. Responses to the following questions would be, *Unxantathu, unombala obomvu* (It is a triangle, it is red.):


(What is Jasper drawing? What colour is it?)

The child also learns to distinguish between different shapes, sizes and colours e.g. a red triangle; green rectangle; blue square; etc. After sharing this book in the classroom, the teacher can set learners different tasks such as drawing different shapes and colouring them in. In another activity the teacher could point at objects in the classroom and ask learners to name their shapes, for instance, the table, a pair of reading glasses, a book, etc. Norton says that such pictures can provide with children with opportunities to observe and identify shapes in their own surroundings (1983: 151).

The book *Ukulala epakini* (Fun in the park) introduces children to the concept of opposites in an interesting way that will thrill young children. The book depicts Jasper playing in the park with a girl called Bibi in a series of brightly coloured illustrations. The entrance gate is used to teach children the concept of “in” and “out” in words and in actions. A jungle gym is used to show the “up” and “down” actions. Other concepts illustrated include opposites like “slow” and “fast”, “sad” and “happy” and so on. The following example illustrates the concepts “full” and “empty”:

In the illustrations Jasper and Bibi are seen holding bottles of colddrink and on the opposite page they are throwing the empty bottles in the dustbin:
Ukudlala epakini umdlalo owomisayo.

(Playing in the park is thirsty work. Where must the empty bottles go?)

The artist should be applauded for his vivid and lifelike portrayal of the actions; particularly, the portrayal of “slow” and “fast”. Bibi is shown with a smiling face, eyes and mouth closed, slowly and dreamily enjoying the merry-go-round. The illustrator portrays her serenity very successfully. The facing page illustrates the concept “fast” by showing the “three” thrilled Jaspers: on the left, in the middle and with eyes and mouth open, holding tightly to the swiftly moving merry-go-round! His face reflects no fear and he is enjoying the fast ride. This book could be used with children who are not yet literate as well as those who can read because the illustrations indeed support the idea that “a book is more than words” (Norton, 1983: 135). The following section provides a discussion on wordless picture books will add weight to this point.

6.5.5 Wordless picture books

Wordless picture books have an advantage because they can be “read” and understood both by children who can read and those who cannot. In the case of such books, every child has the opportunity to interpret actions and events happening in the story as s/he sees them. These books challenge the intellect because children are compelled to decode meaning and express themselves coherently. “These books are especially good for stimulating ideas and language, since they invite individual interpretations” (Norton, 1983: 167). This means that books without words can be used to teach children how to infer and narrate actions in the story. This function has already been explained in *Ibhokisi lemilingo* (The magical box), where the researcher stepped into the shoes of a young girl by interpreting the story. When interpreted by children, the meaning can vary, depending on the age of the children and their acquired vocabulary. Some interpretations may be short while others may be lengthy. Hancock supports this in her comments on the benefits of picture books: “Picture books
provide a compact vehicle for early reader response to literature and the power of making a book one’s own through personal connections” (2008: 88).

Furthermore, Norton mentions a number of other roles played by wordless picture books in the lives of children. She says that they promote the development of oral and written language; they give children pleasure and the opportunity to become writers when they provide the missing text; they stimulate cognitive, visual and language development; they enhance visual literacy abilities; and they allow children from different backgrounds to enjoy the same book (1983:153). The wordless books discussed above are certainly proof of this as will become more apparent in class when the teacher compares interpretations of a number of stories told or retold by learners. Other functions of wordless story books are mentioned by Stewig:

Many wordless books can also be used for developing the skill of pantomime, which leads to drama. Wordless books provide valuable material with which to access comprehension and determine how effectively children can make inferences about plot, setting, and character (1988: 195).

6.5.6 Easy-to-read books

Because their text is limited with only a few sentences, easy-to-read books provide children with beginner reading skills with an opportunity to practise reading. A good example of such a book is *Umlilo* (Fire), which features many pictures which reflect and complement the text. The nine-page book contains some pertinent questions on the last page, which reads as follows:


It is good but it burns. We cook with it, eat and become full. We grill our mealies, eat and are satisfied. We become happy, and get warm. We turn on the lights so that all of us can see. We boil water, and drink tea. Be careful! Don’t get burnt!)
Another short book with eight pages is *Usuku olukhulu lukaMusa* (Musa’s big day):


(Musa woke up feeling very excited. She washed (herself). She put on her beautiful clothes. She ate. She brushed her teeth. She went out to get on the bus. This is Musa’s big day. This is the very first time she boards a bus.)

Easy-to-read books also help boost children’s confidence when they realise that they have successfully finished a reading experience (Norton, 1983:167). Children are motivated to venture on to reading picture storybooks that contain more words and fewer pictures, stories such *Uspoti* and *Ukuphi ugogo?* Easy-to-read books are part and parcel of the literacy process because they can be used to cultivate and promote reading and writing ability and to encourage children to read more storybooks.

### 6.5.7 Picture storybooks

As already discussed, owing to the fact that easy-to-read books are in fact picture storybooks, some examples of functions of the already mentioned easy-to-read picture books will be provided here.

Reading storybooks gives children the opportunity to share books with a parent, family member, or adult at home, or with a teacher at school. When reading storybooks, children are not only entertained but also learn new skills and life lessons, as for example when Njabulo takes on the role of parent to Nomcebo. Storybooks promote visual literacy and develop children’s language and communication skills when stories are mimed in class. They provide authentic Zulu language at the level that suits them, e.g. the use of the word “*xubha amazinyo***” (brush the teeth) which is specifically used in the context of brushing one’s teeth. Also the descriptive use of the ideophones: “**ngqa**” in “*Uyaqala ngqa ukugibela ibhasi***” (It is the very first time she boards a bus). The use of
this ideophone here is effective as it foregrounds the idea of novelty and the naïvety of the child experiencing something new. According to Canonici, an ideophone:

is a word that creates an emotion and a picture, it is sensual, enabling the audience to identify feelings, sounds, colours, textures, expression, movement or silence through its own senses. It is also poetic, the expression of imagery in the purest sense. It is a means of description, a concise way of showing an additional dimension to the action of the story (1985: 82).

An ideophone is also found on page 11 of Ntuli’s story Kuthe cwaka nakhona (Even there it’s dead quiet). A word like “cwaka” (dead quiet) is loaded with meaning and the use of sound here emphasises the silence that overshadows everything else at this moment. In “UNomcebo athi ntinini aqonde esangweni” (Nomcebo quickly runs to the gate) the ideophone creates an image of haste and speed. In “Kodwa uGogo do” (But Gogo is nowhere to be found), “do” creates a feeling of futility. These ideophones all have a poetic effect; they are concise and as such may be viewed as minimising the number of words required by the writer. They prove Canonici’s observation that they are “a concise way of showing an additional dimension to the action of the story”.

Storybooks allow children to become rooted in their own language before they start learning a foreign language. This is reflected in the Zulu idiom: “... edaza inkani yeselesele” (being stubborn like a frog). Children become aware of their culture as observed in Ukuphi uGogo? where in a desperate attempt to pacify and lull Nomcebo to sleep, Njabulo sings her a lullaby that eventually sends both of them to sleep:

Thula Nomcebo, mus’ ukukhala,
UGogo uzobuya
Uzokuphathela amaswidi (Ntuli, 2007: 19).

(Hush, Nomcebo, don’t cry,
Gogo will come back
She will bring you sweets.)
In addition, picture books promote intercultural awareness, especially in older children, between those from different cultural backgrounds. This has been observed in *uTristani noThobe baya eGoli* (Tristan and Thobe go to Jo'burg). Older children learn about other people’s languages, culture, and their immediate environment and about places other than their own. Finally, picture books keep children occupied in various ways while entertaining them and developing them holistically.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed various problems that have stunted the development of contemporary children’s books in South Africa and hindered the development of a culture of reading among African children. Some of these problems included teaching by memorisation, the lack of educational toys and toy books at home and the absence both of picture books and teaching aids.

Various types of picture books and their particular characteristics were discussed and analysed using authentic Zulu children’s books and those which have been translated from English into Zulu as examples. The responses to the questionnaires and the number of translated picture books used in the study indicates that there are still not enough authentic children’s books written in the African languages. Because of the nature of this study, this statement may sound rather general. However, this makes room for more research by other scholars. Studies could embark on an examination of picture books written in different indigenous languages of South Africa, for instance.

It was also found that although picture storybooks fall under the umbrella term “picture books”, there is a difference between the two. Picture books introduce children to reading and writing through the use of illustrations as they are for very young children. Illustrations found in picture books, with the initial assistance of an adult, help children to understand and “read” the story before they can literally read it. Picture storybooks, on the other hand, have a story line, characters, theme, setting and they tell a story. They are suitable for
children who can read. Their purpose is to enable the child to read with understanding, and to complete the whole story. Picture storybooks can thus be regarded as children’s fiction or written works of imagination accompanied by pictures that complement the text.

Various functions of picture books add support to the notion that “opening books for children opens doors to worlds as yet unseen, to experiences as yet untried, to people as yet unknown” (Tiedt, 1979: 3). Children learn about the letters of the alphabet; build vocabulary; develop the ability to interpret illustrations (visual literacy); and develop their communication skills. They also learn to read and write and how to tell stories coherently in their own words.

Picture storybooks help children to gain new knowledge about people, animals (as in Uspoti), objects (Musa’s first bus ride), places and things (fire and other things depicted in the pictures) and abstract concepts (Gogo’s love for her grandchildren). As a result they begin to understand things that surround them. Picture storybooks develop a culture of reading and as such, prepare children for more advanced reading material. They play an important role as supplementary material to textbooks and they have the advantage that children can read them anywhere, over and over again, outside the confines of the school. The positive effects of storybooks on children were also discussed.

Hancock says that picture storybooks give children a basic idea that a story has a beginning, middle and an ending. She adds that children get to know about the elements of narrative such as character. Finally, they “create childhood memories of familiar books and characters that last a lifetime” (2008: 88).

Furthermore, it was observed that some multilingual or bilingual books give children a glimpse of the world or culture of people different to themselves. Finally, it was determined that picture books written in children’s own languages are not only necessary but essential because they inculcate in children the habit of reading.
CHAPTER 7

PICTURE BOOKS: QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS

7.1 Introduction

As previously mentioned in, (1.1) the shortage of children’s literature, picture books in particular, written in the vernacular seems to be rife in the African community, and South Africa is no exception. In order to get to the core of the scarcity and slow pace of the writing of authentic books in South African indigenous languages, the researcher conducted interviews with some authors and sent out questionnaires to relevant stakeholders. Responses were collected via questionnaires while interviews were recorded on tape and later transcribed. Responses from both questionnaires and interviews will highlight, amongst others, some factors that have had an influence on the slow development of South African contemporary indigenous children’s literature. Suggestions on how to solve the problem will also be presented.

Although the questionnaires sent to authors were generally similar, some questions did differ because they were specific to the author’s experience, background, the type of books and the language s/he writes in. For instance, Ntuli and Nxumalo are prolific writers who are more experienced in writing in Zulu genres than children’s literature. Sisulu, on the other hand, is the author of a picture storybook entitled The day Gogo went to vote which has been translated into the indigenous languages of South Africa. Niki Daly is a prolific writer of English children’s picture storybooks and some of his books have also been translated into indigenous African languages.

Responses received were limited which seems to indicate that some African academics do not take the genre of picture books seriously. This was indicated mostly by the limited manner in which they answered a question where they were asked to mention any three children’s books written in their language and their authors. There were only two answers to this question as some chose not
to respond to the questionnaire. One respondent mentioned only one book – written by him – while the second one responded as follows:

Yes, they are there but at present I cannot think of any book.

Secondly, a number of publishers have also shown some reluctance to develop and promote picture books written in the indigenous languages of South Africa. This became apparent when questionnaires were sent to more than twelve publishers; unfortunately, not all responded to the questionnaire. Surprisingly, the response was prompt when some of them were asked to send a list of Zulu children’s books that could be ordered and used for research purposes. This suggests that the sale of books is more important than research into their scarcity!

7.2 Questions and responses

While publishers of Afrikaans and English children’s literature in South Africa have progressed towards a wider and more comprehensive audience and market, indigenous African narratives for children are still searching for a viable market. This concern is corroborated by Sisulu’s response to the following question posed during an interview:

(a) What are your impressions of the literature for African children when compared to that for white children?

I think white middle class children have access to a much wider amount of literature and their culture is reflected in their literature. Whereas in the case of African children - they do not see themselves in the books. If you look at how we grew up, [you will realise that] we didn’t see ourselves in literature. I suppose we saw ourselves in the books we got in schools. I would say we don’t have that experience. And African children today first of all, they have fewer books and the books they get are far less in their own languages – reflecting their own experience (Sisulu, 2009).

The following question on the scarcity of children’s books for African children is followed by interesting and varied responses from various respondents:
Research has shown that there are no original storybooks that have been written in the indigenous (African) languages of South Africa. Do you agree and what could be the reason for this?

The responses from questionnaires were varied:

- It is true; there are very few trained writers in African languages. Training of prospective authors in creative writing should be a priority.

- I think it is because of the different cultures [multilingualism] and a lack of African writers.

- The reason could be that African languages were taught and learnt in the English medium; it is the apartheid factor.

- The education system has looked down upon the African languages, including the University of South Africa. In the libraries there are many French, Latin, Afrikaans dictionaries, etc. and only one Zulu dictionary; this is just the tip of the iceberg.

- Most of the authors are in favour of Western civilisation and African writers do not write storybooks. There are no authors who are interested in the indigenous languages and people who like these languages are regarded as old-fashioned.

- Most of the writers no longer write and they are killing our languages because they now write in English.

- The reason for the lack of books written in our languages is that English is the language of instruction. It is the lack of the use of the language.

- The shortage of writers, lack of motivation, lack of incentives for writers.

- Yes, the standard of contemporary writing should be raised. The reason could be Christianity or that people are scared to write [for children].

- It is because of modern technology and the times in which we live.

