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Searching for solace through children's literature

Master's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Rhonna Robbins-Sponaas

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Kunnskap for en bedre verden

Abstract

Children's literature is a field within literature which sparked its popularity in the 1700s. Bibliotherapy is a branch within psychology which emphasizes the use of books in healing and self-reflection. Oral stories were passed down through generations before the genre became recognized in the 1700s by John Newbery. The main goal of this literature has for a long time been to teach children about proper behavior, until recently have been used as source of entertainment. Some argued that books may be used to help people going through similar situations as characters in stories, and therefore it became studied as bibliotherapy in the early 1900s. In this thesis there will be an exploration of Jacqueline Wilson's novels *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* in the light of bibliotherapy.

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Contents:

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
Chapter one: From teaching proper behavior to joyful entertainment	4
Chapter two: Troubles of divorced parents in <i>The Suitcase Kid</i>	14
Chapter three: The quiet child in <i>Lizzie Zipmouth</i>	23
Chapter four: Narrative empathy and conclusion.....	29
Appendix: The value of the topic in teaching	33
Works cited.....	35

Chapter one: From teaching proper behavior to joyful entertainment

This thesis will investigate how two selected works by Jacqueline Wilson can help children to explore empathy for others or urge children into understanding how others experience difficult home situations in childhood. The first chapter includes background about children's literature, scope and about the author. The second chapter brings in the discussion of *The Suitcase Kid* and chapter three will analyze *Lizzie Zipmouth*. The focus for the thesis will be to investigate children's experience of their parents' divorce. These selected novels by Wilson are recommended for children between six to eight years old and will be the focus for the thesis. First it is important to be acquainted with the genre of children's literature. Afterwards there will be an analysis of the selected works by Jacqueline Wilson. The goal will be to gain a greater understanding of the genre, and to see which perspective Wilson brings in with her novels to the genre. Another important aspect in this thesis will be to examine the artwork in the novels, and to see how they play along with the text in the novels. Additionally, the empathic value of literature should not be underestimated, but rather be encouraged to be used. The genre includes crucial movements which will be addressed in the first chapter of the thesis.

Children's literature is an important part of the beginning of literature. These books were used as means of exposing children to various topics, teach them about morality, or simply be sources of entertainment. Literary scholars include various opinions on how this particular literature should be treated in relation to which topics should be included. Some have insisted that it should only be used to teach children strict behavior, whereas others argue that they should be used for entertainment. In addition, some mean that the stories can include both a moral and be read for enjoyment. Children's literature includes books, magazines, stories and poems that could be intended for different age groups. The genre traces back to an oral tradition where stories were passed down from generation to generation (Hunt). Published texts did not become normal until the 18th century, it is therefore these stories were told orally (Hunt). Literature was a source to teach children about morality, including both secular and religious aspects.

Literature for children includes a long line of history. "The child was not ready for life, and that he had to be subjected to a special treatment, a sort of quarantine, before he was allowed to join the adults" (Grenby, 20). This quote reflects the idea that was presented in an early modern perspective on literature for children. The quote also reflects certain modern elements to how parents raise children and choose which topics to expose children. "The child was not

ready for life” means that they are not ready to be exposed to certain topics, and therefore their parents need to be present and guide them into the world of literature. Early examples of stories made for children date back to more than thousand years ago, showing the appetite to keeping children both educated and entertained. The first stories for children were told through generations and were retellings of stories narrated orally from generation to generation. “It is the abiding memory of many children and the research of a few devoted scholars which have preserved for our time those humble tales which we call folklore, the slowly accumulated an especially rich treasure which is the heritage of English and, with it, American children’s literature” (Meigs, 30).

Fables have been a crucial point in children’s literature and is often associated with the genre of children’s literature. These stories often included elements from the Bildungsroman where the goal was that the child should develop critical thinking and develop empathy for both people and animals (Cosslet). Fables are morality stores in most often where animals are portrayed as humans with human traits. The fables were adapted for children in the 17th and 18th century. Tales and folklores became an important starting point for the genre of children’s literature. The debate discussing the ongoing question where certain stories and folklores have originated from as it is not easy to define stories since there exists variations of the same tales. Variations of the stories exist across the world. For instance, the tale of Cinderella has been traced from Peru to China with variations (Meigs). The one used in England is the translation of the French version of Cinderella. Stories are not static elements and may change due to the emerging culture. There are even variations within English speaking countries; an Irish and a Scottish version of Cinderella (Meigs). In both old fables and fairy tales, readers often encounter animals with human traits.

Anthropomorphism is the practice of treating animals as if they had human qualities. It has often been utilized in children’s literature throughout several periods (Hunt). This is often found in both fables and fairy tales where the animals have human like qualities, and they can speak with the humans in the story. The use of anthropomorphism reflects animals thoughts and can help children understand certain situations in literature. It emphasizes the shared characteristics between animals and humans in terms of the intellectual and could be an interesting way of introducing serious topics to the child and develop empathy through literature. The use of anthropomorphism has been utilized in several stories for children. Texts including animals were often referred to as children’s literature, for instance Anna Sewel’s novel *Black Beauty* which was used as a morality story in schools. The teacher used this novel

to teach pupils about compassion for treating animals properly and develop sympathy in relation to other people. It has been considered as a children's book with its simple story and sentimental appeal which could be one of the reasons why teachers used this book in their lessons. Sewell's novel was popular among both adults and children, and teachers seemed to utilize it for educational purposes and could still be relevant for today. It is important to know why these books were used in schools, because it is crucial when discussing the questions stated for this thesis.

Religious stories and myths are also an important element in children's literature. One example of this are the tales of the legend of King Arthur. Another important period in children's literature includes The Middle Ages in England (Grenby & Immel). This particular period is important because it stated the rise of legends and myths such as the legend of King Arthur and Robin Hood. These characters are still present in literature for children. The stories of King Arthur have old story roots back in the Celtic legend which flowered in the 12th and the 13th century. The first sign of the legend was first found in the 6th century stories by the monks Gildas and Nennius (Alexander). Chivalrous acts might be one of the reasons this was an important story to tell children since it includes proper behaviour and also put a great emphasis on how the different genders should behave. The boys were taught to be brave and chivalrous like the king, whereas the girls should know how to behave like a proper lady. The social norms of how boys and girls ought to behave were thus represented through this particular literature (Hunt). This change also represented both a political and a moral value to children. The legend of King Arthur taught the young ones about the value of duty and to behave properly, while Robin Hood taught children about injustice and emphasized the importance of helping others in need. Before the printing press, books were extremely rare and expensive, which resulted in that most families were not able to buy books. These examples, like in the Greek and Roman era, were not only recommended for children but also for adults. genre, therefore, had not gotten its own respective field up until that time.

The late 1700s had an interesting turn in how literature was written for children. The rise of Puritanism influenced the literature at that time and placed an emphasis on that children needed to be acquainted with the Bible. This meant that they needed to read and study the Bible as they had to prepare for death and what would happen after they passed away. John Bunyan, Abraham Chear and James Janeway wrote books that concerned themselves about children facing hell and death (Hunt). At this point of children's literature, in many ways one might see that the aspect of reading for entertainment was eliminated from the genre and therefore this

period included a turning point. These books did clearly have a focus on instructions for how children should behave. The goal of these books was to instruct children on how to properly behave according to Puritan values (Hunt). This view of literature for children added a religious aspect that had its unique imprint on the genre. Philosophers at that time also reflected on how to properly raise a child and what children should be exposed to during their childhood. John Locke was one of the philosophers who recommended adapting fables into children's literature because they had an educational value. In addition to that, they were also ideal places where one could include the aspect of morality into the stories. This could also build on other philosopher's mindsets such as Jean Jacques Rosseau who meant that the child should not be brought up by strict rules but rather guide themselves into adulthood through self-exploring which could reflect on the literary views. Rosseau supported a freer way of raising children where they should only be guided into behaving properly. Therefore, both Rosseau and Locke bring a new perspective to children's literature in the way that they stand in contrast to the earlier Puritanism view of the strict religious morality lesson (Townsend). Their way of presenting topics to children distinguished from the church's views in several ways. In addition, their critical movement in the genre attributed to how children's literature is represented today, where it is freer, and the stories are less morality strict based than before.

