

Reaching Out

Publication of FRIENDS: The Association of Young People Who Stutter

April, 2000

C S L Children's Literature

Looking for a book for the summer? Here is a partial list of stories for young people which involve stuttering to some extent. The list was begun by Kris Warmka at Mankato State University and draws heavily from an article by Bushey and Martin of the University of Minnesota (LSHSS, 1988, Vol. 19, #3, pp. 235-250). Stuttering is treated with understanding in most works, but the nature of it is clearly misrepresented to varying degrees in some others. We would love to hear your comments about these books once you have read them, or perhaps you know of others.

And, while reading these lesser known books, don't forget the four books in the Mary Marony series by Suzy Kline who will be presenting at our Convention in Washington D.C. in August.

Alan and the Animal Kingdom by Isabelle Holland. Philadelphia: Lippincott. Reading Level: 9-12.

"This is an interesting book in which stuttering is dealt with realistically and with considerable insight." (Bushey and Martin)

Armann og Blida by Kristin Steindottir. Asprent Akureyi.

A book about Armann, who is six years old and stutters, and his cat, Gentle. Originally written in Icelandic, it has been translated into English and is available from the Stuttering Foundation of America (1-800-992-9392).

Blackbird Singing by Eve Bunting. New York: MacMillan Pub. Reading Level: ages 9-12.

"This story is not about stuttering, but about those dilemmas in life that have no completely satisfactory resolution. Marcus still stutters in the end. The author assumes in the story that the cause of stuttering is psychological stress, but she does not oversimplify the dynamics of this stress by making Marcus a vic-

tim of rejection or abuse. Marcus is a loved and valued member of his family and the community. The book captures the profound complexity of both stuttering and life itself." (Bushey and Martin).

The Change Over by Margaret Mathy. New York: Margaret C. McElderry Books. Reading Level: ages 13-18.

"This book is . . . an interesting and exciting story. Stuttering is mainly a device used by the author to give (the main character) a distinctly human frailty and to indicate when the young man was under an emotional strain. Importantly, (he) is not a weak character, as are many people who stutter in fictional literature. (He) is romantically attractive, and no more or less insecure than most young ones. He is not overly embarrassed by his stuttering. The very unimportance of stuttering in this story adds to the book's positive emotional impact." (Bushey and Martin)

The Contrary Orphans by Elizabeth Stucley. New York: Franklin Watts. Reading Level: ages 9-15.

". . . A wonderful story about the na-

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A more comprehensive list of books can be found at:

<http://www.mankato.edu/dept/comdis/kuster/Bookstore/childrensbooks.html>.

Teasing and Children Who Stutter

by Judy Butler, M.A.

A child is more fluent when he feels confident than when he feels insecure. I learned this truth from self-help groups. Persons who stutter say that the more they think about stuttering, the more stuttering they do. Some children cannot forget that they stutter because there is a bully at school to remind them. So, addressing the problem of bullying and teasing needs to be part of speech therapy. To increase fluent speech, the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) needs to include acquiring strategies for dealing with teasing when creating Individual Educational Plans (IEP) goals.

According to a study in Britain, 82% of a group of 324 children who stutter reported being bullied at some time in their school lives. The most frequent type of bullying is imitation and name-calling. Children who are teased are generally anxious, insecure, cautious, depressed, and have low self-esteem. They are often socially isolated because peers do not want to be "teased by association." Adults in the victim's life are sometimes unaware of the teasing problem.

Anecdotally, I have found that the teasing does not need to be about speech to increase stuttering. One of my pre-school students became disfluent in anticipation of being in the same classroom as a certain child. As part of fluency therapy, we took turns pretending to be this bully. When it was my turn to be the bully, I stole toys, pushed, and hit. When pretending to be my student, I expressed fear, sadness, and anger. I told the teacher (played by his mother); I came home and told my Mommy (also played by his mother). His mother said things like, "Thanks for telling me. I will talk to your teacher about it." I used slow, easy speech and short, simple sen-

tences in this play. My aggressive behaviors were gentle. The goals of this lesson were to desensitize the child to conflict and offer ways of handling such problems. His mother and I did our best to prevent the child from getting upset. If pretend play crossed the line into real conflict, we changed the activity.