- Although we do have creative people, publishers choose their own writers – it depends on the people they know.
Most of these responses put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the African authors who are regarded as no longer interested in writing books in the indigenous languages. The apartheid regime has also had a hand in this by not motivating the publishing of children’s books in the languages while the new government is also to blame for elevating English above the African languages. This problem could be solved if the government, in collaboration with the publishers, made funds available for workshops to train African authors and interested school teachers. Secondly, the dominance of English and different cultures or languages used in the country is also viewed as a deterrent and an obstacle. Interviewees’ responses seem to echo some of the answers given in the questionnaires:

The other reason is the market, people who buy books, buy English books. The working class doesn’t buy story books for their children; they will only buy text books. In South Africa, the government doesn’t actually take the African languages seriously. They say because of the market people do not buy books and there are those black parents who say that they don’t see the books and they don’t know them. There are a lot of problems around access, the production of the books and the publishers. Concerning research about the written books I would say there are authentic books written in the indigenous languages of South Africa and not only in South Africa but also in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, because those are South African languages. In fact, it is said that there are more Sotho speakers in South Africa than are in Lesotho and same with Tswana and Swati. All the books of those countries are part and parcel of the literature of South Africa (Sisulu, 2009).

Authors lack models or examples from which they could learn; such books would have been available if Zulu authors had had an opportunity to read children’s storybooks. Publishers played a role in this because they were adamant and refused to publish children’s books.

In the interview with Nxumalo he reflected that the publishers argued that there was no one who would buy such books because:

... Ngoba esikweni lemfundo abantu ungathi uthenga incwadi kuphela ngoba idingeka esikolweni; ngoba uzohlowa ngayo. Nanamuhla lokhu basaphethwe yilokho, abayithengi incwadi babuza ukuthi, “Hawu nananje usafunda?” uma uphethe incwadi, bacabange ukuthi uyidinga

Amathuba okuthi incwadi ishicilelwe ayeme ekutheni incwadi ingathengwa. Kulithuntubeze ijubane lokubhala ngoba, abashicileli abafuni ukushicilela into ebizwa ngamaphoyisa amashalofu, incwadi ezohlala emashalofini.

Esikweni lemfundo, abantu ungathi uthenga incwadi kuphela ngoba idingeke esikolweni (Nxumalo, 2009).

(... according to people’s belief about reading, it seems that one only buys a book because if is for school use and one will be given tests based on the book. Even today, people still have that type of mentality; they do not buy a book and when they see you reading a book they ask, “My goodness! Are you still studying up to this day?” This happens because they associate the reading of a book with school and not with leisure. ... There are many teachers and educated people who do not buy a book and who do not even go to the library. They only go there when they want to go and do school work. There are books about Obama but they will not go and read them to find out what the books says about him. That is how I view how it happened. That is where things lagged behind/ progress was delayed and people were unable to get motivated.

A parent will never think of buying a book for a child, instead of doing so, s/he will buy a toy car, a doll and a toy gun. She will not buy a book because there is no culture of reading supplementary material. S/he thinks that a book is only read at school and as such, it is not necessary. As a result, even though others may have a desire to write
they get discouraged because they do not benefit. Sometimes you’ll find that they did write such books in the past but the books never landed in the hands of school children.

Chances of a book being published depend on the book not being bought. And this slows down the zeal and pace of writing because publishers do not want to publish a book that will languish on the shelves.

Nxumalo’s response reiterates what has been said above about the lack of support from publishers. However, publishers cannot take all the blame because every business needs to make a profit. In an interview with Ntuli he also refers to the reality of the fact that although publishers did attempt to publish in the African languages, these books were not bought by the public:

_Okokuqala njena, ukuthi abashicileli abaningi bathi bake bazizamela izincwadi bathola ukuthi azidayiseki, awukho umdlandla kubantu wokuzithenga ngoba invamisa yazo kuba izincwadi ezisabizayo ngoba kugqama izithombe njena nemali yokuzithenga ivamise ukuba imali enkulu. Ngakho-ke into ebahluphayo kakhulu abantu ukuthi uma ngabe ubhale incwadi noma ingaba yinhle kangakanani uma ingezuthengwa, ingekho imakethe yakhona- igcina ibhuntshile_ (Ntuli, 2009: 26 October).

(The first thing is that many publishers may have once made an effort to make these books available, only to find that it was difficult to sell them. People lack the motivation to buy them because usually they are books that are costly due to the fact that they have pictures and they are expensive. Thus, the biggest thing that bothers people is that it does not matter how beautiful the book may be, but if there is no one to purchase it – if it does not have any market - all efforts become futile.)

In his interview, Nxumalo suggests that the reason for an absence of a reading culture among many Africans may be that books are only associated with school. Sadly, this ignorance has spread to the educators too. It is indeed true that some school children in the few townships that had libraries only used them for study purposes and to do homework, as there was a lack of study space in their overcrowded homes. Fayose (2004) has commented on (see section
2.2.2…). Generally, African children have suffered the same fate as some of their parents and some of them are still languishing in the same predicament, hampered by the same social and educational constraints.

Lastly, parents cannot be regarded as irresponsible because they buy toys for their children. Children like to play and they need toys. On the other hand, white children grow up in an environment in which their parents read bedtime stories, and there is a culture of reading and buying books and where they visit libraries and read for pleasure, not only to study. It is thus not surprising that they grow up fond of books, asking their parents to buy them as presents for them and their friends and also receiving more books to read independently. All this points a finger at the apartheid government and the inferior education for the blacks, different from that of white children. Problems were exacerbated by the fact that many African schools did not have libraries. The few that did have did not use them for the intended purpose. Unfortunately, the situation is still much the same today at some schools.

Another question respondents were asked to answer required a more subjective answer, instead of their knowledge of the titles of children’s books. The question was phrased as follows:

(c) Are there enough children’s storybooks written in your language?

All respondents provided an answer to this question. More respondents replied in the negative, without even giving reasons for this, in comparison to those who agreed. This might indicate their lack of knowledge about such books. Those who said “yes” gave one of the following reasons:

- Yes, but we don’t have modern ones. There are no books written in our languages that reflect modern life.

The above response seems to refer to stories found in the school readers which have traditional settings and themes.
• Yes, but most of them are in English, the standard of writing contemporary books should be raised. We only use the old storybooks that were written by western writers. The respondent is aware of the availability of English picture books and of the contributions that were made by the missionaries.

The following question was posed to see how authors could be motivated to pen children’s books in their own languages:

(d) How can African authors be encouraged to write children’s books in their own languages?

Some of the respondents replied that they did not have any idea of how to do this. Others stipulated various reasons:

• African authors need to fight for their languages; they must ensure that they do not disappear.

• We need isiZulu as our first language. The teaching of African languages at school should be encouraged; the government should come up with ways on how the languages can be taught.

These are very important observations because children would love and know their languages if they were read stories written in their own languages from kindergarten. The following response offers suggestions of how this could be done:

• There must be funds from the government and picture books must be made compulsory at schools.

• Authors must interact with teenagers so as to be familiar with the way they think or the manner in which they do things. African authors should be developed and motivated.

The idea of making picture books compulsory in African schools cannot be over-emphasised. The funds for buying books should be discussed together with a budget for the building of a library at each and every school. Young children should be encouraged to use the library. This means that the school will have to have a school librarian who can issue books to children once they have
registered as members. Alternatively, in instances where this cannot be immediately implemented, there should be periods at school where children are told stories, read to or given time to read on their own for pleasure. As far as age-appropriate books with relevant themes for teenagers are concerned, this is not only imperative for juveniles but for young children as well. It would open authors’ eyes and expand their horizons if they could observe teenagers’ behaviour and interview them about the types of stories and themes they would be interested in reading about.

Many prescribed books for teenagers found in schools seem to be outdated and irrelevant to the present generation. Modern students need to read about romantic love and its problems as they experience them; how to handle peer pressure and other present-day challenges. Unfortunately, they do not see themselves in these. One teenager commented in a workshop and complained about the “boring” books written by old writers. She said that they were tired of reading old books that portrayed life and ways of doing things that were only relevant to their parents. Despite this, there exist in Zulu literature very few interesting and relevant juvenile books which have been recently published by young and developing authors such as, for instance, Dumisani Sibiya.

Other respondents observed:

- Authors need to first know about the importance of their languages, for instance, the Zulu language and history so that children should not forget where they come from. They should write about the value of our languages and about traditional children’s games. Children should know about their history, the use of the language and our culture.

These responses focus on some of the themes and content that authors should know and write about after they have been trained to write children’s books in their own languages. It would indeed benefit children if they could read about the history of their people, condensed in picture books:
Workshops and motivational seminars should be organised and authors should be given incentives and/or a special allowance. We are pleading with the writers to write Zulu children’s books as they are very scarce.

African authors need to be trained on how to write children’s storybooks. The books should make children love their culture. Books should inform children about their backgrounds and beliefs, for instance, they should be told why people who carry the surname Mathenjwa and Dlamini, respectively, do not eat goat and sheep meat. Children should know about their heroes and clan names (Nxumalo, 2009).

Here it is noted that books on culture are necessary, especially in a multiracial and multicultural country such as South Africa where people easily adopt other people’s cultures and languages and look down upon their own. Workshops on how to incorporate such topics could be of tremendous benefit.

The following interview responses are very important and informative. These responses speak for themselves. They should be heeded by all stakeholders and put into practise. Ntuli feels that:

- Publishers should have competitions for the writing of children’s books. They should stipulate rules and prescribe the relevant elements needed for a specific book. Such books should be read at crèches and they should also be available in the school libraries (Ntuli, 2009).

It is encouraging to see that some publishers, like Macmillan, are taking children’s literature written in the African languages seriously and are already engaged in such competitions. Daly believes these awards are very important:

I think they [authors] should be given lots of money! And they should be given first class treatment by publishers. They should be taken out for lavish dinners. They should be flattered and there should be… [laughs] … there should be no amount of expense spared to encourage writers to write.
I knew Sebastian Walker, and was one of the writers/illustrators he treated like a national treasure. He started paying writers and illustrators the sort of money that we could actually live on. He had a lot of style and gave us red carpet treatment. Up until then we were more accustomed to being treated like tradespeople by a lot of publishers. Anyway, Walker Books became a giant in children’s publishing because they knew how to attract the best and get the best, which you do by encouraging children’s writers – affording them the same prestige given to adult fiction writers. I think there ought to be some heavyweight South African awards for children’s literature. And there should be a decent system for reviewing children’s book in the media (Daly, 2009).

Sisulu agrees with Daly on the parlous state of publishing for children in South Africa as well as the scarcity of incentives for writers of this genre:

The problem is that there is no trade industry in children’s books written in the language of the child. We have textbooks; we don’t have a children’s educational industry. There is no system that encourages them to do research on the indigenous languages. There is no system that encourages people and pays them for their stories by giving them grants like academics get grants for their PhDs – to give them space to write so that they do not have to do anything. If it’s an old person, he should be given a computer and a research assistant to record and transcribe his stories. We didn’t have that kind of system for the people who actually are the repositories of the African languages, people who have knowledge – the elders in communities. There is no system which actually says “How are we going to get these people to get the oral, the richness of literary heritage and put it into a written form?” But also not to put it into the written form to but also to acknowledge them as the authors.

People must be given a reward for their efforts. We also need to make sure that these books are used in the education system, in the universities. If one writes a book and puts it on a shelf, it is not much help. Writers should be encouraged to write by giving them incentives. There should be a children’s literature department in the universities, especially at the University of South Africa, where people are taught how to review books, how to use the books in the system, to be able to give writers better writing skills for children’s literature courses for there is not much of that in South Africa (Sisulu, 2009).

Sisulu gives some additional advice on how to promote literacy and create a reading culture:
Make them aware of the importance of developing literacy. Children are the beginning of literacy development. More awareness campaigns on the importance of children’s literature. More academics need to be made aware of the importance of children’s literature. They should be paid for their work and works should be prescribed in schools (Sisulu, 2009).

The last question posed to respondents focuses on the type of topics that should be written about in African languages:

(e) What type of themes or content would you expect to find in a contemporary African children’s book?

The respondents suggested the following subject matter:

- The stories should be about modern life, reflecting the origin of a black person. They should be about the family tree.
- They must be about the importance of education, honesty, respect, culture, building of character and love.
- African value systems, beliefs and norms.
- They should be about Zulu rhymes, e.g. “uNomtopoyi” and about oral art.
- Folktales with moral lessons and poems and rhymes for children.
- Stories about wild animals, good and bad friends, and stories on how one should choose friends and about behaviour.
- Stories about the naming of places and history of old heroes.
- Children’s stories that carry messages about their languages and their uses, life skills, etc.

These responses point to the inclusion of themes that reflect both traditional and modern life. These themes have already been discussed in the study, for instance, there is a game song about uNomtopoyi, which discourages laziness. Some important themes are suggested here because one has to know where one comes from and one must be rooted in one’s culture before one can take any bold step into the future.
Other responses were varied and included themes that reflect children’s environments:

- They should be about villages and urban life experiences, cooperation and harmonious existence, *ubuntu*, sports, music, culture, cattle and heroes, so that children will be motivated to be like them.

- Modern houses, schools, supermarkets and the life surrounding them.

- Theme and content should be about unbelievable [imaginary] things, animals, domestic animals, children playing with their dolls or make-believe dolls, e.g. placing a small branch on their back pretending it is a baby, etc.