Even though there have been several turning points and influences in children's literature, the beginning of the genre as it is known today starts in the following period. The 1700's represented a period when literature had an increasing rise in popularity. The novel gained the leading role and the most consumed one by the common public by the 1790's. They were also under the great influence of political debates that ravaged in England after the French revolution. Literature was affected by the changing world where enlightening ideas were put into practice in several countries in Europe, most importantly in France and how it affected England. At that time, England did not have any pre-publication censorship and therefore the press was freer and more open to new texts and ideas. There was also a rise in the printing press and the novel became the dominant area at that time where one could both read and listen to stories. There was an appetite for something new in Britain. Britain at that time was still deeply involved in building an empire worldwide. After the age of industrialism and world trade, the middle classes were boosted, and more people had more money in which they could spend. This included literature as well. More and more people became literate, and more people could afford to buy novels in contrast to what it was before (Watt).

The Renaissance provided an interesting role in the development of the genre as it is known today because of the improvements in the printing press had made it possible to produce large quantities of books. This resulted in an increase in owning books among people. It was still only a limited percentage of the population who could afford it, despite the increasing wealth in England. More children were literate in comparison with the Middle Ages. This resulted in an increase of number of sold books and the population grew an appetite for reading. Books became crucial elements in schools, where teachers would often read aloud stories for students. With the rise of a literate population, this literature also included lessons in morality and manners. “Golden Age of children’s literature of the nineteenth century and set astir a renaissance of children’s book criticism in the twentieth” (Meigs, 108). The 18th century literature for children was reflected through John Locke’s influence. “Early children’s texts appealed to readers whose worldview was based in a Puritan ideology” (Demers, 22). The morality therefore has a strong influence on the topics in the literature at that time where the afterlife itself is the motivation for changing the child’s behavior through reading these books. It is therefore a distinction between moral and Evangelical tales because of the Christian aspect to the story about the afterlife (Grenby & Immel).

By the mid-18th century the word “morality” had lost its pejorative connotations, and there is a new focus added to the literature where John Newbery’s focus changed that children were to acquire this morality through reason. This could also reflect the philosophers at that time who argued that humans should think rationally and move away from Christianity and emotions. This reflects Rosseau’s reflections that children should not be taught what is morally correct or not, but they should be guided into it by developing their own rational skills. Even though there are many variants of early literature for children, most literary scholars agree that the rise of this genre happened in England during the 18th century (Grenby & Immel). In the emergence of the genre, British literature for children followed the original idea of children’s literature often with the story of folktales and heroes. This emergence had a visible entry from the 17th century. It included moral lessons, stories, alphabets, rhymes and riddles that were to both amuse but at the same time instruct children how they should behave properly. Philosophers like John Locke and Jean Jacques Rosseau were also important in shaping literature of children. Their own opinion on how one should raise and instruct children through their literary works such as John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* from 1693 and Rosseau’s *Emile, or On Education*. At this point there was already a discussion regarding the adult’s raising of the child.

John Newbery saw a growing appetite for literature and utilized the philosophers' ideas about a more modern way of writing for children. Newbery is seen as the father of children's literature and wrote over two hundred books for children. He is an important author in the history of the genre and saw the need to defend children's literature as its own branch within literature. He realized the need for children to have stories of their own, and not read the same stories as adults. In this period, there was an increasing number of new books made specifically for children, and thus the new genre was born. The start of this business included commercials which was a new element to the literature, and books contained games, pictures and rhymes. Riddles, schoolbooks with the learning of alphabet, songs, stories and dialogues appeared in England from 1742 (Watt). The Newbury enterprise lasted until the 19th century and he was the first one to commercialize books especially made for children. They sold both religious and secular books for children. Some morals were directed at girls whereas other ideas were intended for boys. *Booke of Good Nourture for Chyldren*, and *Youth to Learn Theyr Dutie By* were some of the books sold from 1557. This book had topics such as duties for young boys and girls which consisted of a medieval content in its morality to children, bringing back elements from the earlier period of the genre. This of course, would not be the case nowadays with literature for children. Instead of reading about medieval themes of duty and differentiate between genders, most contemporary novels are written for all genders. This is also the case with Jaqueline Wilson's novels. Newbery along with the ideas of Locke and Rosseau played an important role in starting a critical movement in children's literature, since it gave the genre a new light and a bright new focus where the focus of entertainment was crucial in the literature (Townsend).

Another crucial movement in the genre is the 19th century which is also referred to as "The Golden Age of children's literature". This period is called "The Golden Age" because the genre starts to be acknowledged as a literary genre and as a recognized as part of British and American literature. At this point, the ideas of Newbery are being developed further, and the element of empathy and the evolving life skills among children is emphasized as a central point in books (Hunt). The imagination and fantastic stories are also an important element in this period, rather than utilizing the strict rules of the older instruction books. Hans Christian Andersen and the Grimm brothers became famous names who collected fairy tales to children (Townsend). The moral aspect in the stories are not as crucial anymore, but still the stories did provide a moral to the story, but the didactical aspect of the fairy tales was not as prominent as it had been before. Another important name from this period worth noting is Charles Lutwidge

Dodgson, known by the pseudonym “Lewis Carroll”, introduced *Alice in Wonderland* in 1865. The story about Alice became extremely popular. Carroll’s story about Alice brought fantastic elements which played with anthropomorphism and brought in new narratives to the literature. “Perry Nodelman suggests that, in terms of ‘humanized animals’, the association happened ‘more or less by accident’, in so far as Aesop’s fables provided a suitable early example of didactic literature for children, which was then emulated by others” (Grenby & Immel, 242).

The 20th and the 21st century include an increase in diversity in children’s literature. This is an element that was not seen in children’s literature before and it is still important today. The latter is in a large degree used in today’s literature for children in many ways (Hunt). One of the most notable elements is the use of images in the text. Fantasy is the leading genre within children’s literature, especially from the 1960’s and onwards until today. In the 1970s and the 1980s, literature became more realistic. Important authors who wrote for children during these periods were Clive Staples Lewis who represents modern Anglo-Saxon fantasy literature. His most famous book-series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, became immensely popular and were written between 1950 and 1956. These books had a great influence on the fantasy genre, and are still popular to these days, both in book versions, and in addition, adaptations for movies. Lewis’ brought fantastic elements to children’s literature, and his books were immensely popular among children. Lewis also added the element of Christianity to the books. There is also a great use of anthropomorphism in his books, which is very clear in his Aslan-figure, who also represents Christianity in the books.

The shaping of children’s literature has witnessed crucial changes from when the first stories were told, to the development of today’s novels. The transition involves great changes in topics, language and narration. Literary scholars, adults and philosophers have both argued and disagreed on which stories the child should be exposed to and it is still an ongoing debate today. The diversity of literature in this century provides new elements to literature and has helped it expand into more than only the traditional way of viewing literature. Serious topics are discussed in Jacqueline Wilson’s works. It seems that exposure to serious topics may help the children tackle these situations. Her stories have been loved and criticized by many, bringing back the ultimate dilemma and discussion which roared even hundreds of years ago of to which topics the children should be exposed. The need to discuss certain topics coheres with real-life problems are dealt with.

