

Title of Session: Language Arts Forum - Orphans in Literature

Moderator: Donna Hendry

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DonnaH: In case you haven't already gathered, I'm your session leader tonight. My name is Donna Hendry, and I'm an educational consultant in Connecticut:)

KimZB: Hi, this is my first time to go to any session...so where do we start?

BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a fan of Donna's sessions

KimZB: I'm a first grade teacher in VA

DonnaH: did Bj tell you what tonight's topic was?

BJ: no, you didn't...

BJ: so you can make up anything

DonnaH: *smile* (you know what it is, Bj)

DonnaH: We're going to discuss the role of the orphan in children's literature:)

DonnaH: First, let me share this article with you...

DonnaH: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngkids/0412/lemony6.html>

DonnaH: did you get that, Kim?

KimZB: Yes, I am going to look at it...

DonnaH: (gotta love my daughter's stuff) this article got me to thinking...

DonnaH: (let me know when you're ready)

KimZB: Ready...

DonnaH: well, we started discussing, there are a terrible number of stories that are based on orphans.

DonnaH: Harry potter, boxcar children...

KimZB: I never thought of it before...but you are right! My husband is by the TV near me and he didn't know that Frodo was an orphan....

DonnaH: further back, Anne Shirley, Tom Sawyer AND Huck Finn...

KimZB: I have read the boxcar children with my first graders...they get very sensitive about it

DonnaH: Oliver Twist, the children from The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe

DonnaH: Kit from The Witch of Blackbird Pond...

KimZB: Wonder what the percentage is....

DonnaH: not to mention most of the comic book superheros

DonnaH: (Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Robin...)

DonnaH: (Eoin Colfer's heroes, Artemis fowl is nearly one...mum is a bit insane, dad is presumed dead...)

DonnaH: and his other hero (in the supernaturalist) is an orphan as well.

DonnaH: Esperanza Rising isn't too far off either.

DonnaH: So with so many books having orphans, what is the draw? what makes them so special?

BJ: the article you showed said that being an orphan makes the character more heroic

KimZB: I just realized that I should be quiet and wait for a question....the best books I read have some sort of conflict or problem ..that is the hook which pulls me in

DonnaH: Why? What is more heroic about it?

DonnaH: okay. we have conflict or problem...that is what makes a story...is being an orphan mean there is automatically some sort of problem?

BJ: overcoming obstacles from the git go of being orphaned?

KimZB: They have no support system...so they have to do it all on their own or gather support characters on their own merits?

DonnaH: or do you think that it has more to do with the whole child vs. adult world?

ChantaratP joined the room.

DonnaH: a child with parents has a structure to work within, but an orphan doesn't have as much structure, and hence can do things in a new way?

DonnaH: (hello Chantarat:)

ChantaratP: Hi Donna

ChantaratP: Hi every one

KimZB: Hi

DonnaH: We're discussing the roll of the orphan in children's literature, Chantarat

SusanR joined the room.

ChantaratP: Donna could u pls give more focus meaning that u mention "Structure"

DonnaH: Sure.

DonnaH: A child who is in a nuclear family (or other generally perceived family unit) has a certain structure, a hierarchy that they learn to work within.

DonnaH: (with me so far?)

DonnaH: An orphan, however, doesn't have the same structure. Missing quite a bit, actually.

SusanR tiptoes in and sits quietly at the rear of the class

DonnaH: (in the literary sense, let's keep that in mind)

DonnaH: so they have to learn how to deal with occurrences on their own, without the regular structure.

DonnaH: which leads to more varied, (read: interesting) responses to situations.

DonnaH: and that doesn't mean it needs to be fantastical. Look at Tom Sawyer and the whitewash job.

KimZB: They may not have even lived within the regular structure, so what they have is regular to them and more interesting to us...

DonnaH: You really can't get a whole lot more boring than that, right? But what makes it interesting is his uncommon reaction to it.

DonnaH: that's at least MY perception of it, yes:)

DonnaH: Twain was working off the concept that as an orphan, Tom didn't have the structure, so Tom's way of working around it was of a child coming to his own solution, instead of an adult proposed solution.

DonnaH: (does that make sense?)

DonnaH: The Beaudelaires work much the same. Face a situation, and their responses are something that, in general, we would not consider.

DonnaH: Hmm. does that mean, that writing an orphan hero(ine) gives the writer a wider berth in their choices for character development?

DonnaH: (not held to general societal standards?)

DonnaH: ie, orphans are more fun to write?

ChantaratP: as I notice the orphan children need some close taking care the same as completed family child, so that working with this children have to take care in special teachers.

BJ: when you have the opportunity to see the orphans grow up, I think that is true

DonnaH: perhaps we need to point out that literary orphans need to be recognized as different from real orphans to our students?

BJ: hmmm...that might be an interesting topic...especially looking at war orphans

BJ: o O (probably for older children)

KimZB: and interesting as war orphans may make it into our country

ChantaratP: now in Thailand we going to have more orphan due to Tsunami event.

DonnaH: they have many times in he past...

DonnaH: large numbers of Vietnamese and Korean orphans ended up here during and immediately following those wars.

BJ: Also WWII orphans came to the US

DonnaH: do you think, in general, that reading these stories also gives hope?

DonnaH: The rising above adversity...if they can do it with the little they have, everyone should be able to sort of mentality?

ChantaratP: so dealing with this problem is need staffs who understand the problem very well, is it ?

BJ: I think it takes a certain amount of sensitivity, Chantarat

BJ: yes, I think that the orphan stories are hopeful

DonnaH: perhaps that is what draws the reader?

ChantaratP: Ye, BJ , you know now , mostly people on hurry to them for serving nothing else.

BJ: Donna, I think it's the American way to cheer for the underdog

DonnaH: Well, not just American...

KimZB: We think about the Tsunami orphans and we want them to go on and have a good life. We want to read about that happening with orphans in the stories we choose as well. I do find these stories hopeful...

BJ . o O (think about all those Red Sox fans!)

DonnaH: Anne Shirley was Canadian...Harry Potter and Oliver Twist were British.

DonnaH: So is it something we all do, cheer for the underdog?

ChantaratP: Donna, what is your specific perception on this regard, in Thailand we don't have more works of orphan. What is your commend on this ?

BJ: I would like to say that it is human nature, but I'm not sure it is a cross cultural phenomenon

BJ: Chantarat, could it be that we are just not familiar with Thai authors?

DonnaH: it's at least predominant in the western world. (ethnocentric, but true)

DonnaH: I'm not exactly sure WHY it is popular...but I know that it is...it is why were discussing it tonight.

DonnaH: I believe you missed the original article I shared...

DonnaH: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngkids/0412/lemony6.html>

DonnaH: However, we're at the top of the hour...so our session is over:)

BJ: certainly you've given us something to think about, Donna

KimZB: This was a new concept for me as well

BJ: thanks, Donna

KimZB: Thanks, catch you later

BJ waves goodnight

SusanR: Thank you Donna.

DonnaH: Good night everyone:) Thank you for coming:)

DonnaH: Oh, and next Wed [January 26], I'll be speaking at a special Social Studies forum...

DonnaH: I just got back from a conference with PBS and the National Archives on New approaches in Teaching slavery, to go with PBS's premiere of "Slavery in America" which is due out Feb. 9th.

ChantaratP: Thanks Donna and everyone

DonnaH: goodnight!