These responses from questionnaires and interviews shed light on issues concerning the writing of children’s literature in the indigenous languages of South Africa. Suggestions of what to do to ensure that this is taken seriously by various stakeholders have been made. The acceleration of the writing of authentic, age-appropriate and culturally relevant children’s books in the indigenous languages was particularly highlighted. However, all responses have made one huge omission. The subject of illustrators and the importance of illustrations were conspicuous by its absence. This is one of the most important elements in the writing of picture books, and its absence speaks volumes about other problems to do with the publishing of picture books in the African languages. It suggests that many Africans do not understand what picture books are or how they can be used. Illustrations in books did not form part of their school life and furthermore, there are very few trained African illustrators! This suggests too that drawing has until recently not been part of the syllabus in some South African schools. As such, schoolchildren have been denied this important element of education. Visual literacy skills were not emphasised and children relied solely on words in the text. This makes it imperative for the Department of Education to introduce drawing to all African schools and not to concentrate only on singing.
The following section focuses on interviews and responses provided by a prolific author and illustrator who has had a number of his children’s books translated into indigenous African languages. These responses should give readers and researchers with little experience some idea about the writing and illustration of children’s storybooks. Furthermore, it is hoped that the discussion will further benefit those who are already conversant with this topic.

7.3 Through the eyes of the writer/illustrator: A perspective on the writing and illustration of picture storybooks

The following information is part of an interview held with Niki Daly, an internationally acclaimed South African writer and illustrator of children’s storybooks. Several of his works such as the Jamela series e.g. *Ingubo kaJamela* (Jamela’s dress), *UJamela ukuphi?* (Where’s Jamela?), and other books like *uSalma omuhle* (Pretty Salma) and *uMgwayo uZanzibar* (Zanzibar road) have been translated into South African indigenous languages, including Zulu. The information from the interview, although rather lengthy, is vital as it provides an idea of how a writer conceives and gives birth to his ideas by concretising them in a picture storybook. The rationale for doing this is that given that there are no established, prolific and/or full-time children’s authors who have written children’s books in the indigenous languages of South Africa, future children’s authors might be encouraged to write in these languages and benefit from Daly’s experience. The researcher’s attempts to interview two of South Africa’s renowned women’s writers, who have also have written some children’s books, were unsuccessful because of their work engagements and hectic schedules. However, some of their works have been used in the study. Not all responses from the chosen section of the whole interview will be analysed in detail as some responses are self-explanatory. Also, the reader may make her/his own interpretations of the written form.

Interview with Niki Daly - children’s author and illustrator - conducted by Cynthia Daphne Danisile Ntuli in Cape Town, 16 October 2009.
Edited by Niki Daly on 14 September 2010.
Dear Nikki, I’ve heard that you have written more than 40 children’s books. What inspired you to write so many children’s books?

Well, that answer comes in two parts. The first, which is the simplest and most honest, probably, is because it’s the way I earn my living! [Laughs] ... Plus, since I was a child I’ve always enjoyed drawing and spent all my spare time making pictures. So what better job is there for me to do than be paid for drawing every day. But on a practical level, it’s a job and it’s a job that I love doing.

Why did you choose to write for children?

Well, I care very deeply about children and I see my writing as a way of communicating with them, and what I want to communicate are all the good things about my life and about life in general; to give children a feeling that life is exciting, that it has infinite potential. Also, that life can be complicated with problems that need to be solved. But there’s usually in my books an ally that helps my characters to solve their problems, or fulfil their dreams and to remain hopeful.

I think, I’ve found in children’s literature a real place for myself, which is very satisfying and that’s confirmed by parents or librarians (mostly) and then children, when they’re given a chance to talk – to tell me they’ve enjoyed my books and they’ve meant something to them. Then there’s also a political angle to what I do. I mean, in a very wide sense of politics – the struggle for power starts within the family, not so?

What do you mean by “struggle for power”? Please expand on this.

Like, who has the power, who wants the power – and, let’s face it, children are way down the power ladder. I have a great sympathy for these little people who are in our lives by our invitation – that life can be made so difficult for them sometimes by some adults. ... So, some books can be useful in showing children how they can empower themselves. For instance, in many of my books, I feature a solitary child trying to achieve their goal – with or without the help of a parent. Often, the assistance comes from some sympathetic person outside the family circle.

Can you give me an example of this from one of your books?
ND  *Papa Lucky’s Shadow* is a good example. Mamma isn’t happy with the little girl learning to dance, and going off into the city with her grandfather – an old tap dancer – to earn some extra money dancing on the pavements. Her grandfather is the one who encourages her to dance – “in his shadow”. In *Once Upon a Time*, it’s not Sarie’s parents who help her become a confident reader but “Ou Missus” – a lonely old lady on the farm. You’ll find “fairy godmother/father” figures occurring in a number of my books.

In this part of the interview, it is clear that Daly is a prolific writer who has written many children’s books in his own language, English. From the discussion it emerges that writing is a God-given talent that stems from a gift for drawing, which he discovered as a young child. Daly seems to be one of a few people who writes children’s books because it is a job that he loves, but which also has financial benefits. He demonstrates that writing for children is not a one-way street but a means of communication whereby a writer imparts something to his young readers. Writers use their stories to teach children about life in general and how to solve problems they encounter in particular. The interview reveals too that it is important that stories should give children hope. Furthermore, the reader’s response or feedback is very important for the writer for it can serve to motivate and steer him in the right direction. The author feels happy when he realises that people appreciate and cherish what he is doing.

Daly’s explanation of how he portrays the struggle for power in children’s books is insightful, despite the fact that he gives examples from some of the books not translated into the African languages. In the next section of the interview Daly comments on the theme of a girl and why he prefers to write stories about girls. He also discusses the innovative and practical method he follows to understand the behaviour, voices, feelings, likes and dislikes of some characters, e.g. twelve-year-old young girls. Some of his comments explain why story picture books need to have a limited number of characters and pages. Although the section concentrates mainly on how to write a children’s storybook, instead of picture books in general, it also points out that writing a children’s book is not as easy as it seems. The following quote by Roald Dahl attests to this:
I am fairly sure that it is more difficult to write a fine and enduring children’s book than a fine enduring novel. My reason for making this contentious statement is as follows. How many adult novels are written every year that will be read widely twenty years later? Probably about half a dozen. How many children’s books are written every year that will still be read widely and avidly twenty years later? Possibly one (1985: 15).

This statement is an indirect reminder of the limited number of African writers who write for children in the indigenous languages, particularly women writers. In Zulu, for instance, there are a fairly large number of male writers who write in different genres, but they do not write children’s books. One of the reasons for this may be that they realise that writing a child’s book is not child’s play.

The interview continues:

DN So you seem to be drawing from your own character, and yet you often write about the girl child?

ND I’m not quite sure why that is so, perhaps it’s just that I think little girls are nicer to write about – to draw – or maybe I spent more time with my sister’s friends than I did with my brother’s friends, who were like a lot of thugs! So to hang out with them you knew you’d get roughed up. Whereas, the girls were more gentle and full of fun.

DN And they are the ones who are vulnerable sometimes, they need to be empowered to present the image of girls who are strong and capable.

ND Yes, yes. So, I feel very comfortable writing with girls as the main characters. Preparing for the most recent publication of mine - *Bettina Valentino and the Picasso Club*, which has been published in America and is due to be published and translated into Afrikaans here – I went a step further . . . stepping into the shoes of a Grade Five girl to find out what makes them tick. What I did was this – I interviewed Grade fives at Springfield Primary, learning their innermost secrets! You know, like what they keep in their handbags, what is their most precious possession, that sort of thing. The answers were great! The answer to “what do they do on a bad hair day?” was – “blame the brother!”

DN So you were also giving them an idea of how to write a book from research?
Yes, and in turn plugged into the energy that I knew was in 12-year-old girls – which is a delightful energy. Girl Power! You know, they spend a lot of time just having fun, a lot of giggling or testing out their newly discovered sophistication. You can hear them imitate their mothers; using expressions that you can tell come straight from their mums’ mouths. So, it’s an interesting age, where they can go from being little girls and playing with girl’s things to becoming quite sophisticated – experimenting with a little bit of makeup . . . and so on.

Your books always seem to have one child that is central to the story. Why is that?

Well, as I mentioned, the solitary child seems to be a big theme for me. Even Jamela is seen on her own in the company of adults. I suspect it’s most unlikely that you would ever see a child on her own in a township. They’re going to be with brothers, sisters, friends or whatever. But for the sake of the kind of story I like to write – or maybe, just end up writing – I settle for one child. I think, partly, it’s a practical, logistical kind of choice to limit my characters, because the more characters you include in a picture book, the more dialogue. And the more words, the less space for pictures. And as I make “picture books” – I like using most of the space for my pictures.

How many pages do you need for a picture book?

Conventionally – 32 pages. It’s a neat format. So, to keep it that way, I work with limitations. Besides, it’s just easier to draw one child than a whole lot of children!


I once heard a lovely description of the quality that should be found in a children’s book. It comes from Frieda Linda, now an old retired children’s book writer. What Frieda said was – children’s books must have vitality. They must be written in a vital way, about vital matters – because children are vital beings and they are not going to respond well to writing that lacks vitality and reads like some didactic, destructive, moralistic tract. That kind of writing just dampens the spirit of a child. So, when you get a book that uplifts children, that makes children feel liberated, then I think you’re working with positive energy.

The trouble is – many people assume that writing a children’s book is easy because you don’t have to be “literary”; as though anyone can knock out a children’s story over a weekend. Well,
there ought not to be much text, but people are very, very mistaken when they think that it can be done easily. On the contrary, it’s a genre that is as finely tuned and structured as other forms of writing are – from a haiku four liner to a 500 page epic. A children’s book is a specific form with particular requirements. And if you don’t understand that, you can go badly wrong trying to write for children.

DN

I’ve realised that you’ve used the word “vital” a few times. Can you explain and give me an example of this “vitality” from one of Jamela’s books?

ND

I think all the Jamela books are vital because you can see it in her body . . . she’s full of life. I draw her very often with…

DN

Action, yes.

ND

That’s right. She doesn’t sit down very much. She’s always on the go.

DN

Full of energy.

ND

Yes, I think that for me one of the most satisfying pictures that I’ve drawn is the title page for Jamela’s Dress – where there’s a sort of parade of kids and Mrs Zibi all following Jamela, wrapped in her Mama’s lovely fabric. That to me has music. I can hear the sounds and smell the dust – that’s the kind of illustrator I am. I’m not an illustrator that goes in for great detail or great technical effects. I’m the sort of illustrator who tries to capture life’s energy and vitality on paper!

DN

And you succeeded! When I translated it I could feel that you really captured it all. I like that book very much.

ND

I’m glad to hear you say that, Danisile. Illustrating a children’s book is quite similar, I think, to acting because as an actor takes on a role and internalises all the feelings of his character and illustrator, he must also feel the characters he brings alive on paper. Some of the ways in which I’m using my hands and facial expressions now is the way my characters will move on a page … or give the illusion of moving.

DN

You are advantaged in that you are both an author and an illustrator; I have a feeling that you are truly blessed.

ND

I am also a musician and a singer. Yes, I’m blessed.

DN

Aye, you are lucky! I wish I could draw.
Well, I think rhythm is very important in writing for children because lyrical writing sounds good on the ear. Song writing prepared me well for writing for children. The only way I can test if my writing is successful or not is by reading it aloud and hearing how it sounds. When it sounds right and my tongue’s not stumbling over words – when it’s as fluid as a song – then I can say “I think I wrote that well!”

The above dialogue proves the advantage and benefit the writer has if s/he is also an illustrator and musically inclined. The importance of the presence of rhythm in young children’s literature is highlighted as it appeals to the eyes and ears of small children. When one writes for children one should have some way of testing and appraising oneself, as Daly attests:

When it sounds right and my tongue’s not stumbling over words – when it’s as fluid as a song - then I can say “I think I wrote that well!”

Daly’s responses are typical of a writer and illustrator for as one reads, one can actually view the illustrations of children’s books as “actors” and some rhythmical words propelling the “actor” to dance to the sounds of the “lyrical writing” that appeals to the senses of hearing and sight. All these elements bring delight to the child while teaching her/him something about the language and the environment. At the same time, the mental pictures plant a reading seed, wooing her/him to the pleasure of reading and unwittingly inculcating a love for books.

The interview turns to examining the establishment and the politics of the publishing of children’s books:

DN Now, as a writer and founder of Songololo Books, one of your aims and intentions written in your mission statement says that “we aim to create a book list respectful of children’s rights and free of sexism and racism as well as books which enrich the imagination of children, books which may be regarded as gifts of love”. Tell me about Songololo Books.

ND I established Songololo Books while working at David Philip Publishers. It was my “baby” and David and Marie Philip gave me
all the support I needed to publish some great books. Years later, Songololo Books was sold, along with David Philip Publishers, to New Africa Books. After that, Songololo Books was bought by Shuter and Shooter - so the list has had three homes.

DN That’s interesting.

ND Our original mission statement was very simple: it said “Books for all our children”.

DN That’s nice, regardless of race.

ND That was significant because I felt, rightly or wrongly, that children’s books published at that time in South Africa did not look as though they were for “all our children”. They seemed directed at English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking white children and thrust on black children through school libraries and prescribed reading schemes – whether they were relevant or not.

There were these books in which black kids appeared very much as token players - usually in stories set against a rural backdrop. That was understandable because that’s, generally, where white children and black children formed friendships – on farms. When I was at Songololo Books I was still getting those kinds of stories sent to me in which a black child was always cast in a token role. The story never fully centred on the black child. Black characters were inevitably on the periphery of any action – bystanders – gawping at the antics of their white counterparts. The illustrations would reflect that as well, you would always see black children looking on with great admiration as the white kid did this or that! The stories were formulaic. It seemed the only reason that good things would happen to black children was because they either saved a tractor from burning or the farmer’s wife from drowning, or some other heroic deed that would earn them a reward. I thought it was terribly unfair, sad and repetitive – and worst of all, racist and patronising. So, what we tried to do was find stories that were out of the box. One of those was Charlie’s House, which dealt with a family who lived in a shack. Charlie’s House was written by Reviva Schermbrucker who knew the family on whom the story was based.

DN But it’s also a story about the power of imagination, isn’t it?

ND Yes, Charlie’s a very resourceful child whose dream is to build his own house with a room for his Gogo, his mum, and one for himself. He fills it with a television and all the things other people can afford. You see Charlie building his house in a back lane of
some township, using sticks, mud and scraps of rubbish that he finds lying around. I think it's a beautiful book.