Jacqueline Wilson grew up in Kingston as an only child. This view of keeping a quarantine to what the children should read or not could be reflected in Wilson’s novels because

of her untraditional way of including topics that are difficult and serious. From an early age she knew that she wanted to become an author. She started her career writing for a magazine for young adults when she was seventeen years old. In 1990 she published her first book in Great Britain. Wilson had a huge interest for writing crime fiction which was the starting point of her career as a writer. Wilson has been granted with several awards in connection with her children's novels such as *Smarties Prize* and *Guardian Children's Fiction Award*. Some of her novels have also been adapted to Television films and shows. Wilson is one of England's most read children's literature author and has sold millions of novels worldwide. She is only second to author Joanne Rowling on the top lists in Britain. She had a huge interest already from an early age and started writing stories in various genres.

Wilson writes in accessible way which reaches out to a younger audience. One reason for her success among a younger audience, is that she does not write stories based on her own childhood, from when she was young, but on the other hand, Wilson states in an interview that she wants to try to imagine how it is to grow up as a child in Britain today. She does also have a daughter, and visits schools where she brings her books where they have been used in connection with both teaching and reading together with children. Wilson's narrative voice seems to be one of the key elements in how she reaches out to children where she includes a first-person narration, written in the perspective of the child. Her novels include this narrative perhaps because she wants the child to be the central character in her books, providing the authority to the child rather than telling the story from a third-person narrative. This could encourage the children to both understand feelings in the stories and in addition participate and engage themselves in the story, creating a safe learning environment where children may together with an adult tackle difficult home situations.

Jacqueline Wilson has a huge range of novels written for a broad range of audience, from a very young age and up until pre-teen children. Her novels provide the readers with interesting topics in which the young audience may find themselves in. The author has been criticized for the utilization of grave and serious topics in children's literature. This is also what characterizes her style of writing, and gives the literature a new dimension. One could also argue that exposing children to such topics, could help them understand why certain situations are what they are like, and how they can cope with situations and know how to handle feelings and being able to talk about them. One interpretation of Wilson's writing is that she writes in the way because she wants to help them engage themselves in reflecting upon their situation.

Narrative techniques impact how stories are received among its readers. Wilson's children books are written in a first-person narration, where the child is the protagonist and the main character which the reader encounters at the very beginning of the novel. The use of that narration ties the reader together with the central characters in the story, creating a closer relationship to them because of the use of the personal "I" (Keen). Because of this, the reader feels that they are closer to the characters and become a part of their world. It also supports Wilson's idea of writing stories from the perspective of the child and trying to imagine what their problems would be like in their everyday life. The books might have been received differently if they had been written with a third-person narration, creating more distance to the characters in the novels. By using the personalized "I" in the story, it could be easier to discuss the topic or the character's feelings to the child, since children's empathy are still in development at a young age. The comprehension of the situation is thus facilitated by using the narrative. "[...] Ensures that Wilson writes from a simple, yet subtle juvenile point of view which is largely non-judgmental and encourages reader identification" (Waddilove, 76). Unlike the dual-focus narrative, the first-person narrative the protagonist becomes the subject in all the other characters and subjects. The reader becomes aware of the surroundings through the perspective of the protagonist of the story and could therefore at sometimes be a subjective way of narrating a story (Altman).

Realistic setting is an essential key in Wilson's novels. "They are realistic modern books about children with problems. They sometimes deal with very sad subjects like divorce and bullying but the children always find a way of dealing with these issues" (Carter, 2). This excerpt reflects Wilson's writing for children. Wilson's novels include serious issues, such as divorce, in which children and young adults can relate to. Her novels reflect daily life and are down to earth, but at the same time portray important issues to be discussed. Most of her novels are set in Great Britain where children face daily struggles in their years of growth. Among the most known novels are for instance, *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid*. These novels correspond to her famous writing where they discuss taboo topics, for instance mental illnesses, dealing with loss and divorce. Wilson has also been criticized for her choosing of topics, since many adults have responded to her novels that they include topics that are too grave for children.

Children's literature includes several stages from the earliest examples of oral tradition, to new elements in contemporary novels. Literature for children has been used to teach children valuable lessons, but also proven to be used as joyful entertainment. In conclusion, this thesis

will investigate how Jacqueline Wilson's novels *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* portray difficulties of divorce, and how they may be used in connection with bibliotherapy.

Chapter two: Troubles of divorced parents in *The Suitcase Kid*

The Suitcase Kid is one of Wilson's most known novels which became extremely popular in the United Kingdom after its release in 1992. Jacqueline Wilson states in an interview regarding the novel about children's experience of divorce. "*The Suitcase Kid*, which focused on a young girl caught between her parents fighting a bitter divorce, could provide solace for an upset child or one with a friend in the same position, she says" (Rackham). The novel emphasizes children's perspective of their parents' divorce. It portrays children's feelings of finding it difficult to choose with whom to stay. The protagonist of the story is a young girl named Andrea. This novel is selected for the thesis because it handles children's experience of parents' divorce. The goal is to bring up these topics for discussion to create a greater understanding for children who are experiencing similar feelings. The selected novel is therefore an approach to bring up difficult topics together with children. Through reading about Andrea's way of finding her way of dealing with the situation, readers may apply it to their own lives. By relating to the fictional character in the novel, they may be able to handle similar situations. Additionally, they will also be able to comfort others going through the same process and develop empathy through the first-person narration in the story. Another crucial idea is to explore how the portrayal of the family is presented in the novel and how it normalizes new ways of forming families.

Bibliotherapy is a branch within psychology which may well be used to describe Jacqueline Wilson's works. It is defined as the use of books as therapy in the treatment of psychological or mental disorders (McCulliss). Bibliotherapy is a term which has been used in connection with the utilization of the mentioned novels in the thesis. The purpose of bibliotherapy involves using culturally-specific stories with the purpose of the therapeutically effect of healing through self-development (McCulliss). It was initially first used to help people from mental illness. Even though examples of bibliotherapy can be found around 300 BC, the term bibliotherapy was not coined as a term until Samuel McChord Crothers introduced it in 1916 (McCulliss). It may be used to help people cope with their own problems through the use of imagining what characters in novels may feel. The feeling of relating to another human being is a strong element in this treatment because it may help the reader organizing their own feelings and emotions (McCulliss). The feeling of relating to another human being is a strong element in this treatment because it may help the reader organize their own feelings and emotions. In addition, bibliotherapy also shows the reader that they are not alone of having to go through the tough processes. Bibliotherapy includes an empathetic element to it which signalizes to the

reader that certain feelings are completely normal, and that other people experience similar situations.

The topic of divorce is present in *The Suitcase Kid* in several ways. This shows that societal changes also affect the way literature is written for children. “The social meaning of ‘the family’ is constantly being revised and reconstructed” (Reynolds, 2009). A common problem in the society of contemporary Great Britain is how divorce affects young children, like Andrea in the novel. Contemporary literature for children dealing with this topic is written for several age groups in order to extend their understanding of the current situation. *The Suitcase Kid*, however, aims to an age group between eight to thirteen years old. The divorce of the children’s parents is an essential topic to bring up in children’s literature. Another prominent topic in this novel is loneliness which becomes a result of their parents’ handling of the demanding situation. The protagonists often experience stress and anger related to the issue. Besides, they also experience that their parents do not necessarily view the situation through the perspective of their children. Thus, the perspective of the young child in the difficult situation becomes essential in *The Suitcase Kid* because of the child’s experience of the current situation. Another important element to the novel, is that the story is told from the perspective of the young child.