A friend who was teaching kids from different backgrounds explained to me that those who lived in “nice houses” — brick houses — looked down on those who lived in shacks.

One little “shack boy”, who had never come forward in any group discussion, suddenly had something to add after Charlie’s House was read in the class. At last there was a boy like him in a book who lived in the same kind of house as his, and he was able to identify with Charlie — the book gave him some recognition.

So, I believe that books can provide “bridges of understanding” between children. Quite a few of the Songololo Books featured children who had previously never appeared in children’s books as fully fledged characters — central to their own story. Oh, and there was also One Round Moon and a Star for Me, written by Ingrid Mennen and set in Lesotho, which I think is a fine book.

DN Would you say that Not So Fast, Songololo started the trend for “books for all our children”?

ND I believe it is recognised as a forerunner of what we might refer to as “post-apartheid children’s picture books”.

The following part of the interview provides a general idea of how a writer may take some inspiration from the environment in which s/he lives to write a book. This includes ideas about theme, setting, relevant characters, their behaviour and their way of life. This approach is helpful because it allows the author to understand, to a certain extent, other people's cultures. Daly shows some concern and trepidation about writing stories about people other than his own.

DN Where did the idea for Not So Fast Songololo come from?

ND Like a number of my ideas, it was hatched out on the street; being in the right place at the right time.

One Christmas – maybe the first or second Christmas after my return to South Africa — I was walking along a crowded main road in Claremont and spotted a large Gogo and her tiny grandson. They weren’t walking next to one another, but I could see that they were connected because every now and again the little boy would glance over his shoulder to make sure his old Gogo was still following. I was fascinated by the scene because it conjured
memories of going shopping with my grandmother – you see, I’d go shopping with her when I needed new shoes; my mother seemed never to notice when our soles started to come away and flap. But my grandmother did and would say “come, let’s go and get you a pair of new shoes”. So when I saw this Gogo with the little boy, I wondered: Where are they going? Where do they come from? Who are they? Now, the minute you ask those questions and imagine what the answers might be, well, you’re writing a story.

Another public sighting that led to a story was something I saw on the beach. It occurred soon after the scrapping of the separate amenities including Fish Hoek beach. It was so very clear that the beach had opened up to all races because there were far more brown skins to be seen against the white sand, I mean people who didn’t even need to tan! [Laughs].

DN [Laughs].

ND So there I was, sitting on this previously “All White” beach and amongst these white sand dunes I spotted a little brown-skinned boy – and he just looked so wonderful. Well, I’m an artist and I respond to details that other people might not find interesting or significant. So I could see the potential in what I was looking at in terms of illustration. This brown skinned boy and this white beach – The Boy and The Beach was the result. Sorry, I’ve rather wondered off . . .

DN Ja, but you’ve given me information I would not have had if you didn’t wander off. And this gives me an idea for a comparative study about our books that have been written by our own black authors and yours … the different perspectives.

ND Yes, the differences are interesting. And there are always questions that hang over anyone who writes outside their own culture or experience. In my case, it might be, “How can a white man – a white South African male, nogal – write books that could ever authentically reflect a black experience?”

Well, I call myself a child of apartheid because I was sort of born into it, lived through it and am undoubtedly shaped by it. So when somebody asks me that question …

Daly’s concern is valid and indicates his awareness of some of these political issues. Some stakeholders like African authors and academics are displeased by this. They question some Western authors’ tendency to write stories about
Africans whose culture they know nothing about, as can be seen in the following extract:

Writing and illustrating out of one’s culture is a challenge, especially if the pictures included in the books communicate “misinformation” about the culture in question and perpetuate stereotypes. This has been and continues to be the plight of African culture depicted in children’s books that are illustrated and/or written by those who hail from the West and the United States in particular (Yenika-Agbaw, 2008:17).

Fortunately, in Daly’s books when he writes about Africans, this seems not to be the case because, as already discussed, before he writes such a book he starts by observing and researching his characters and their way of life. Secondly, his advantage is that he writes fiction about people with whom he lives. Thirdly, as a white South African male, he is wise enough to steer away from writing specifically about other people’s culture because he seems aware that this is something of which he has very little knowledge. He should be commended for his beautiful and bright illustrations, for instance, in the Jamela series, that are a true reflection of the black African people of South Africa, the places they live and their way of interacting with one another. This empathy is also reflected in the names of some of his characters.

As noted above, publishers are often part of the problems (and the solutions) that plagues the publishing of children’s literature on this continent. According to Yenika-Agbaw:

One major reason why this problem has endured over the decades is because the big publishing houses “scurry” for literature that depicts human diversity. Unable to get “authentic” stories and pictures from Africans in Africa for various socio-political reasons, these publishers resort to using established illustrators/writers in the West (some of whom have lived in or visited different countries in Africa) (2008: 17).

Problems like these clearly illustrate that African authors need to be urged to write children’s books about their own people and experiences that will reflect their own culture as lived, experienced and seen through their own eyes. This
points to an urgent call to all stakeholders to earnestly consider the nurturing and training of African authors and of illustrators of children’s books as well.

Daly acquires many of his ideas from his childhood memories, as explained in the discussion of a point of view from the Jamela series:

DN Your books about Jamela are regarded as very interesting since they portray the lives and settings of blacks in the townships. How did that series come about?

ND My publisher’s cousin who was living in Australia had an idea to make children’s dresses out of Amablou material – for the Australian market, for the millions of South Africans living there. She figured they’d really go for these ethnic looking kid’s clothes. So, my publisher thought if I did a book featuring the cloth and his designer-cousin made and marketed the dresses and the books – well, it could be quite an interesting business venture. But she never got her side of it together so I shelved the story, which came to me during a visit to a mission station called Mamreweg.

DN What story was that?

ND I remember seeing a group of little village girls sitting and giggling in the sunshine. Just beyond them was a washing line with a pretty Sunday “mama’s best dress” hanging on the line. I imagined what might happen if one of those little girls took that dress off the line, put it on, and started doing a fashion parade around the village? That could be a nice story – about a little girl getting into a whole lot of trouble. And that turned into Jamela’s Dress. But as in all my writing, I sort of merge fact and fiction. That is, I take a made up story and merge it with an event, or memory, from my own childhood. That way the story feels “emotionally true”.

DN For instance?

ND For instance, I remember once going into my father’s work shed where he kept all his tools. He was a cabinet maker and made great furniture and stuff. I wrote about my father in the book called My Dad, published by Anansi. Anyway, I was fiddling around with his tools, and broke one of his chisels. I knew my father had a very short temper so I made a quick exit. It was a Saturday and I stayed away as long as possible. I didn’t have lunch and by evening time it was getting cold and I was hungry. I thought, I’ve got to go home.

DN I’m getting scared!
Not as scared as I felt! Well, there he was waiting for me on the stoep. I can see him now – my absence had given him time to get really very angry.

And what happened?

I got the *klap*! So you see, it’s this kind of memory that I connect with when dealing with certain kinds of emotional situations in storytelling. Poor Jamela just got lost in a dream while wrapping herself in that material, and before she knew it she was in deep, deep trouble.

Shame!

And it didn’t help showing off her dress to her aunt. “Jamela,” said her aunt, “Your mama’s going to be very, very cross when she sees what you’ve done!” and Mamma was cross, she was so cross she couldn’t even talk to Jamela.

At this point it seems fitting for the researcher to write the translated Zulu version of the passage:

*Hheyi, wena Jamela! Unyoko uzothukuthela kabikabi uma ebona ukuthi wenzeni ngendwangu yakhe!” Nangempela kwabanjalo. UMama wayethukuthele egane unwabu, engasakwazi nokubuka uJamela (1999: 15 (pages unnumbered)).*

I would have been cross too.

Even Jamela was cross with Jamela! [laughs].

[Laughs].

So you see I’m using language that expresses the doom a child feels when they get into that sort of mess. And when you look at that picture of Jamela accompanying the text – “even Jamela was cross with Jamela” – you can see in her body just how upset she is; how alienated she feels from her Mama and friends who are all so fed up with her. It’s a serious moment!

It is said that a picture says a thousand words! The crisis, concern, worry and misgivings are artistically laid bare in this illustration that precedes the extract that is translated into Zulu above:
The picture complements the written text as it conveys non-verbal cues portrayed by the characters. Jamela’s tense pose, her leaning against the wall while eavesdropping on the conversation of the adults, says it all! Especially the sucking of her thumb, with a pitiful, puppy-look in her eyes – typical behaviour which, under the circumstances, one would expect from a child of Jamela’s age. The illustrator’s skill, ingenuity and dexterity are perfectly represented in the illustration.

The above translated version by Ntuli also has a merit of its own. The translator shows that this is not merely a word-for-word translation, but a harmonised piece in line with the natural Zulu way of speaking. She has added to the English text, by using a Zulu idiom that reveals an emotion of extreme anger:

(Mama was cross; she was so cross she couldn’t even talk to Jamela.)

The phrase “she was so cross” has been extended by using the idiom Wayethukuthele egane unwabu which means she was so angry that she got married to a chameleon. The researcher could, unfortunately, not find the origin of this idiom. However, it could mean that she was so angry that she changed colour like a chameleon does.

DN Yes but it’s so nice and well written. Next question – of the five Jamela stories – which one is your favourite and why?

ND They are all very different, I don’t think I’ve got a favourite because, you know why, Danisile? – it’s because the whole Jamela series is one big story that echoes some important social changes as I’ve experienced them where I live, since ’94 and the scrapping of group areas and all the other crazy apartheid legislation.

DN Can you touch on some of the changes?

ND Okay, starting with Jamela, her mom and Gogo living in a township – it’s clear that they don’t have very much money. When Mama buys material for a new dress she has to consider the price very carefully. The next in the series is Yebo! Jamela – a Christmas story that still has a township setting – but it appears that the family is able to afford a nice Christmas meal and that life is becoming a bit easier. So, for the first two Jamela books I looked towards the townships for my references; the way houses looked, the street life, and so on. Meanwhile, during the course of doing the Jamela series, my own neighbourhood was undergoing some amazing changes – other race groups started to move in. Soon, my street grew into the sort of street that I wanted to illustrate. So, it made sense to move Jamela out of the township and into my street – into my house as a matter of fact!

DN And where did the name “Jamela” come from?

ND I overheard my neighbour, Mrs Mdingi, calling her daughter, “Jamela!” and thought, that’s a nice name! I think that’s a beautiful name and I’m going to use that name for my new character.

DN So Where’s Jamela? reflects a time when people started to move away from the townships into the suburbs?
Yes, it echoes the social, political and economic shift that gave people the right and option to live where they could afford to live.

What social changes did you include in *Happy Birthday Jamela*?

In *Happy Birthday Jamela*, you see Jamela branching out into a culturally diverse neighbourhood. There’s her friend Lilly the bead worker and Amin, the fruit seller, plus a mixture of children who reflect my Mowbray community.

*A Song for Jamela* includes “Afro Idols”. You are reflecting some popular culture here, something that can be enjoyed by all race groups, yes?

In *A Song for Jamela*, by the illustrations of the house, the clothes and hairstyles we understand that Jamela’s family has improved their financial status even further. You’ll remember that in *Where’s Jamela*? Mama gets that letter of appointment for a new job, and while never stated in the text, one can presume that it puts the family on the road to prosperity. Through the series Jamela has gone from being “a township girl” to being “a girl about town”. There’s nothing wrong with remaining in the township, of course. I’m simply reflecting some changes in our ever changing South Africa, and at the same time bringing Jamela home to me, where — as a fictional character — she belongs!

For your research, I see you had to visit some hairdressing salons?

Yes, for some reason Mowbray is a sort of Mecca of hairdressing salons. And it was great fun to do research along the main road where they are packed — one next to the other. I can tell you, I got some funny looks! I could see on the faces of the hairdressers’ complete bewilderment. Like, “What does this bald white man coming into my salon want to know so much about braiding, corn rows and what have you?” You saw me in Yoli’s Hairdressing Salon, didn’t you?

Yes I saw that on the DVD.

That was great fun to film. Right there — in the middle of a world that is fictional as well as real to me.

Daly also comments on the downside of writing and illustrating for children, especially in South Africa:
Mm, that's quite interesting. So do you have any intentions to continue with this series?

Sadly, no. You see, I depend on my international publishers to publish my work. And if they say no more, then it's no more. I think my South African publishers would be happy for the series to continue. But if I were to exist entirely on my income made in South Africa, well, I'd be very poor, very poor. In fact, I wouldn't be able to illustrate full time. I would have to teach. You simply cannot earn a living in South Africa as a children's book writer and illustrator – which leads back to your question regarding the absence of black writers and black illustrators of children's books. The fact is that, the small financial gains to be made out of children's books in South Africa are hardly enough to draw young people from disadvantaged backgrounds that are looking for a better life for themselves. They aren't going to find financial security in the high risk business of writing and illustrating children's books; it makes no sense for poor black kids to choose such a financially unrewarding career. It also explains why children's book writers and illustrators are mostly artistic, white married females who see it as a nice way of earning some spare cash.

This extract of the interview has touched on various issues to do with the writing and illustration of children's books. In the previous chapter, the contributions made by the missionaries to the writing of Zulu children's books were discussed. This part of the interview with Niki Daly concerning the Jamela series was particularly revealing. It reminds us that the white man's important contribution, through the translation of English books, cannot be overlooked. However, some seasoned African writers prefer to write adult fiction in English, and not in their mother tongue, which poses the questions: why then are there so few children's storybooks written by these black South African authors, even in English? Or in their home language, and translated into other African languages? Must Africa always rely on feeding off others? Is this the result of ignorance about the genre or is it a financial issue?