The social construction of the family is in constant change in the 20th and the 21st century. Various factors play important roles regarding the way authors choose to write for children. Therefore, stories change due to revisions in contemporary societies where divorce is a common phenomenon among many families. Parents would choose certain topics to which children should be exposed. Children who grew up in the aftermath of World War 2 would be told different stories than children who grew up in the beginning of this century (Grenby & Immel). For instance, stories related to the nuclear family and how young children should behave are present in literature after the second world war. In this period, the definition of family included a strict biological family consisting of the mother who takes care of the children and the father who supports them (Reynolds). This view of the family, however, is not necessarily the case with literature after the 20th century, such as in Jacqueline Wilson’s *The Suitcase Kid*. The definition of family has changed due to changes in society. Literature reflects these changes in the stories which are read by children. “Children’s literature is playing its part in opening up thinking and offering young people opportunities to revision relationships, culture and power structures” (Reynolds, 193). This involves adding new family members which reflects new ways of living. For instance, in *The Suitcase Kid*, the protagonist’s family

consists of her parents, her new step-parents and her step-siblings. This representation of family would not be the same in literature from before the 21st century because of the definition of how a family should be constructed. Through her novel, Wilson intends to view the process of divorce through the protagonist's point of view. It is crucial to discuss topics such as changing families in literature. In Wilson's novel, families come in various sizes and types which stands as a contrast to how it was represented in earlier children's literature (Townsend). *The Suitcase Kid* addresses the topic of divorce in a sincere but still humorous way through the young child's perspective and challenges the idea that this is a topic to which children should not be exposed.

The narration of *The Suitcase Kid* is divided into various chapters and also plays with images. Images play with the storytelling in a way that it emphasizes certain elements to the story. The frame narrative for this novel adds a new element to its storytelling. The chapters are titled so that each chapter's focus is based on the first letter of the chapter title. For instance, the first chapter is titled "A for Andy", which explains to the reader who the main character is and introduces the reader to her family. There is a presentation of her family with illustrations provided for the readers. Andrea is the protagonist of the novel and the story is told from her perspective. The inclusion of the first-person narration emphasizes the value of using the child as the protagonist of the story. Even though the use of first-person narration is not a rule when writing for children, it is a common strategy. This narration facilitates the reader's empathy for the characters in the novel which is why authors who write for children use this literary technique (Keen). In the traditional way of writing for children, the child is the star of the story and the adults' perspective is put aside in the story which makes the narration appeal to its younger audience. It emphasizes the child's experience of the situation and may therefore be used as an aid to talk about serious topics such as divorce. The protagonist's experience of their parents' divorce is something in which readers can relate to. The importance of choosing a child protagonist in literature for children is a conscious choice made by the author. The book may have been perceived differently if the story included another type of narration, such as a third-person narration (Keen) This raises a question about a conflict between this narration and the fact that the author is an adult. Nevertheless, Jacqueline Wilson emphasizes that she tries to imagine what it is like to be a child and grow up in today's society. The narrative strategy provides empathy and understanding which relates to the part of helping children cope with their feelings and developing life skills. The novel will be more appealing to the young readers and make it more accessible to how children view the world instead of creating a narrative where the adults tell how young children perceive the situation.

Historically, the use of illustrations in children's books date back to the 17th century. John Locke argued that illustrations facilitated comprehension learning and functioned to spark joy among children. Illustrations add meaning to the text since children's literature relies on the medium in order to convey its message to its readers. The illustrations in Wilson's novel are in black and white instead of vivid colors. The use of black and white is a conscious choice made by the author to emphasize meaning to the readers. The illustrations in this novel are drawn in black and white instead of using colors unlike the cover of the book which adds drama to the story. The use of black and white adds to the seriousness in the story (Grenby & Immel). It also signalizes that these novels are not intended for the youngest children, but rather older children who have started reading on their own. The cover is in vivid colors to attract attention to the novel where the protagonist is placed at the center. The popularity of using images in books did not start until the 19th century where illustrations functioned as a method of language learning in Europe. Example of this are children in Germany who made use of illustrated books to learn Latin (Grenby & Immel). "Pictures themselves functioned here as a universal language which could help students bridge linguistic divides and align otherwise disparate language systems" (Grenby & Immel, 55). The utilization of pictures is relevant when analyzing Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid* since frequent use of illustrations occur throughout the pages. In addition to function as a language learning aid, they also provide children with an enjoyment of creative images which increases the joy of reading. In addition, research shows that including pictures, or reading a graphic novel adaptation of a work increases material comprehension among young people (Kukkonen). Wilson's novels include images made by Nick Sharrat. Children might notice characters' feelings through examining Sharrat's illustrations. The first illustration in chapter one portrays Andrea between her parents who have split up, where Andrea sits on top of her suitcase. The suitcase is represented as the foundation for the story and intensifies Andrea's feelings towards the situation. The illustrations are made by Nick Sharrat in cooperation with the author.

The first chapter begins with "When my parents split up they didn't know what to do with me" (Wilson, 7). Wilson explains that they create them together as she goes through the stories together. The front of the book introduces its readers to a colorful and bright cover with a picture of a family and Andrea standing outside of their family circle. The background picture consists of a map with various street names and cross points which could emphasize Andrea's hard time of accepting that she must travel from parent to parent every week instead of having a gathered family like they used to. "Will Andy find a place to call home?" This implies that

Andrea is frightened about her situation with having to deal with divorced parents and that she is scared that things will not be as they used to be.

In the following, five excerpts of *The Suitcase Kid* will analyze the way Andrea perceives challenges after the divorce of her parents. These five excerpts show selections of Andrea's thoughts and examples of how to cope with problems. The first selected excerpt introduces how Andrea's family situation has changed due to her parents' divorce. Her parents have split up and she struggles with the new home situation. The following excerpt describes Andrea's attitude towards her new stressing situation related to her feelings of becoming lost between her parents. "When my parents split up, they didn't know what to do with me" (Wilson, 7). Andrea's feelings regarding the divorce of her parents are concerned with the sentiment of feeling misplaced or that she does not have anything to call her home anymore. The significance of this excerpt is that when the reader encounters Andrea's first thoughts in the novel, the reader may recognize themselves in the situation, or be able to relate to peers who are experiencing the same feelings. Therefore, the start of the novel is an interesting way of introducing children's feelings towards their experience of the situation. One may ask the reader what they think of Andrea's situation and ask why she claims that her parents did not know what to do with her when they split up.

The second selected excerpt which will be analyzed concerns itself with Andrea's emotions regarding her new step-father. "He's my horrible step-father and I simply can't stick him" (Wilson, 15). Andrea's description of her new family member does not approve of her new step-father in this excerpt. She views her world as the only child whose family has always consisted of herself and her mother. The significance of this excerpt is useful when showing readers that these negative emotions related to the new father figure are normal, and that it makes sense to feel that way at the start. This excerpt shows her disapproval to one of the new family members. The emphatic value is relevant in the mentioned excerpt because it may reach out to young readers who are also experiencing divorce in their family. It shows children's perspective of a new father figure which is relatable to many children experiencing the same complicated situation. It shows that new family members do not necessarily become great friends in the beginning, but rather shows that new relations may need time to bond and cultivate in a new family setting. Andrea is honest with the reader and does not try to hide the fact that she does not approve the new family member with whom her mother spends a great deal of her time with lately.

The third selected excerpt presents the issue of parents quarreling in front of the children and bringing their own problems into the world of their child. “Well, if you hadn’t bled me dry over the divorce, we could afford a better place” (Wilson, 66). This excerpt shows disagreement between Andrea’s parents regarding finance. It presents normal issues related to the period after one’s parents’ divorce. Additionally, it shows one unfortunate problem related to it which is that Andrea’s parents are fighting in her presence. Wilson adds a common issue to the problems of the divorce of Andrea’s parents. This presents economic issues between children’s parents and that many parents unconsciously or not, unfortunately involve their children when fighting over money. The relevance of this excerpt is that it shows readers issues that may occur throughout their situation. In conversation with readers, one may ask what they think Andrea is feeling in this excerpt. By encouraging a conversation about the topic, the reader may engage in self-reflection, and try to understand what Andrea might be feeling in this situation.

The fourth selected excerpt shows a problematic issue because of students’ situation distracting them from school. “It would be so much better if you settled down in one place for a while and went to the local school” (Wilson, 48). The excerpt above describes a situation where one of the parents tries to make Andy decide where she wants to live. They claim that it would be better if she settles down. However, Andy does not want to choose one of her parents. Andy’s wish is to go back to the old house together with both of her parents instead of choosing one place to live. The quote describes a situation which many children can relate to when experiencing the separation of one’s parents. Many children find it hard to choose between whom they should stay. It is, therefore a source of uncertainty and confusion at a young age. The stressful situation is put upon Andy whose parents want her to choose whom to stay with for a certain time period. A lot of young children are experiencing the same feelings as Andrea when they are in a similar situation. Through discussing this excerpt, children are able to discuss how their feelings are related to the same situation. Through literature they are able to increase their understanding of why certain situations are the way they are. Many can relate to the issue that their parents are trying to figure out what is best for their children. In this process, the opinions of the children are not necessarily considered when it comes to deciding to settle down in one place. Andy is also experiencing stress due to the divorce of her parents, and it is something that can be used to discuss with young children who are in the same situation as her. Bringing up the topic through discussion may help them to understand the difficulties of deciding where they should live.

The fifth selection explores Andrea's sense of achievement at school. The excerpt shows readers that it may be difficult to perform well at school when there are other challenging situations going on in their minds. "It's just not good enough, Andrea. Your schoolwork's gone to pieces this year" (Wilson, 91). The headmaster at school expresses that Andrea's grades are not as good as they used to be. It seems that the tough home situation affects Andrea's concentration at school. In some way, readers may feel that Andrea is stuck between two worlds where she is only able to concentrate on one thing at a time. Andrea emphasizes the stress that is currently happening in her life, related to the fact that she needs to move around between places and bring all her stuff with her. This relates to the title of the novel and strengthens Andrea's feelings and perspective. The protagonist presents the difficulty of focusing on school during their experience at home. Andrea, like many children experience challenges in staying focused at school. Instead of focusing on schoolwork, Andrea is preoccupied with her idea that she wants to bring her parents back and live in Mulberry Cottage. The issue related to her lack of focus becomes problematic since she does not achieve what is expected of her in class. The headmaster becomes an objective third part to the story who is worried about Andrea. Even though the headmaster wants to have a conversation with Andrea about her current situation, it seems she is not able to understand Andrea's concerns. The headmaster tells Andrea to start working harder and get back to the level she was at before which is challenging for her at this point. Andrea feels that the headmaster does not understand her situation, and the conversation ends with Andrea daydreaming and not participating. This excerpt is useful because it shows the reader that many children experience that they are not able to focus as much on working with school because of the situation going on at home. It shows that this is a problem, but also shows reader that it is normal that it will be hard to focus at school when there are so many things going on at home. The significance of this shows the school's prominent role of guiding children into becoming happier and helping them deal with their personal problems. This excerpt shows the difficulties of moving around between several homes. It also shows the reader that other children may experience that it is tougher to focus on school in different time periods. The child protagonist becomes present in the conversation between Andrea and the headmaster because of the two various points of view. The headmaster becomes an objective person who focuses on her schoolwork in this situation and does not share the same perspective as Andrea. On the contrary, Andrea is the one whose situation is being discussed and therefore she may experience discomfort in discussing the situation with other people. The relations between the adult and the child therefore becomes crucial in this situation. It adds light to the importance of relations between teacher and student because of the understanding of the pupil's experience

and how it relates to their performance at school. In addition, it also shows how people around children who are experiencing the same as Andrea are urged to develop sympathy for them. It helps them to understand their home situation and express empathy on the current issue.

The final excerpt analyzed from this novel shows the representation of family counseling. Andrea gets to have conversation with a therapist who encourages her to talk about the situations at home. Meanwhile, her parents start quarreling at the session and she runs out of the room. “We had to have another family counselling session. It was the same lady, the one with the mummy doll and the daddy doll and the bricks to make House A and House B” (Wilson, 64) The representation of therapy in the book illustrates that it is perfectly normal for children to consider to search for professional help. Children become aware of opportunities of how they can talk about their feelings on the matter. The portrayal of the family going to therapy together strengthens the child protagonist in the story because the therapy is aims to understand Andrea’s experience of her parents’ divorce. This is an important topic to bring up to children because of the importance of talking about how they experience this type of situation. By encountering it through Andrea in this novel, the reader becomes aware of the normality of utilizing mental health care services in order to cope with their feelings. It is therefore presented to the reader that it is possible to get through this hard situation by discussing it with another objective, impartial adult who may approach Andrea and therefore children’s perspective in these situations. This is important to the topic of the thesis which proves to young people that talking with a professional about their problems is something that one maybe need to do during life.

Finally, the main character seeks out solace in the end. Andrea finds a house similar to the one they used to live in before which reminds her of her old house symbolizing how her life used to be before her parents split up. She lost her favorite toy when staying in the garden of the new house and creeps out in the night to search for it. It reminds her so much of her past that she wishes to spend more time in the garden of the new house that she forgets that someone is living there and watching her from the house. After losing her beloved doll in the garden, she and her mother decide to go and talk to the people living there. After the encounter with the kind elderly couple living there, Andrea gets acquainted with them and finds out that they enjoyed having her playing in their garden. She is also welcomed at a later point and the couple function as a new friendship for Andrea, and their garden becomes her place free from worries and divorce where she can play and be the person she was when her parents were together. “It’s been grand to see her enjoying our garden. All our grandchildren are in Australia so we’ve no

children of our own to come and play” (Wilson, 135). Andrea creates a bond with the couple and starts referring to them as her grandparents. They function as an objective family member with whom she can spend time with without listening to her parents quarreling or needing to deal with one of her stepsiblings. She enjoys spending time in their garden and the situation shows the reader that it is important to find a space for themselves free from stress and take a break from her stressful situation.

Another example of Andrea finding solace in her new situation is found after her new half-sister is born. She figures out a way to deal with her step-siblings and does not mind living with them at the end of the novel. She becomes quite fond of her youngest half-sibling who appears at the end of the novel and actually enjoys caring for the newborn baby. By the end of the novel, the reader has become aware of alternative solutions in order to adapt to the new situation despite challenges and difficulties at home. Andrea becomes content with her newborn sibling and finds joy in spending time and caring for the baby. Andrea has gained a new role in the family and views the situation in a different light than before. In the last chapter, Andrea is smiling while holding her new half-sibling and seems satisfied with how the situation turned out. “Zoë’s my special favourite sister now. She really does like me. I can nearly always stop her crying” (Wilson, 154). This excerpt shows that Andrea has found solace in her new half-sister and finds a good solution to her troubles. The significance of this excerpt shows a potential solution for the reader, and views another perspective of the situation. It provides the reader with a happy ending to their troubles, showing that they will too eventually find happiness in their new home situation.