Surely some of these writers buy books for their own children and those of their family members? Surely they have read children's books written in English or Afrikaans to their children? If they had written books it would have given all children the opportunity to read about their own culture and that of fellow black
South Africans. This would not necessarily promote reliance on translated versions. When he was asked his view of the practice of translating English children’s books into African languages, in the interview, Ntuli responded as follows:


Here Ntuli remarks on some of the problems pertaining to the contents found in translated books such as using a milieu that is foreign to the intended readers. He says that children from the rural areas read books that have Whites as characters who live in European houses and who use European utensils and toys. He observes that this causes problems because this is in contrast to the life lived by these children. However, he praises books that use African characters and settings. He concludes by making an appeal:


(Therefore, we acknowledge and encourage the fact that nowadays there are different communities; the rural and the urban communities. But if it is a series of books, it would be better if they reflect both the rural and urban type of life so that children from the rural areas can read about the urban life as well. We believe that there is a need for writing for and teaching children in their own languages and that translated books should come last.)

Ntuli’s response reveals that although he acknowledges the translated versions, he believes that it is important for books to be written in the child’s own
language and that they reflect settings where children themselves live. He also mentions the fact that there is a gap that should be filled by all stakeholders and that translated books should not overshadow authentic books written in African languages.

His response emphasises the undeniable fact that African authors, especially women and teachers who are conversant with the language, should be encouraged to write authentic children’s picture books in their own languages. It is important to make women authors cognisant of this because they are the ones who feature most in children’s surroundings and who are better equipped to write for them. This notion is expressed by Dahl:

When it comes to writing classic children’s books, women triumph over men. They are pretty good at novels, they are better still at ghost stories, but they are best of all at children’s books (1985: 15).

Furthermore, the interview with Niki Daly has shown how creative writing for children is conceived and concretised by the author. Writing for children is a process which is not always easy as the writer has to possess particular qualities. An author has to have the skill, talent and passion for writing. If an author lacks illustration skills he or the publishers can bring in someone to draw pictures; the words in the book should complement the illustrations. Daly impressed upon the researcher that writing is a form of communicating various aspects of life. The author has to understand the genre he is writing in. The language should be used both literally and figuratively in order to paint beautiful pictures with words that touch the senses of the reader. Children’s stories should be interesting and spiced with humour in order to delight them. As the creator of the story, an author has to be an observant person who takes time to do research about the chosen theme and the characters he wishes to portray. Daly also cautioned against African children being portrayed as “token players” in books written by Europeans. Writers should be careful about how they portray characters from their own background. This means that readers and researchers should scrutinise the role played by children in children’s books.
It is imperative for the writer to be aware of the age of the targeted reader in order to use simple and age-appropriate language. He needs to know about such children’s likes and dislikes, emotions, wishes, dreams, etc. The interview also highlights the point that a storybook should have a story line with a beginning, middle and an end. Furthermore, the story should preferably end on a happy note or give children hope and empower them to deal with life. Daly observed that writing for children is not as easy as it looks as it has specific requirements and characteristics, such as those mentioned above. It is a difficult but fulfilling job that has its pains and pleasures. Most importantly, the interview reveals that one can best write a children’s story by tapping into one’s own experience.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined various issues that have led to the scarcity and slow development of children’s literature written in South African indigenous languages. It also focussed on the reasons for African authors’ reluctance to write children’s books in their home languages. Some possible solutions were derived from a number of stakeholders who responded to the interviews and questionnaires. These responses revealed that the shortage of authentic children’s books in African languages, picture books in particular, could be the result of a lack of training in the writing of such books, a lack of incentives and publishers’ unwillingness to publish books which may not be profitable. The chapter also underscored the demand for training of African authors and illustrators of children’s books. All respondents agreed that authors should be rewarded for their talents and efforts. Lastly, a great deal of valuable information on the writing and illustration of picture storybooks was drawn from an interview with Niki Daly, an author and illustrator of children’s books. His responses provided insight into the process of writing children’s storybooks.
CHAPTER 8

GENERAL CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

Children’s literature transcends boundaries as it is a universally inherited experience common to all communities, irrespective of colour or creed. It has its roots in traditional oral societies where nursery rhymes, lullabies, game songs and folktales were passed down from one generation to the next. In non-literate African societies, performance was used as, amongst other things, an instrument to socialise, entertain and informally teach children. As people became literate, school and reading ushered in an era of written children’s literature where books took centre stage. This concluding chapter provides a summary of the study by discussing research findings, limitations and recommendations for future research.

8.2 Research findings

In the introductory chapter of this thesis an assertion was made that the writing and publication of indigenous children’s books in South Africa is a genre that has been neglected by all stakeholders. Additionally, it was said that research on this subject was limited and this was still unexplored territory which researchers, African researchers in particular, appear to have steered clear of. The primary aim of this study was to arouse interest in this field of research to further development of authentic contemporary children’s books written in the vernacular. The following is a synopsis of the research findings:

The research has revealed that Zulu traditional oral children’s literature has been in existence since time immemorial and can be divided into folktales and traditional poetry (*imilolozele* and *izilandelo*). Women like the grandmother and aunt, as custodians of the language and people who were close to children,
seem to have been the main composers, performers and transmitters of Zulu folktales. Additionally, the composition of lullabies as a simple form of poetry was a product of the creative skills of a child’s mother, *ugogo* or a female childminder. *Izidaliso* or *izangelo* have also distinguished themselves as a sub-genre of children’s game songs, composed by the bride for specific and personal reasons. *Izilandelo*, Zulu game songs seem to have been composed by adults for older children.

The categorisation of Zulu children’s poetry has posed a problem for Zulu authors as well. Some authors gave them the umbrella term of *imilolozelo* while others differentiated between *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo*. Lines of differentiation between *imilolozelo*, *izilandelo*, *izidaliso* and *izangelo* appear to be blurred. Researchers like Fraser and Kunene, who have conducted research into Zulu oral children’s poetry, do not provide a clear distinction between *imilolozelo* and *izilandelo*. Fraser has adopted the comprehensive Zulu term and refers to them as *imilolozelo* (lullabies). Kunene, on the other hand, has imported a western term and refers to them as nursery rhymes. *Imilolozelo* he calls *simple nursery rhymes* and *izilandelo*, *complex nursery rhymes*. From this researcher’s point of view, children’s oral poetry in Zulu may be divided into three types: *imilolozelo*, *izidaliso/izangelo* and *izilandelo*. The rationale behind this is that the three have different functions and are performed in different circumstances and for a different audience. *Imilolozelo* are used mainly to lull a child to sleep while *izangelo* are used to bring joy and love to a woman’s child. They are used by the bride, who is also the mother to the child, as a channel to voice her thoughts and emotions. It was pointed out that, during a performance of *izangelo*, younger children would be present in the vicinity while in the case of *izilandelo*; the location was away from the home precinct. Also, there were no adults around as young children acted interchangeably as performers and audience. Lastly, *izilandelo* are sometimes longer than *imilolozelo* and *izangelo*. Furthermore, this study found that no research has been done on the type of game song called *izidaliso/izangelo* – a work of art originating from *umakoti* (the bride).
It was felt that research should be conducted on existing children’s game songs but also on those which have not yet been recorded. Research could also be carried out on game songs featuring archaic and clichéd words whose meaning is difficult to comprehend. In such cases, senior citizens as the custodians of the language, and retired scholars could be given grants to tackle the task. The viewpoints of these adults could bring new insights to the history and moral lessons of some children’s poetry.

This study has also revealed that the transmission and reproduction of folktales from one generation to the next was usually via word of mouth but a transition from the oral to the written took place with the arrival of the missionaries. The missionaries converted these tales into written text, first by recording them from the African performers and later by transcribing and translating them into English. Folktales can thus be regarded as the first form of oral literature, and also the first genre to be recorded and written in print form in indigenous languages such as Zulu.

Conversely, Zulu oral children’s poetry was found to have escaped the taint of foreign influence and has as a result, retained its originality. Imilolozelo and izangelo can be regarded as a child’s inheritance. The following interesting comment about nursery rhymes resonates with African children’s poetry as well:

A part of every child’s heritage is the nursery rhymes we commonly attribute to Mother Goose. Whatever the origin, these jingles have endured over a period of time and have consistently been favourites of young children. And we adults have an opportunity to enjoy these verses again as we share with toddlers, as well as children in the primary and upper grades. What a rich source of language, imagery, and story content (Tiedt, 1979: 34; 35).

Their dynamic nature allows them to be used in oral and written poetry as well and it is in this mould that new and adapted izilandelo may be found. Some of these poems do exhibit traces of western influence and may have been translated from English.
Children’s written literature in Zulu owes its development to the missionaries who, from the early 1800s, first wrote and published readers as school textbooks. Their ground-breaking and innovative work set an example which was later emulated by many African authors who followed in their footsteps over the decades. Readers served to lay the foundation for literacy and the delineation of African modern children’s literature into various genres. In this study, during the definition of readers, a problem was encountered because research on these readers is scarce.

The early readers by missionaries and by their African successors were found to have a “one-size-fits-all” approach as they contained written folktales, lullabies, game songs, modern children’s stories and poetry. However, they were appreciated because they helped to give birth to literary genres like traditional oral and modern written poetry and prose.

This study also found that subsequent readers published by Zulu authors emulate those first written by the missionaries. The contents and themes tapped into the child’s environment. Although these readers could be regarded as modern children’s literature, they were nonetheless found to have reached their “sell-by-date” because some of their themes no longer fulfilled the needs of modern learners.

The problem of the scarcity of authentic contemporary children’s books written in the indigenous African languages was a bone of contention. The researcher found that fingers were pointed at African authors and publishers alike. One of the reasons offered for this scarcity was the dominance of English and the government’s failure to promote the use and love of African languages, failing to ensure that picture books in African languages were made available in all schools, especially in the foundation phases. Responses from questionnaires blamed authors’ lack of interest in writing books in their own languages as some seemed to prefer to write in English. The few who chose to write in their own languages feared being regarded as old fashioned. The following were regarded as other obstacles: very few writers have been trained to write children’s books; a shortage of writers among Africans; and a lack of incentives
and financial gain for hard work. All this seems to be killing potential writer’s motivation to write.

Reviewing works on traditional literature revealed that there was little or no research on folktales, lullabies, game songs or school readers as children’s literature. This despite the fact that in African traditional oral societies the genres, folktales in particular, were regarded as vehicles for teaching children. Secondly, folktales were recorded and reproduced in print form, first by missionaries and later written and published by African authors. Thirdly, since they were first published by missionaries in the 1800s and later used in schools as textbooks, readers have not inspired interest in researchers. Obviously, these authors were keen to transmit and reproduce oral literature into prescribed books, mainly for financial gain. This was easy because these genres are regarded as a form of heritage that does not require any copyright. They were easy to write and reproduce compared to coming up with original ideas such as, for instance, rewriting folktales as new works of fiction for children and opening up new avenues for research. However, such relevant research studies were available in English and some of these deliberated on African folklore. For instance, Fraser’s dissertation on performance in imilolozelo and izilandelo was invaluable. Her fieldwork has provided many authentically researched and well translated examples that this researcher could build upon.

Picture books, when compared to readers, were found to be a different type of modern children’s literature which could be introduced to a child from infancy or early childhood. They are regarded as supplementary material essential for planting a reading seed in a child’s life, and kindling a love of reading for pleasure.

An examination of picture storybooks revealed that there are still not enough authentic books written in Zulu. Furthermore, African academics seem to be ignorant of picture books and their value to the life of a child and this is demonstrated in the fact that little research has been conducted in this area. In
the same breath, most black authors have not written in this genre because of ignorance and a lack of training.

It was found that youth literature in the indigenous languages is another neglected genre which could be researched using various relevant topics.

Some similarities in oral literature, like lullabies and game songs, and children’s picture books, like toy books and concept books, were discerned. Lullabies and game songs were used by adults to socialise, train and encourage a child from a tender age to walk, talk, sing, and to inculcate in the child her/his culture, norms and values. Picture books, on the other hand, are used by adults at home and teachers at crèches and schools to introduce children to the language of books and to develop in them a lifelong habit of reading and a love of books. Both genres are necessary in the life of a child as they complement each other. Both these genres revealed that a child who grows up without learning game songs, for instance, misses out on the free and effortless acquisition of heritage from her/his ancestors, while in the modern world and formal education, a child who grows up without having picture books, picture storybooks in particular, introduced early in her/his life may experience some problems later at school unless some form of intervention is made.

Finally, the study found that the different types of children’s literature were all necessary as each had important functions and values in the life of the child.

8.3 Limitations of the study

Several limitations emerged during the process of conducting this research study:

The most significant restriction encountered was in the form of publishers. Their lack of cooperation in responding to questionnaires has left some gaps in the study and many unanswered questions. Firstly, their responses concerning the scarcity of picture books published in indigenous languages would have been acquired first-hand. As for the question about the first picture book that was
published by individual publishers, the information received would have shed light on when these books were published and also on their content and themes over the years.

8.4 Recommendations

The writing of this study has been a voyage of new discoveries. Some of the “old topics” have been defamiliarised and transformed to make them look like new. This journey was completed in several short chapters, each of which could in future be transformed into longer journeys of new research. Despite the new perspectives which have emerged from this study, the researcher believes that it has merely touched the surface in as far as research into indigenous children’s literature is concerned. It is for this reason that the following recommendations for further research in all the indigenous languages of South Africa and beyond the borders of this country are made.

Traditional African oral children’s literature which is conveyed in the language of its people is a valuable heritage which should continue to be passed on to new generations. With the changing times and because South Africa is a multicultural and multilingual country, dominated by the English language, the teaching of the home language during the years of schooling is imperative for every child. Speaking their languages is part of their culture. However, this can only be accomplished if parents teach their children by speaking to them in the vernacular, and insisting that at school they be taught by mother-tongue language speakers, regardless of the medium of teaching. The government has to take a leading role in this and to do away with what has become the norm: one finds, for instance, an Nguni speaker learning the Sotho language which in turn is taught by a white teacher who does not have the command of the language. This is one way to develop in children a love for reading books written in their own languages and may possibly help to develop future writers who will write in their own languages.

It is thus imperative for scholars to conduct various types of research in this “old-and-new” field of research: the indigenous languages of South Africa and of
Africa. It is recommended that further studies on the subject be conducted, in some instances, through various methods of qualitative study to find authentic information, new ideas and holistic insight. Fieldwork could, for instance, be employed by writing about the effects of picture storybooks in the life of young learners who are exposed early in life to reading and those who are not.

Qualitative research should be made part of both the undergraduate and the postgraduate syllabus. Students should be encouraged to conduct interviews and collect stories and analyse them. As the culture of storytelling is disappearing, some stories could be adapted for the media. Retelling existing folktales to suit modern times will bring meaning to old fashioned lullabies. Researchers could make comparative studies between the Nguni and Sotho languages or other languages like Tshivenda and Xitsonga.

As far as the writing of books is concerned, the researcher recommends that authors be trained and commissioned to write children’s books, especially picture books. As such books require illustrations, workshops for illustrators are essential. Owing to the fact that few illustrated children’s books exist in Zulu, it is imperative that more Zulu illustrators be trained. The researcher recommends that at African schools, singing should not be the only talent that is nurtured; drawing skills also require attention. In fact, drawing should be part of the syllabus.

Anthologies of age-appropriate, modern poetry with relevant themes are long overdue and should be encouraged. Furthermore, books or anthologies of traditional poetry are suggested. These books could contain old and new game songs complemented by appropriate illustrations. Norton supports this in her comment on nursery rhymes:

The humour, simple plots, characters, and jingles found in nursery rhymes lend themselves to expansion into picture storybook format. Children frequently want to know more about their favourite nursery rhyme characters; books illustrated by several artists allow children to share longer versions of nursery rhymes. These versions may also stimulate creative interpretations as children think about what might happen if they expanded and illustrated the plots in other nursery rhymes (1983: 140).
As many African teachers do not themselves have a culture of reading books and know little about picture books, they will also need to be trained. The mere fact that they spend most of their time with children means that they should be encouraged to attend workshops on how to write picture storybooks and how to engage children during the process of teaching. They should also be made aware of the functions and values of using picture storybooks.

Parents’ meetings should be arranged where they are informed of the importance of storybooks. This might encourage them to buy picture books for their children.

As already mentioned by Sisulu, teachers’ training colleges should include a module on children’s literature as part of the curriculum. Secondly, universities should also include this genre in their programmes and, if possible, mainstream children’s books into the curriculum.

8.5 Concluding remarks

As the study has not provided an exhaustive discussion of the topic, this chapter has made an attempt to provide ideas and examples for further studies. The study has identified some problems and provided some suggestions on how to deal with the writing and development of picture books in African languages. Impediments which limited the scope of this study were also stated. As not all questions in the questionnaires and interviews were covered in the study, a sample of specific questionnaires and interviews is provided in the appendix. This was included in the hope that they will be of help to future researchers.

The researcher believes that these findings and recommendations will help to galvanise future researchers into embarking on a study of picture books written in the African languages and children’s literature as a whole. It is also hoped that authors, academics and publishers will be motivated to write original books instead of relying on translations. The question of training African writers and
illustrators is a matter which both the government and the publishers should take seriously. This will hopefully lead to a situation where African researchers are motivated to do similar research, or improve on the current study, in their respective African languages.

Finally, the researcher would like to close this study with the following words by Taylor from his book entitled *One hundred years of the American Board Mission in South Africa 1835-1935*:

May those who are inheritors of the great tradition prove worthy of their heritage. May the spirit of the missionaries, the spirit of adventure and of costly dedication of ecumenical vision and invincible determination, be present through all the inevitable changes and adaptations of the next hundred years. Let us end with Browning’s great words:

“The best is yet to be” (1935: 50).

The researcher hopes that these words will, in the coming decades, be echoed by all stakeholders responsible for the writing and publishing of picture books in the indigenous African languages.
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APPENDIX A: Folktales

Folktale 1

UNanana Boselesele

Umxoxi: Kwesukasukela!
Izethameli: Cosu!


Wahamba yedwa uNanana Boselesele.


Wahamba yedwa uNanana Boselesele.

Kwaphendula inyathi eyodwa yathi, “Ewu, usithole kabi namuhla. Sisemhlanganweni bandla kodwa sizothi singaqeda bese sikulandela.”

Wayesethi, “Ngicela ningiphelekezele phela nina bakwaNkawu, ukuze ngithole isibindi.”


Wafulathela wahamba. Uthe esahamba wezwa izinkawu zimhleka usulu. Wayesezwa izwi lenye inkawu limemeza, “Uqaphele phela siqhwaga, ingakumimiliti indlovu!”

UNanana Boselesele wayesekhuluma yedwa wathi, “Angisoze ngavuma lezi zinkawu zingithene amandla ngale mikhutshana yazo engasile.”


UNanana Bosele wathukuthela wathelwa ngamanzi wathi, “Angizile ukuzosinisa amahleza, ngifuna umntanami. Nguwena omgwinyile. Awubuke nje lesi sisukazi sakho!”


Esephakathi, owesifazane athole konke okwakudliwa yindlovu: abantu, izinkomo, izimbuzi nezimvu. Ingane yakhe yajabula kakhulu lapho ibona unina.


Umxoxi: Cosu, cosu iyaphela!

**Nanana Boselesele**

(Once upon a time there was a woman. This woman lived with her daughter. The woman’s name was Nanana Boselesele. Nanana Boselesele built her house near the road on purpose because she relied on her courage and cunning. She built it on a path where all animals passed.

One day when she had gone to fetch firewood, the animals arrived. They found the child playing alone. They asked, “Whose is this pretty-pretty child?” The child gave the same response she had given to the other animals, “It is Nanana Boselesele’s child, the one who built her house near the road on purpose because she relies on her courage and cunning.”

The animals said, “The elephant is coming, yes, Sondonzima (Heavy weight) is coming.”
Each time other animals found the child alone, they asked the same question, “Whose is this pretty-pretty child?” The child gave the same answer she had given to the other animals. The animals warned, “The elephant is coming; yes, Sondonzima (Heavy weight) is coming.”

After all the animals had passed, the elephant eventually arrived and said, “Whose is this pretty-pretty child?” The child answered, “It is Nanana Boselelele’s child, the one who built her house near the road on purpose because she relies on her courage and cunning.” On hearing the response, the elephant became very angry and asked again, “Whose is this pretty-pretty child?” The child answered, “It is Nanana Boselelele’s child, the one who built her house near the road on purpose because she relies on her courage and cunning.” Then the elephant took her and swallowed her.

At sunset Nanana Boselelele returned. She was surprised when she did not see her daughter. She looked around and asked the small animals, “Where is my child?” The animals answered, “She has been swallowed by the huge elephant. Sondonzima has gulped her down.” Nanana Boselelele exclaimed, “What? She is in the elephant’s stomach?”

She did not sleep a wink. She kept thinking about her child. The following morning as she got to the gate of her homestead, she noticed the elephant’s footprints. She was convinced that her child had been swallowed by an elephant. She went back into the house. She took a basket, she took a pot and put it in the basket, she took a short assegai and put it in the basket, she then took a pot of water and put it in the basket too, and she took burning firewood and put it in the basket. She took the basket, placed it on her head and held the hoe-handle in her hand. She was ready to follow the elephant.

Nanana Boselelele stormed out, seething with anger. She walked with short, quick steps and she was breathing heavily. After walking a distance, she met an antelope and asked, “Antelope, help me please, help me to find the elephant
that ate my child.” The antelope said, “He is very far away, by the elephant pools. You will recognise him by his huge stomach.”

“Come along with me, please, I need someone who will give me courage to go on,” she pleaded.

The antelope answered, “I am sorry, I can’t help you today. I also have to go and check on my children. I’ll follow you later on.” It swung its head and went on its way. Nanana Boselesele walked on alone.

Suddenly, she came across a herd of buffalo. “Buffalo, help me please – help me find the elephant that ate my child.”

The buffaloes replied, “He is very far away, by the elephant pools. You will recognise him by his huge stomach.”

“Come along with me, please, I need someone who will give me courage to go on,” she pleaded.

One of the buffaloes replied, “We are very sorry, we are in a meeting now, go and we will follow you later on.”

She proceeded with her heavy, slouching gait. On the road ahead she met some monkeys and asked, “Monkeys, help me please, help me find the elephant that ate my child.”

The monkeys looked at her as if she were a lunatic and said, “He is very far away, by the elephant pools. You will recognise him by his huge stomach.”

“Come along with me, please, I need someone who will give me courage to go on,” she pleaded.
The older monkey remarked, “Oh no, we are scared of that elephant. He is too big and strong for us.” Another monkey remarked, “You have built your house on the road on purpose because you think that you are confident and cunning. It is now really amazing to hear that you need support.”

Nanana proceeded on her journey. As she walked, she heard the monkeys laughing at her mockingly. Then she heard the voice of another monkey shouting, “Be careful, oh mighty one, lest the elephant swallows you!” She promised herself that she would not become discouraged by their silly monkey tricks and continued on her journey.

It was like that all the way. All the animals she met directed her to the same place and ultimately, she arrived at a big open space. She had reached the elephant pools. Nanana Boselelesele identified the elephant with the huge stomach, she approached him and asked, “Elephant, help me please, help me to find the elephant that ate my child.”

The elephant just looked at her and kept quiet. Once again she asked him, “Elephant, help me please, help me find the elephant that ate my child.”

He replied, “Proceed, you will identify him by his huge stomach.”

Nanana was now furious and shouted, “Listen here, elephant, I am not here to play games, do you hear me? I want my child right now! It is quite clear that you are the one that has swallowed her! Just take a look at your enormous stomach!”

The elephant became annoyed. He raised his trunk and answered angrily, “I will swallow you, you cheeky little woman.”

Nanana Boselelesele attacked the elephant with her hoe-handle. The elephant caught her and swallowed her, basket and all.
Inside, she found everything the elephant had swallowed. His stomach was filled with people, cattle, sheep and goats. Oh! The child was happy to see her mother! She put her basket down. She took out the pots, the assegai, firewood and made fire with the burning wood. She cut out the elephant’s liver and lungs. She cut pieces of meat here and there and cooked them. She ate with her child and gave some to the other people. She told them the story of the problems she had encountered.

Suddenly the elephant said, speaking to other animals that were with him in the forest: “There is something gnawing me in the stomach.”

The animals asked, “What is happening?”

The elephant replied, “Since I swallowed the woman my belly is painful. It goes, ‘cut, cut, cut.’” Then he added: “It goes ‘chew, chew, chew’ in my tummy! I am feeling dizzy …” Then the elephant fell down and died.

Nanana Bosele used her assegai to cut a big hole in the elephant’s stomach. She, her child, the people and animals were set free from the elephant’s stomach. Everyone was very happy. The people promised they would have a great feast to show their gratitude for the bravery she had shown.)

**Folktale 2**

3.3.1 **UCHakide nebhubesi** (Trickster story about animals only)

imbiza emilweni. Leli phunga elimnandi ayesizwa kule mbiza enkulu.
UChakide wagwinya amathe.

“Sikhulekile Baba,” kusho uChakide. Ibhusesi laphenduka labheka uChakide
lathi, “Nguwe lowo mfana?” UChakide waphenduka wathi, “Yimi Baba. Yimi
wena owakhulu silibele. Isisu somhambi asingakanani. Singangenso yenyon
Baba.” Ibhusesi lahlekahleka lathi, “Yilokhu waba njalo wena nokuthanda
ukudla. Ake uzobamba lapha emsebenzini uzongisiza.” Waphenduka uChakide
wathi, “Cha Baba akusikho ukuthi ngenziwa wukuthanda ukudla. Bengikhuleka
nje. Ibhusesi lathi, “Awu suka, uthi angikholwe yilokho. Uthanda ukuhaha
wena. Ake ukholwe ngesiwasana sakho uzosebenza bamba lapha.” Nembala
uChakide wayosiza ibhusesi.

Wasebenza-ke uChakide esiza ibhusesi kodwa inhliziyo yakhe yona
yayilaphaya embizeni ebilayo. Amathe ayelokhu econsa. Indlala nayo ilokhu
idlangile. Kuthe sebesebenze isikhathi eside ibhusesi lathe, “Ake siphumule
mfana wami. Ngicabanga ukuthi ukudla kwami sekuvuthiwe.” Ibhusesi laqonda
eziko lephula imbiza. UChakide uselokhu egwinya amathe. Ibhusesi lavula
imbiza lase lithatha uggoko lwalo. Layikhipha inyama layibeka ogqokweni.
Lahlala phansi laqala ukudla. Lalikhetha inyama ekhuluphele liyidle. Bese uma
lihlangana neqatha elizacile namathambo liwaphose kuChakide. Ibhusesi
layidla layiqeda yonke inyama ekhuluphele. Wahlabeka uChakide ebena
ibhusesi lindala ngaye; limnika inyama ezacile namathambo kuphela.

Zaqhubeka izinsuku. Nsukuzonke umsebenzi wahamba kahle kakhu
lu. Nsukuzonke Ibhusesi laqhubeka lidla inyama ekhuluphele. Nsukuzonke
uChakide yena waqhubeka edla inyama ezacile namathambo.

Lwafika usuku lokufulela. Baqala manje babeka utshani ophahleni lwendlu
yebhubesi. Ibhusesi liphezu kwendlu, uChakide yena wayengaphakathi endlini.
Umsila webhubesi wawulengela ngaphakathi. UChakide wawubona umsila
wathi, “Ngozolilaya leli bhubesi, alingazi ukuthi ngingubani mina.
Nginguphunyuka bemphetha. NginguChakijana Bogcololo owehlula izinduku


Cosu iyaphela.