In conclusion, *The Suitcase Kid* has shown children’s experience of their parents’ divorce. According to the examples, the texts shows that Andrea’s problems solved through daring to go to therapy and being able to talk about her feelings. It shows readers that therapy may be essential in certain situation and that many problems will be solved after some time talking about them and adapting to new situations. In the beginning, the reader encounters Andrea’s thoughts surrounding her role in the family and the reader may relate to Andrea’s sentiments of anger, feeling neglected and stressed in their parents’ current handling of their divorce. Still, the book has also shown that Andrea, like readers who may be experiencing the same situation as her, has struggled with anger and sadness related to the topic but as well showing that most of these intrigues and feelings will pass and the main character adapts herself to the new situations despite the rough start of her story.

Chapter three: The quiet child in *Lizzie Zipmouth*

Jacqueline Wilson's *Lizzie Zipmouth* tells the story of a young girl who struggles with dealing with her new home situation. Due to new circumstances regarding new family members, Elizabeth does not want to interact with her family. *Lizzie Zipmouth* deals with the same theme as *The Suitcase Kid*, which portrays how children experience the life after their parents' divorce. Like *The Suitcase Kid*, *Lizzie Zipmouth* also connects with the issue of changing families and includes the point of view of the child in the new home situation. It tells the story of young Elizabeth who refuses to speak to anyone in her family. Like Andrea in *The Suitcase Kid*, Lizzie finds it difficult adjusting to the new home situation with new family members. It is one of Wilson's most known novels which tackle challenging situations in which young children have to go through in their childhood. Wilson's *Lizzie Zipmouth* is another of her masterpieces which tackles hard home situation and where the child eventually finds a way of coping with their sad thoughts and change their behavior. *Lizzie Zipmouth*, like *The Suitcase Kid*, is aimed for 7 to 10-year-old readers according to the author herself and reflects on challenging topics in a humorous and realistic way for the reader.

Literature may help children cope with their problems by relating to characters in the novels. Bibliotherapy has been offered in the United Kingdom since the early 2000s. The goal of bibliotherapy is to utilize literature to cultivate a positive effect on the reader's mental health (McNicol & Brewster, 2018). It uses fiction to increase the individual's wellbeing and self-esteem. The term was introduced already hundred years ago, but the definition of bibliotherapy remains the same today. The essence of it is that guidance and solace can be searched for in books. As previously mentioned in chapter two, society is constant change which affects the way families are formed. Many children experience hard home situations which will affect the way they perceive themselves and their skills. The choice of including these challenging home situations in books for children is an important rise within that field of children's literature. Earlier, literary scholars meant that certain topics were not suitable for children. This has, however changed through Wilson's novels. It is crucial for children to acquire these copings skills in order to handle frustration, anger and stress which is included in their daily lives. Therefore, bibliotherapy becomes a fundamental tool to help children with their personal own challenges. The inclusion of difficult topics in literature also reflects the contemporary literature in which people are surrounded.

Nowadays children are exposed to hard topics. They are constantly being exposed to stress and instability which can lead to uncertainty in their feelings and a low self-esteem.

Research provided by literary scholars and teachers have shown that bibliotherapy is a way of helping children to cope with their realities (McNicol & Brewster, 2018). Expressions made in the text offer the readers an opportunity to figure out solutions which may work for them as well as the characters in the stories. Therefore, the use of literature can be used as a way of guiding children into thinking about the same issues as the main characters in a novel. The act of reading literature for children, also enables the progress of developing academically and emotionally both in order to cope with topics themselves, but also cultivate empathy for others. The term bibliotherapy is relevant for *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid*, because these are incredibly helpful resources to utilize in order to make children talk about their feelings and develop empathy for others. *Lizzie Zipmouth* makes the reader feel like they are not the only ones dealing with these hard topics, which is why it can be useful in order to help others who are dealing with the same situation. The novel plays with humor, imagery and metaphors which are helpful tools for the young readers.

Another work worth noting in this connection, is Suzanne Keene's *Empathy and the Novel*. Keene's work supports the idea of using bibliotherapy in order to help children going through hard home situations. Keen brings in neuroscience into the discussion of learning about empathy through reading literature. "We are living in a time when the activation of mirror neurons in the brain of onlookers can be recorded as they witness another's actions and emotional reactions" (Keen, 207). She discusses emotional mirroring in characters which leads to automatically shared feelings. She also notes that humans "tend to experience more readily and accurately for those who seem like us" (Keen, 208). Keene argues that narrative empathy includes both being able to imagine what a person is going through which relates to empathy, but the narrative does also include how the reader feels when encountering a character, which relates to sympathy (Keen, 210). The genre of fictional text will also have a greater influence on its readers rather than reading a scientific text. This is interesting because the fictional shows the reader in a fictional space which presents a scenario with characters which creates narrative empathy. Therefore, the genre is important. For instance, *Lizzie Zipmouth* is written as fiction rather than a scientific text presenting statistic about children of divorce because it cultivates empathy to a larger degree than what a scientific text would be able to do for readers.

Martha Nussbaum is an American philosopher who introduces the act of narrative imagination and being able to take the perspective of others. Nussbaum refers to the act of reading together with children in order to cultivate empathy for their peers. By reading together with children, they will urge into thinking about how the characters in the stories are feeling.

“When a child and parent begin to tell stories together, the child is acquiring essential moral capacities” (Nussbaum, 385). The curiosity for the character is essential in developing empathy for their peers. Through literature, they learn about emotions and the lives and struggles of other people. The stories about characters are important because the children get to know them and are acquainted with the characters situations. Nussbaum urges people to use literature as a tool of becoming a more democratic person with empathy for other citizens. Reflections should be brought to the lives of others. Nussbaum’s theory is relevant when analyzing Wilson’s novels because it emphasizes Wilson’s intention with her novels.

Lizzie Zipmouth includes a narration through use of first-person narration. The book consists of 79 pages which makes it shorter than the previously analyzed novel. Nick Sharrat’s illustrations are also present in nearly all the pages which creates a great interplay between text and imagery. The drawings are also colored in black and white just like Wilson’s *The Suitcase Kid*. The use of illustrations in novels is effective when deciding the setting and emotions of the story. Playing around with black and white color may emphasize certain grave elements to the story. On the contrary, by using images in bright and warm colors, the author may put the emphasis on happy feelings instead of feelings of sadness or hard situations. In *Lizzie Zipmouth*, the expressions of the main character are portrayed with these particular drawings which may help children to understand Elizabeth’s current situation.

The illustration helps the text depict certain situations and make the book appealing to the young readers. In addition, the illustrations may help children understand content in a larger degree, for instance, due to lack of language development in young children (Bodmer). *Lizzie Zipmouth* does in several ways utilize imagery to convey feelings and determine mood of the novel. For instance, in the beginning of the novel, the main character is portrayed with a zipper on her mouth which symbolizes her feelings of wanting to remain silent to her family. However, as the reader encounters Elizabeth later in the story, after spending time with her stepfather’s grandmother, she slowly starts to smile in the images. The drawings including the smiling girl symbolize that she views certain solutions to her hard situation. She becomes friends with this elderly lady who becomes almost like a grandmother to her. They bond together with their common interest of dolls, which makes Elizabeth happy. The images put an emphasis on Elizabeth finding happiness for herself through hard periods of her life. In the last page of the book she is viewed with a big smile on her face which shows the readers that they are able to find a way that works for them. Imagery states the sentiments of the novel at the end and shows a happy ending for Elizabeth through these images.