Folktale 3

The Weasel and the Lion

(Once upon a time there was a Weasel. The Weasel was starving. He had spent a few days without food. One day he went out hunting for food. He walked
and walked; suddenly his nose picked up the aroma of meat. He stopped and lifted his snout, trying to locate the direction from which the smell was coming. Once he was certain he walked in that direction. Soon he came upon the Lion’s house. He walked straight into its home. The Lion was building his house. The Weasel looked around and saw a pot on the fire. The aroma he had smelled was coming from that huge pot. The Weasel swallowed some saliva.

“Greetings, Father,” said the Weasel. The Lion turned around, “Is that you, son?” The Weasel replied, “It is me, Father. It is me, Father. I am starving to death. My stomach is the size of a bird’s kidney, Father.” The Lion laughed a bit and said, “You never stop your love for food. Come and help me here with my work.” The Weasel responded and said, “No, Father it is not my love for food that has brought me here. I was just greeting you.” The Lion replied, “You think I believe that? You are greedy. Just forget about your little stomach, come over here and work.” And indeed, the Weasel went to help the Lion.

Then the Weasel helped the Lion but his attention was not on the work at all, but on what was in that boiling pot. He continued to salivate. The hunger was persistent. After he had worked for a long time the Lion said to him, “Let us take a break, my boy. I think my pot is now ready.” The Lion removed the pot from the fire. The Weasel kept on swallowing. The Lion opened the pot and picked up a wooden platter. He removed the meat and put it on the platter. He sat down and started eating. The Lion chose all the fatty pieces and ate those. When it came across small pieces it threw them to the Weasel. All the bones were also thrown in the Weasel’s direction. The Weasel felt hurt when he saw that the Lion was taking him for granted. The Lion finished all the fatty meat. The Weasel was heartbroken as he had only received small pieces and bones.

The days went by. The work progressed very well. Each day, the Lion would eat all the fatty meat and the Weasel would eat the scraps and the bones.

The day to put up the roof arrived. They started thatching the roof of the Lion’s house. The Lion was on the roof, while the Weasel was inside the house. The
Lion’s tail was hanging down into the house. The Weasel saw it and said, “I will teach this Lion a lesson. He does not know who he is dealing with. I am the slippery one. I am Chakide Bogcololo the sly one, the possessor of medicinal powers that blow off the fighting sticks of other fellows!” Chakide tied the Lion’s tail to a pillar in the house. The Lion was unaware of what was happening. It thought a tick was irritating its tail. Chakide tied the Lion’s tail more securely. Then the lion said to himself, “Ouch, why do these ticks keep biting me today?” He continued thatching his house.

Suddenly he heard the sound of someone tampering with the pot. He shouted to the Weasel, “What is happening there? Who is impersonating me and fiddling with my pots?” The Weasel replied, “There is no one here, there is no one, king of the animals.” The Weasel took a platter. The Lion heard him and said, “What is happening there, boy? Who is impersonating me?” The Weasel replied, “There is no one here, my dear Lion.”

The Weasel dished up all the meat onto the platter. He went outside with the meat. The Lion saw him. He was enraged and roared in anger. He made to leap down, wanting to snap the Weasel into pieces. He couldn’t move. The Lion realised that his tail was stuck. The Weasel laughed out loud, enjoying the Lion’s meat and said, “Who are you feeding small pieces and bones?” The Weasel chose all the fatty pieces and started eating them. He ate until he had finished all the meat. He did not even give the Lion the bones! When he had finished, the Weasel went on his way. He was walking on air, looking back every now and then. He left the Lion on top of the house. The Lion remained there until he died of hunger.

That is how the story ends.)
Folktale 4

UBongopha inkabi yezimanga (Bongopha the magical ox) (Story about human beings and animals)

Kwesukasukela.


Umfana wakhula ekhulela esibayeni. Leyo kwakuyiyona mpilo ayeyazi. Wayengayazi enye impilo ephilwa ngabanye abantu. Njalo ekuseni umfana wayecula ingoma athi:

Vuka Bongopha,
Sekusile Bongopha,
Kuyavukwa Bongopha.

Bese iyavuka inkabi. Esevukile uBongopha ame angavumi ukuhamba. Acule umfana athi:
Hamba Bongopha,
Kulanjiwe Bongopha,
Kuyahanjwa Bongopha.


Ngena Bongopha,
Sekubuyiw iBongopha,
Kuyangenwa Bongopha.


Hamba Bongopha,
Amasela Bongopha,
Akwebile Bongopha.


Vuka Bongopha,
Hlangana izicucu zakho Bongopha,
Kuyahanjwa Bongopha.


Once upon a time.

There once existed a certain king. This king had many wives. One of his wives became pregnant. An ox was born. The name of this ox was Bongopha. The king loved Bongopha more than all his cattle. The king said, “The child who is to be born from this wife of mine will be put onto this ox.” One day he received news that one of his wives had given birth to a baby boy. He was very happy to hear the good news. He took the baby and put him onto the white ox.

When the king tried to take the baby off the ox’s back, the ox refused to let him. The king called some of his warriors to assist him. The warriors tried but did not succeed. Whenever the baby needed to be fed, the mother would bring the milk so that he could be fed on the back of the ox.

The boy could not be separated from Bongopha. During spring, the boy would spend his nights on Bongopha’s back. In summer, the boy would spend his nights on Bongopha’s back. In winter, the boy would spend his nights on Bongopha’s back. During autumn, the boy would spend his nights on Bongopha’s back. The boy would spend each night on Bongopha’s back!
The boy grew up in the kraal. That was the life he knew. He did not know the life followed by other people. Every morning the boy would sing a song:

“Wake up, Bongopha, 
Morning has broken, Bongopha, 
It is time to wake up, Bongopha.”

Bongopha the ox would wake up. Once Bongopha had woken up, he would stand still and refuse to move. The boy would break into song again:

“Move, Bongopha, 
People are starving, Bongopha, 
Everyone is moving, Bongopha.”

Then the ox would move. The entire herd would follow him.

With time, it became clear that Bongopha was an unusual ox. Nothing could be done in the kraal without this white ox. Whenever something had to be done, the boy would have to sing. He had to sing at the grazing plots, and then when it was time to return home. When the herd reached home, the boy would sing again:

“Come in, Bongopha, 
We are home, Bongopha, 
Everyone is entering, Bongopha.”

The ox would go into the kraal. One night cattle thieves arrived from another nation. These thieves had been sent by their king to steal cattle. They went into the kraal. They beat the cattle with their sticks. The cattle did not move. They kept beating them, surprised at what was happening. They beat them again and again until their sticks broke. Each thief was left with a single stick. The thieves lost hope and thought of turning back. At that moment one of the thieves saw the boy sleeping on the ox’s back. He came nearer and said, “Here is the person who is refusing with the cattle.” The thieves were thinking that the boy
had a magic potion that made the cattle invincible to pain. The thieves said, "Boy, make these cattle of yours move or else you will die!" The boy then said:

"Move, Bongopha,  
It is the thieves, Bongopha,  
They have stolen you, Bongopha."

Bongopha then moved. All the cattle followed him out. On the way, Bongopha would stop when he no longer knew what path to follow. Once the boy had sung, he would move again. They walked and walked until they reached the king's palace. As the thieves tried to drive them into the kraal, the ox just stood without moving. They forced the boy to sing. The boy sang. The king was surprised when the thieves told him the news about the magic ox.

The thieves then prepared themselves to kill Bongopha. They said the boy should sing or else they would kill him too. The boy sang and said the ox should allow himself to be stabbed. The ox allowed that, and it died. The boy sang again and said it must allow itself to be cut up. The ox was cut up. The thieves were very happy. Everyone went to sleep. Once everyone was asleep, the boy woke up. He collected all the meat and wrapped it in the skin. He sang his song:

"Rise up, Bongopha,  
Join all your pieces,  
We are leaving, Bongopha."

The boy sang and sang. All the meat pieces quickly came together. The ox rose and stood in front of the boy. The following morning the thieves were shocked when they saw the ox. They called a warrior to kill the boy. The warrior failed as nothing worked. The spear just slipped off. The boy could not be stabbed.

This deed angered the boy and he said, "This is enough, now it is my time. I will destroy all of you!" He threw his spear just once. The king and his entire regiment died on the spot. When the boy saw the piles of dead people, he became very sad. He felt sorry for them. He resurrected all of them with the
exception of their king. He instructed them to follow him and his white ox. There was a cloud of dust as the people and the cattle returned to the boy’s home. The boy’s father was very pleased with what the boy had done. Amongst the people who were brought along was a most beautiful girl. The boy’s father wished his boy to marry her. He had heard that the girl was the daughter of the slaughtered king. The following day the king went to the kraal to tell the boy about the girl. The boy did not respond to his father. The boy’s mother also went to talk to her son. She begged the boy to marry the beautiful girl.

That night the ox showed signs of being unwell. It shook so heavily that the boy fell to the ground. Thereafter it looked at the boy with sad eyes. The boy realised that the time for Bongopha’s death had arrived. He broke into song:

“Die, Bongopha,  
It’s time to die, Bongopha,  
The end has come, Bongopha.”

The ox dropped dead. The boy’s heart was broken. From that day the boy returned home. He married the king’s daughter.
Foltale 5

Isizwe esaphenduka izmfene (The tribe that became baboons) (Story about human beings only)

Kwesukasukela:


The tribe that became baboons

Narrator: Once upon a time

Audience: We hear you!

A long time ago there was a lazy nation. The surname of its king was Thusi. It is said this nation originated from the nation of the Mfene. This nation was different from others because it was known for its laziness. It was lazy to work the fields. Other nations were industrious. They would get up at dawn to work the fields. They would also do other jobs for a living. The people from the Mfene nation were lazybones who would not lift a finger.

These lazybones loved eating other people’s food. Whenever the crops were ready they would go and steal them. This annoyed other people. Some would criticise them, whilst others would laugh and ridicule them. Thusi’s people did not worry about what people were saying. They ignored the people’s complaints. You would hear them saying, “Even though we do not work the fields, we will live like all the others when we eat the food of those who do.”

Eventually people chased them away. The king of the Thusi gathered his nation and said, “People of Thusi’s nation, let us gather food for provisions. As of today we are going to live on our own. We will go and start a new life in the forest.” Indeed, they took food and prepared it. Then they took their plough handles and packed them on their backs and left.

After some time they were punished for their laziness. The handles of their ploughs grew and stuck to their bodies: they changed into tails because they were not being used. Their bodies started sprouting hair. Their faces grew huge
umbrella-like foreheads. The people changed into baboons! They moved to the cliffs. The cliffs became their homes.

The people of the Mfene nation are the Thusi nation which changed into baboons because of laziness. Even today when a baboon has been killed people will say, “That is a person from the Thusi nation. The baboons’ origins date back to the people of the Mfene nation.”
Folktale 6

Inkosikazi eyabe ingabatholi abantwana (The barren wife) (Story about human beings and animals)

Umxoxi: Kwakukhona
Izethameli: Cosu!
Umxoxi: Kwakukhona inkosi. …
Umxoxi: Le nkosi yabe inesithembu; iganwe ngamakhosikazi amane. Inkosikazi yasendlunkulu yabe iyindlela; kodwa le nkosi yabe ingabatholi abantwana. Amanye amakhosikazi enkosi wona ayebeletha; kodwa ayezala amagwababa. Lokhu kwakuyiphatha kabi inkosi. Yayibona sengathi amadlozi akubo ayeifulathele. Yayihlala ibalisa ngokuthi yayiyokufa ingenayo indlalifa. Inkosi yase ihlane ngedela; yagcina iwemwele wona amagwababa lawa yathi angabantwana bayo.


ekhaya iyothatha ukhamba ize nalo. Yahamba-ke inkosikazi yayolanda ukhamba.


Cosu, cosu, iyaphela-ke.

Izethameli: Siyabonga! Yaze yamnadi indaba yakho!

The barren wife

Narrator: Once upon a time
Audience: We hear you!
Narrator: There once was a king. ... 
Narrator: This king was a polygamist; he had four wives. The first wife was a dark beauty. She was a sight to behold. The king loved her very much but she could not conceive. The other wives of the king had children but, lo and behold, they were crows instead of children. This used to worry the king very much. He felt that his ancestors had turned their backs on him. His heart would break over the fact that it meant he would leave this world without an heir. The king had already given up and had accepted the crows as his children.

This brought the first wife sorrow and tears. She saw herself as a nonentity in the palace. She would always cry out in a sad voice and say, “I wonder what wrong have I done to the world not to have even a single child! It would at least
be better if I too were giving birth to these crows. Look at me now - I have been banished from the main house and I now live near the gate."

The other three wives made a laughing stock of the barren wife. They thought they were better than her because they at least had given birth to crows: they called her the Barren One. Even the crows themselves knew that this particular wife was a joke who was disregarded by everyone. They would often flock to her house and scatter the ashes that were in the fireplace all over it. Sometimes they would vandalise the house, calling: “The Barren One! The Barren One!” Whenever this happened this wife would break down in floods of tears. Her status had changed from favourite wife to the least favourite.

One day she saw a herbalist passing in the kraal. She went to him and cried: she was wracked with tears. The herbalist was surprised to see her crying and asked her what was wrong. She said she had never been able to conceive and had consequently become a laughing stock to her peers. The herbalist told her to cry no more as he would help her. He told her to go back home and bring back a claypot. The woman left to fetch the claypot.

The woman came back with the claypot as instructed by the herbalist. The herbalist made a cut in her forehead out of which he drew a blood clot in the form of a boy. The clot was put inside the claypot. The herbalist then made another cut. A clot in the form of a girl came out. It was also put in the claypot. He then sealed the claypot with cow dung. When he had finished he told the woman to hide the claypot in a secret place. He gave her strict instructions not to say a word to anyone. As she was about to leave he advised her as follows: “You must not open this claypot; but when it is time to open it you will know without being told.”

Days went by. The other wives of the king continued taunting their peer. The crows also continued to provoke her. She started laughing and singing to herself. Whenever the other wives heard her singing a lullaby they would say:
“Oh, listen to this! Why do we keep being irritated by the Barren One when she cannot give birth to even a single crow?” The woman would just keep quiet and unlike before, not shed a single tear. The mothers of the crows were surprised at her response.

Inside the claypot the two children were slowly growing. Indeed, she opened the claypot one day. What beautiful children she found! They had grown quite a bit. They were now crowded into the claypot. On seeing them she shouted with huge joy. She ululated, thanking her ancestors.

The king who was passing with his induna near the gate heard the sounds of joy and rushed to see what was happening. The wife told him the good news of the twins’ arrival, a boy and a girl. Tears of joy streamed down her face as she explained to the king that they were his. The king was very happy and he was heard reciting praises for the boy child.

The following day the king summoned his induna. He said he should kill all the crows. Indeed, the induna killed them. The mothers of the crows cried up a storm over their “children”. Thereafter he called all of his wives in. Once they had arrived he said: “You know how the lightning operates. It takes the one who was right inside the house and throws him outside, and the one outside it throws inside. My wife, who has given me twins, is the ruler over all of you today. Go, my queen, and fetch the two Good News. The once barren wife left to fetch her twins. She came back with the children and handed them over to the king. All three wives became scared, covered with shame. From that day they all became slaves to the once barren wife.

That is how the story ends.

Audience: Thank you! What an enjoyable story!
Folktale 7

Igundwane elingezwa


Once upon a time there was a hole. In this hole was a mouse’s homestead. A mother mouse lived there with her children. This mouse had four children. The mother said to her children, “My dear children, please stay put here at home. Do not leave this place even once! If you do, you will come to harm. There are many dangers outside.” One of the little mice was disobedient. It was very naughty. It took no heed of its mother. It merely laughed when she was speaking. It spoke to the other little mice. It told them their mother was not telling the truth. There were no dangers. After all, the mother herself goes outside the homestead but comes to no harm. The mother herself did not hear her child’s utterances.

The mother did her chores in the house until she became tired. Once she had finished tidying her house she said she was tired. An urge to sleep came. She fell asleep.

The naughty mouse wanted to go out. It wanted to see what was going on outside. The little mouse looked at its mother. It saw that she was sleeping. Then it heard her snoring. It tiptoed nearer to his mother. It confirmed that she was indeed sleeping. Her eyes were tightly shut. She was snoring.

The little mouse tiptoed towards the opening. The others watched it. They realised that it wanted to go out. They reprimanded it and said, “Mother said
that we must not go out. There are dangers out there, we will come to harm.” It responded by saying, “Leave me alone. I am not a coward like you. I am not afraid of non-existent dangers. I am hungry. I want bread. Stay behind, you fools. I will not bring you any bread either. Besides, I am tired of staying inside the home. I want to stretch my legs. I want to explore the land.” The other mice threatened it and said, “We will report you to mother.

The little mouse was not bothered. It went towards the opening. It popped its little head out. It saw nothing. It popped its little nose out. It smelled the air a bit. It did not pick up anything sinister. It listened. It heard nothing. It was dead silent! It said, “I have indeed said that there were no dangers.”

It left the hole. It was very pleased when it felt the pleasant waft of air. It became pleased too when it saw the empty space it could play in. It also smelled the aroma of bread on the table. It spoke to itself and said, “It is wonderful to be smart. The fools are sitting back home. I am very happy that I am not a fool. The bread is lying on the table. I am going to eat alone till I am satisfied. I am going to bite as deep as I can. I will not bring them anything. Even mother she will have to eat her sleep!”

The little mouse clambered onto the table. It enjoyed the bread till it was satisfied. It climbed off the table. It started playing on the floor. It ran to the one end. Then it turned and ran in another direction. It was very pleased that it was not a coward. Not once was it thinking about danger.

However, there stood a cat! The little mouse was not aware of it. It was not aware that death was approaching. The cat was dead silent. It was not moving. It was not even blinking. Its eyes were fixed on the little mouse. The cat leapt. It leapt once and landed on top of the little mouse. Its sharp claws went into the little mouse’s flesh. The little mouse cried out in pain. It called out to its mother and said, “Mother, I am dying. Oh, mother I am dying!”
The mother was shocked. She rose from her sleep. She was woken up by the cries of the little mouse. She looked at her children. She realised that there was one missing. The other children also became very scared. Their knees were knocking against each other from fear.

The mother quickly ran to the opening. She stood there and peeped out a little. She saw her naughty child in the cat’s mouth. The child also saw his mother. He cried out, loudly asking for the mother’s help, “Mother, please help me. Help me, I am dying!”

The mother cried when she saw her child in the jaws of death. She realised that she would die too if she were to go out. The children would be left alone. They would become orphans. They would struggle to live. The mother just said, “My child, if you had listened to me you would not be in that situation.” She turned back, crying bitterly. The other children were also in tears.

The cat went away with the little mouse. It killed it and then ate it. It started with the head. It ate everything except the tail. After it had finished it licked its whiskers. It shut its eyes and took a nap.
**Folktale 8**

**Sibambe elentulo**


We are sticking to the lizard’s word

“Give me your ears, grandchildren. Long, long ago people never died. They lived for years and years without dying.”

The children laughed. They were laughing because grandmother was repeating the years over and over again. They were happy because grandmother was narrating well. Grandmother continued.

“The creator looked at everything and was pleased that it was good. It was good that people should not die. It was good that they should live until a ripe old age but not die. He called the chameleon. The chameleon came walking very slowly. It came and stood in front of the Creator. The Creator spoke to the chameleon and said, “Chameleon, I am sending you …”

“Yes, Lord,” the chameleon trembled in response.

“I am sending you to the people. I want you to go to the people. Tell them that I said they should not die. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Lord, I understand,” responded the chameleon, shaking still. Its eyes looked forwards and then backwards. Indeed it turned around. The leg trembled and went forward. It placed it on the ground. It then lifted the other leg. It trembled too and went forward. There went the chameleon, lifting a leg and shaking along. The eyes kept on looking backwards and forwards.

After it had been walking for a long time, it saw blackberries. Its eyes looked at the berries. It started salivating. Then it said, “No, I can arrive at the people at
any time. There is no rush. Let me just take a detour here. After all I am already starving. I do not have any provisions. The Creator will not see me.”

Indeed, it went to the berries. It kept eating; it indulged itself until it forgot it had an errand. And the Creator was watching it. He became incensed. He summoned the lizard. The lizard arrived in a wink.

The Creator spoke to the lizard. He said, “Lizard, run as fast as possible. Run and get to the people. When you get there tell them that I said they should die. I sent the chameleon. It is now busy with berries along the way.”

The lizard slithered into action. The tail wiggled whilst it was running. There was a cloud of dust in its wake. It did not want to touch so much as a morsel of food on the way. It passed the chameleon still busy with the berries. It passed it in a hurry and away it went. When the chameleon saw the lizard a hint of fear struck. It remembered that it was on an errand. It stopped eating the berries. It trembled again and followed the lizard.

The lizard reached the people and said, “Lend me your ears, people. Listen to the word. I have the word from the Creator. Please listen in your entirety.”

The people fell silent and listened. They stopped their chores. They all wanted to hear the Creator’s word carried by the lizard.

“Listen, all of you. The Creator says people must die.”

The lizard turned back. It went on its way home. The people remained talking. They were all discussing the lizard’s message. Whilst they were talking the chameleon appeared. It was out of breath from the walking. It kept shaking and approached very slowly. The people saw it and said, “Here is the chameleon. It looks as if it wants to say something.”

The chameleon spoke, “Listen, all of you. Listen to the word. I have a message from the Creator. Listen, all of you.”
The people said, “The chameleon is also saying it has the Creator’s message. Let us listen to what it says.” The people kept quiet and listened to the chameleon.

The chameleon continued and said, “Listen, people. The Creator says people should not die.”

The people said, “Oh, you have come to tell us that? Where were you all along? We are sticking to the lizard’s word.”

The chameleon was disappointed. It turned and left. Today there is a saying we know very well. It says, “We are sticking to the lizard’s word”. That is how this idiom came about.

“Thank you, grandmother, for the lovely tale. We will go to school having learned many sayings. We now know five idioms. We know that nobody knows what fattened the pig. We also know that night-time will bring you home and that you should make sure the sun never sets. We know, too, that the one who never listens will be hurt. Now we know that we are sticking to the lizard’s word. We will learn good Zulu from grandmother.”
APPENDIX B: Samples of interviews and questionnaires.

(i) INTERVIEWS

(i) Interview conducted on 26 October 2009 with Elinor Sisulu

1. As a writer of children’s literature, could you briefly tell me about your book entitled The day Gogo Went to Vote?
2. What was the inspiration behind the writing of this book or the writing of children’s literature?
3. This book has been a success in the US and I’m also aware that it has been translated into the indigenous languages of South Africa. Can you cite any reasons for this book’s success?
4. According to you, what makes a good children’s book?
5. Research has shown that there are no authentic children’s books written in the indigenous languages of South Africa. What could the reason for this be and how can African authors, especially women, be encouraged to write children’s books?
6. As an African woman writer, are there any challenges or obstacles that you have faced? Please explain.
7. As a child, were you told stories or did you have any opportunities to read storybooks and what was your favourite story?
8. Do you think this has played a role in turning you into a writer?
9. What are your impressions of the literature for African children compared to that for white children?
10. For centuries, folktales have been the textbook of African education. What could the reason for this be? Do you think that they still have a place in the life of the modern child?
12. Do you regard folktales as an equivalent to storybooks or a good substitute for contemporary children’s storybooks?
13. There is great concern about the lack of a culture of reading among our children. Do you have any ideas on how a reading culture could be developed?

Thank you very much for your time!

The following is the Zulu version of the interview conducted with O.E.H. Nxumalo. It should be noted that most of the questions are similar to those posed to D.B.Z.Ntuli
(ii) *Ingxoxo-mabuzana eyenziwa mhlaba zi-28 kuNcwaba (Agasti) 2009 noSolwazi uNxumalo*

**Imibuzo**

1. Emakhulwini eminyaka, izinganekwane zaziyincwadi yemfundo kwelase-Afrika. Yini engaba yisizathu salokho futhi ngabe ucabanga ukuthi zisenomsebenzi yini enganeni yesikhathi samanje?

2. Lapho useyingane ngabe wawunaye yini umuntu owayekuxoxela izinganekwane, futhi uma kunjalo ngabe iyiphi owawuyithanda ukwedlula zonke?


4. Ngicela uphawule ngamafuphi ngeqhaza elabanjwa ngamamishini ekuthuthukisweni kwezemibhalo yesiZulu, ugxile kakhudlwana emibhalweni yezingane.

5. Ngabe izincwadi zokufunda ezindala njengoMasihambisane neGodu ubona zisamfanele umfundi walezi zinsuku, futhi kungani usho njalo?

6. *Imilolozelo nezilandelo kuthathwa njengezinkondlo zezingane zamaZulu.* Ngicela unginikeze izizathu zokuthi kungani kufanele zithathwe njengoho lombo kwezingane owethulwa ngomlomo.

7. Ucwanging selukhombise ukuthi azikho izincwadi zezindaba ezibhalelwe ngezilimi zoMdabu zaseNingizimu Afrika eziqanjwe yilabo babhali. Yini engaba yimbangela yalokhu?

8. Ngabe kunezincwadi ezenele yini ezibhalelwe izingane ngesiZulu?

9. Yikuphi ongalindela ukukuthola kuqukethwe yincwadi yezingane yesikhathi samanje?

10. Ngabe kuhona okucabangayo mhlawumbe, maqondana nokuthi ababhali besiZulu noma base-Afrika bangakhuthazwa kanjani ukuthi babhale izincwadi zezingane?

11. Ngabe ucabanga ukuthi ukushicilelewa ngokwenele kwezincwadi zezingane ezibhalwe ngabomdabu kungabasiza kanjani abasebancane?
12. Njengelungu nomsunguli wenhlango yababhali, Usiba, ungangichazela ngamafuphi ngaleyo nhlangano neqhaza elibamble ekuthuthukisweni kwemibhalo yesiZulu, kubandakanya nemibhalo yezingane yesiZulu?

13. Ngabe kukhona yini okunye ongathanda ukukwengeza noma ukukugqamisa maqondana nalolu cwaningo?

Ngiyabonga kakhulu ngokufaka kwakho isandla.
25 March 2009

Dear Publisher

My name is Danisile Ntuli from the department of African languages at UNISA. I am currently doing research for my Doctoral studies on traditional oral literature and modern written literature for children.

A literature review has revealed that research on contemporary children’s books in the indigenous African languages is a neglected area. I would really appreciate it if you could help me gather relevant information by answering the following questionnaire.

Thank you

Mrs Cynthia Danisile Ntuli
A SURVEY ON THE WRITING AND PUBLISHING OF CHILDREN’S BOOKS IN ZULU

- This study is conducted to determine publishers’ viewpoints on the writing and publishing of children’s books in Zulu/African languages.
- Answering this questionnaire will take you about 15 to 20 minutes.
- Your answers are not limited to the space provided. Please feel free to use additional paper.

Name of respondent: (optional)

Name of publisher:

Questions

1. When was the first Zulu/African picture book published by your company? Please provide the title of the book and the name of the author.

3. What was its market? Public, school or library?

2. The promotion of reading and the publishing of children’s books in the indigenous languages of SA have been neglected by authors and publishers. Do you agree? Please explain.

4. What selection criteria do you use when considering whether to accept a children's book for publication?

5. Do you think African children are exposed to suitable books in their mother tongue early enough?

6. Why do you think it's important for children to read age-appropriate books written in their home language from a tender age?
7. It seems there is growing concern that most of the children’s books in African languages are translations. Do you agree/disagree with this? Why?

8. Over the past few years some publishers have held competitions for children’s books written in the African languages. Could you please explain what has triggered this sudden interest?

NB. Please remember to provide the list of the Zulu children’s books published by your company; please fill them in on the following table:

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<tr>
<th>Name of book &amp; publication date</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Name of publisher and address</th>
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Thank you very much for participating in this study.

Mrs Cynthia Danisile Ntuli
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