Lizzie Zipmouth includes a first-person narration throughout the story. The utilization of the first-person narration is an interesting choice which the author has made. Not all children's books are narrated using first-person. It is still an interesting way of storytelling for children because of the effect by using the first-person storyteller instead of a third-person narrator. Keen suggests that this is a good choice made by authors in order to convey their message to the reader. It also cultivates empathy among young readers compared to the use of the third-person narration. "Narrative theorists, novel critics, and reading specialists have already singled out a small set of narrative techniques – such as the use of first person narration and the interior representation of characters' consciousness and emotional states - as devices supporting character identification, contributing to empathetic experiences, opening readers' minds to others" (Keen, 1290). Keen shows that the reader is being disposed to altruism. Therefore, it is an excellent choice by authors to include a first-person narration when including a hard topic in their novels. It is also crucial to keep in mind why the author chose to write the novel. Jacqueline Wilson wishes to help children in their own situations. Therefore, Keene's theory is important to use in relation to narration theory. It is relevant to *Lizzie Zipmouth* because the author uses this specific way of narrating the story and wants to reach out to children who are in the same situation as the character in the novel.

The first topic which the novel discusses is the changing families in the protagonist's life. Like *The Suitcase Kid*, *Lizzie Zipmouth* also includes this as an important topic in the main character's life. The reader encounters Elizabeth's thoughts about her new step-siblings early in the novel. "I haven't gotten a real sister. Or a real brother. But today I was getting two new sort-of brothers, Rory and Jake. I didn't like them much" (Wilson, 18). This excerpt emphasizes Elizabeth's experience of the new situation. She expresses that she is not quite content with the extension of her family. In addition, the main character expresses that they are her new "sort-of brothers" which signifies that she does not know where to categorize them into her new situation. This implies that she needs to adapt to the new situation and that she is not used to share her mother's time with anyone else given that she grew up as an only child with only her mother. The quote shows the reader that Elizabeth experiences her new difficult home situation and that she does not like her new family members. By reading and talking about this part of the novel, the reader who might experience similar situation as the main character, may acknowledge that their feelings may be similar to the main character's. If the reader does not experience this in the same way as Elizabeth, they might know some peers who are going through a similar situation with their own family. The use of the first-person narration does also

bring a useful element to the reader by putting themselves into the thoughts of the main character of the novel.

The second excerpt from the novel reflects on the absence of a father figure in the child's upbringing. Elizabeth reflects on her past where her only family was her mother after the divorce of her parents. "I hate step-dads. I've got a real dad, but I don't see him now. He stopped living with us ages ago. He doesn't come to see me, but I don't care anymore" (Wilson, 11). The author introduces a new element to the hard home situation in this excerpt. Elizabeth does not have any form of contact with her biological father. The absence of her father becomes present in the novel and adds a new topic in which children can relate to. The absence of one of the parents highlights a relevant topic even before adding of the new family members. Elizabeth, like Andrea (*The Suitcase Kid*), does not adapt well to the new surroundings, and has always been the center of attention of her mother. Elizabeth, however, does not have any contact with her biological father, which stresses the issue of raising children as a single parent. It appears that Elizabeth does not mind that he does not come to visit her anymore. The reader, however, might have a different experience related to this particular issue, but may at the same time relate to Elizabeth. The excerpt shows that Elizabeth has developed some kind of a coping mechanism due to the absence of one of her parents when she comments that she does not care about him anymore. This excerpt is important to stress to the reader because it shows the importance of discussing family relations.

Many families consist only of one parent, which is something the reader can relate to when encountering Elizabeth in *Lizzie Zipmouth*. The story does not correspond to the traditional nuclear family, consisting of the mother and the father with their children. This correlates with recent ideas of how literature should be written for children. In this passage, Wilson demonstrates that the family does not necessarily consist of two parents, nor two parents of the same gender. On the contrary, the modern idea of family may consist of various elements, for instance the inclusion of stepsiblings. In many ways, the new family members which are introduced to Elizabeth's life may function as a way of distraction from the absence of her father even though she does not approve of them in the beginning. Her new stepfather becomes a replacement for the absent father and takes care of Elizabeth and her mother.

The third excerpt from the book functions as a way of helping children to cope with their hard home situation. Elizabeth becomes great friends with her stepfather's grandmother, and their relationship develops greatly and she sees her as her grandmother from this point. "She forgot she's not my real great-gran. But she's definitely part of my family" (Wilson, 75).

The inclusion of this new family member with whom she bonds becomes a solution for Lizzie to deal with her sentiments. An unexpected friendship is formed between Lizzie and her new “grandmother” which helps her dealing with her new home situation. The grandmother functions as an objective part of the situation and understands Elizabeth through their common interest in dolls. This part shows the reader that there are various ways to cope with the situation regarding the divorce of her parents. Elizabeth sees her as her own family even though they are not biologically related to each other. The inclusion of the bonding of the two portrays an alternative method to approach one’s difficult feelings related to the challenging home situation.

Jacqueline Wilson’s *Lizzie Zipmouth* is a novel which portrays young children’s experience of challenging home situations. It involves a young person who struggles with life after the divorce of her parents and the act of adapting to a new home situation. Narrative empathy plays a large role in the inclusion of the young girl as the narrator of the story. Keene also conveys the inclusion of the first-person narrator in novels which can cultivate empathy among its readers. Literature plays an important role in cultivating empathy because it tells the story of people who experience struggles and challenges throughout their story. Humans are storytelling creatures and have always had an interest in telling stories for each other. Humans have had the interest of telling stories from the point where we could speak. Wilson’s novel may be used to talk about difficult home situations. The protagonist’s expressions in this book has shown that life is not always easy. This book, however, like literature, has a unique ability to help people who are experiencing similar feelings in their own lives. It aids them understand who they are as a person, and at the same time provide them with solutions to how they may cope with their own situation. Examples made from *Lizzie Zipmouth* show that the inclusion of new family members may be tough in the beginning, but after time, unexpected friendships form which helps the main character of the story.

As previously mentioned, the inclusion of the first-person narration is an interesting choice made by the author. Many books written for children include a first-person narration because of the sympathetic insight it provides the reader. The young reader will be able to understand the perspective of the main character to a larger degree than including a third person narration. The utilization of the first-person narration also builds upon the aspect of making the reader identify themselves with the characters in the novel.

Chapter four: Narrative empathy and conclusion

The inclusion of difficult topics in literature for children is present in many contemporary novels. The tendency of exposing children to these challenging topics is becoming more prominent compared to what children's literature used to include in earlier decades (Townsend). A change has been made in the way authors choose to write for children due to societal changes. Societies are reflected upon in literature. This means these stories tend to reflect what children are experiencing nowadays. The challenging topic portrayed in the chosen novels for this thesis is the difficulties of divorce and the shaping of a new family through the perspective of children. Like many children, the main characters in these stories are going through a demanding period in their lives which includes stress related to the time period after their parents' divorce. The representation of the situation is presented in a realistic way which makes the reader philosophize over their current situation. Modern literature for children includes this topic in a very delicate way in literature for both young and older children.

First, Jacqueline Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* reflect upon these challenges set in contemporary Great Britain. Wilson challenges traditional ways of writing for children. Instead of sparing children for certain topics, Wilson adds controversial topics in her books in order to help young children with their feelings. Wilson expressed in several interviews that one of her visions is that she wants to know what it is like to be a child present-day and grow up in this particular society. Her characters in *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* are made relatable to young audience, who tell stories about their everyday life struggles. The novels portrayed children's experience of their parents' divorce realistically which is essential to this thesis because they functioned as stories children could relate to. The stories are not set in fantastical worlds, but on the other hand invite readers into reading about their own familiar world. The inclusion of serious topics in literature is a helpful aid in order to help young people cope with difficult challenges through life. Literature may help people acquire valuable life skills when encountering challenging times. In both *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid*, the protagonists find ways of dealing with their own demanding situations in a healthy way.

Bibliotherapy has been relevant in this thesis regarding the use of Wilson's novels in the therapeutic aspect of reading *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid*. Wilson lifts specific subjects which are aimed at young children, and wishes to help them in their troublesome paths. These raised qualities emphasize the therapeutic value for the young children reading her novels. Jacqueline Wilson's novels *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* may offer sense of

companionship and identification. This may result as helpful coping skills which will hopefully help young children to understand their feelings related to their parents' divorce. These books can be used as bibliotherapy. Wilson adds controversial topics in her books, which creates a new perspective in representing specific topics within the genre of children's literature. This signifies that children enjoy her books and that they may see the therapeutic aspect as valuable and helpful in Jacqueline Wilson's novels. There seems to be a change in what the literary demands are and what people want to read. Stories for children do not only consist of fantastical stories where taboo topics will not be brought light upon. On the contrary, it seems that talking about challenging topics could be helpful for children when guided by an adult reader such as their parents or a teacher.

Another example of how bibliotherapy could be used in group settings is the classroom. Not only could bibliotherapy help an individual with their life struggles, but it also creates a room for a group-oriented way of reading books. The implementation of bibliotherapy in the classroom proves to be beneficial to both teacher and students (Vestli). It is a smart approach for the teacher to utilize in order to get to know their young students in a creative way. By selecting appropriate literature intended for a particular age, the teacher assists the students in developing their own life skills related to problem solving and helps them to understand their own challenging situations. Story time is a huge part of the curriculum in elementary school, which it is crucial for the teacher to keep several aspects in mind when choosing which books to read. Teachers spend a lot of time with their students given that they spend most of their days in a classroom. This proves the importance of creating an area for safe conversations between the teachers and their students. Teachers include guided discussions which may open up for reading literature about specific topics. This allows the students to involve themselves in self-reflection and developing empathy alongside with their peers and exchange thoughts and feelings through the discussion of the characters in the books.

Another crucial question to be raised is whether why children should read. Literary scholars have long debated literature's role in the upbringing of children. Literature did for a long time function as entertainment for young children. It has, still, been used to make morality stories where the main goal of reading literature is to learn about proper behavior from it. Literature has proven that it has a shaping and comforting role among both young and older readers. It is an important element to prepare young ones for interaction with peers. "In these various ways, narrative imagination is an essential preparation for moral interaction" (Nussbaum, 386). Interaction between people is an essential skill which young children must

acquire during their upbringing. As a citizen, children must know how to interact with other people, where one of the possible methods is by using literature. Their encounters with various characters from novels may help them to understand how other people are feeling about certain emotions and situations. The answer to why children need literature is therefore that it may function not only as a source of entertainment, but it may also shape the way children perceive the world around them. Additionally, it helps them become great storytellers and amplifies interaction with new people. “When a child and a parent begin to tell stories together, the child is acquiring essential moral capacities” (Nussbaum, 385). Nussbaum refers to the act of reading together with children in order to cultivate empathy for others. By reading together with children, they will together with the adult urge into thinking about how the characters in the stories are feeling. The curiosity for the character is essential in developing empathy for peers. They learn about emotions, thoughts, life, and about other people. The stories about other characters is important because the children get to know them and are acquainted with the character’s feelings.

The child narrator is an important element in both *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth*. Using a child narrator in books for children could be a smart choice regarding promoting the situation from their point of view. It is however, important to note that the author herself is an adult, but has through interviews stated that her goal is to strive to see the world through the perspective of a young person. This is not a rule when writing for children, but it is however, an interesting choice which may spark reading interest among children. According to Keene and Nussbaum, a first-person narrator brings an emphasis on the empathetic value of text which adds another important aspect to novels. These texts help children understand other people’s feelings in a creative manner which provides them helpful tools in life. The first-person narrator also provides the text with a more subjective and personal point of view which may help readers relate to the situation in a better way than for instance a third-person narrator could provide.

The normality of certain feelings is another crucial element which *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid* have portrayed. Readers may encounter their own feelings through the main characters throughout the novels and are reassured that certain feelings are completely normal. The thesis has illustrated that this is a crucial element which is emphasized through Jacqueline Wilson’s *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid*. Readers may feel that they are understood and that their emotions are valid, and therefore, through literature acknowledge their own feelings. Literature has proven to have a therapeutic value by portraying specific topics in a normalized form. The value of reading for children should not be underestimated, as it is a big part of a

person's upbringing. Children like to be entertained with stories, and are often being exposed to stories by their parents and in school. This thesis has depicted how Jacqueline Wilson's *Lizzie Zipmouth* and *The Suitcase Kid* have portrayed difficult home situations, and how they could be used to help children in similar tough situations.

Finally, this thesis has investigated how Jacqueline Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* may be used in order to depict challenging home situations and how it may help children going through the same processes. The inclusion of difficult home situation is a topic which has been both criticized but also been appreciated by readers. On one hand, some argued that there are certain topics which children should not be exposed to. On the other hand, literary scholars have argued that being exposed to certain grave topics could help young people overcome their fears and cope with their situations. Firstly, the reader gains information about the current situation which they find themselves in. They will be acquainted with the topic and search out information through the particular literature. Secondly, readers will be provided with tools which they can apply to other similar situation throughout their lives, and being able to handle tough situations and be able to make important decisions.

Appendix: The value of the topic in teaching

This thesis has addressed how *The Suitcase Kid* and *Lizzie Zipmouth* portray children's experience of parents' divorce. It has also shown that these two novels can be used as bibliotherapy. Exposing students to certain topics is crucial. This representation of divorce is valuable in relation to teaching. The use of literature in classroom in English in Norway has been emphasized through the Knowledge Promotion (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 8). This curriculum presents the chosen material which teachers should use in their teaching. One important element in the curriculum includes the importance of reading written materials in English. The value of Wilson's novels may be useful to present in a classroom because it is a relevant topic which many of the students may recognize themselves in. Students are supposed to study hard at school, but it is also important to consider their personal problems and challenging home situations as well. Literature has been used to aid people going through similar situations. By incorporating these topics into the classroom, one is able to promote both language learning and discussing difficult topics and as teacher guide the pupils to talk about their feelings.

As future teacher, I would like to introduce reading as a way of helping children cope with certain topics as a crucial part of the English curricula. Nowadays, many children experience stress related to demanding home situations. Additionally, they are expected to perform well in school while having personal concerns which may affect their performances. This topic is valuable for English as a foreign language in Norwegian school because the novels involve a part of life that many students may recognize themselves in. The subject Personal life skills was introduced at school emphasizing the value of creating self-developing conversations in classrooms. In Norwegian schools, English includes a part about being able to handle challenging life situations. This foundation bases itself on being able to express experiences and feelings both orally and as written form in English. (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, page 3). Therefore, Wilson's novels are helpful tools in order to spark useful conversations in classrooms.

The empathic value of literature should not be underestimated, but rather be encouraged to be utilized in schools. In conclusion, this topic is currently relevant due to changes in the school curricula which emphasizes the use of teaching useful life skills. The teacher's role does not consist of only teaching subjects anymore, but additionally includes teaching and helping children through tough challenges in their daily lives. Jacqueline Wilson's *The Suitcase Kid*

and *Lizzie Zipmouth* may be useful when talking about difficult topics such as divorce. They may be utilized for classroom discussions, and as guidance in order to understand peers.

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