Parents often ask me what to do about teasing. First, we talk about what is going on. During this discussion, the parent usually expresses anger, sadness and fear. Children speak of embarrassment. As the SLP, I listen carefully, take notes and stay calm. We review family policy for handling conflict. I share stories (anonymously) of how other families have confronted similar situations. As a team, we organize all this information into an action plan. I resist making judgments as to the "right" thing to do. Families make that decision.

The references at the end of this article, suggest ways of dealing with bullies. Banks recommends the following:

- 1) Tell a friend what is happening.
- 2) Try to ignore the bullying or say "No" really firmly, then turn and walk away.
- 3) Try not to show that you are upset or angry.
- 4) Don't fight back if you can help it.
- 5) It's not worth getting hurt to keep possessions or money.
- 6) Try to think up funny or clever replies in advance.
- 7) Try to avoid being alone in the places where you know the bully is likely to pick on you.

8) Sometimes asking the bully to repeat what they said can put them off.

9) Keep a diary of what is happening.

I encourage SLPs to include the issue of teasing as an integral part of a fluency program. Speech therapy is the time and place to talk about teasing. The SLP is a safe adult, a knowledgeable and empathetic adult, in whom the child can confide. During group sessions, children can share personal experiences, offering one another support. They can brainstorm solutions to bully troubles. The SLP can model solutions in role-play. She or he can follow up at subsequent sessions, coaching the children week to week. For documentation, she can design pre- and post-testing or compile a portfolio of the student's discussions.

Children who stutter need to feel empowered to defend themselves in constructive ways. Then they will gain confidence and more fluency.

"Bullying in Schools" by Ron Banks (<http://ericece.org/pubs/digests/1997/banks97.html>).

"Kidscape" (<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/kidscape/parents.html>).

"Stuttering and Teasing" by Gail Wilson Lew (<http://parentpals.com/5.Onewstletter/5.5speechnews/5.5/stutterease.html>).

"Teasing and Bullying of Children Who Stutter" by Ian Roth and Deryk Beal (<http://www.mankato.msus.edu/dept/comdis/kuster/journal/roth.html>).

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ture of children and, more generally, about the challenge of survival. . . . Frankie becomes fluent as a result of breathing exercises and changing his attitude about the world. This book is a joy to read because it contains genuine and thoughtful observations about children living together and coping with reality." (Bushey and Martin)

*Emily Umily by Kathy Corrigan. Toronto: Annick Press. Reading Level: 4-7.

"Although this delightful book is written very simply, it captures the essence of preschool. Emily's problem is treated honestly and realistically. Her disfluency is not called stuttering in the book, and there is no indication that the disfluencies are caused by nervousness. Emily is just as disfluent in her mother's lap as she is at school. Her life changes for the better with an attitude change, but there is no immediate change in the speech pattern." (Bushey and Martin)

*Equal Rites by Terry Pratchett. Corgi Books.

This is not aimed specifically at children, but Pratchett's books appear to be very popular among teenagers. It is a fantasy book. The stammering character, Simon, is not the major character but is quite important. Peter Knutsen, a high school senior, reviews the book as follows: "The person who stutters, Simon, is portrayed as highly intelligent, a talented wizard's apprentice, with a natural gift for understanding magic better than other wizards. He is a bit nerdy, but I think that's fair enough. Simon's stutter is treated well by the people around him; they do finish the words for him sometimes (which is bad, of course), but he is accepted for what he is. Simon is portrayed as a real human being; his stutter is just a feature, and no attempt is made to use the stutter to explain anything about him or define him as a per-

son." Equal Rites is a book in the Discworld series. The books can be read independently, although some of them are a mini-series spanning two to three books.

*The Flimflam Man by Darleen Bailey Beard and Eileen Christelow.

Based on a 1950 event in Wetumka,

Oklahoma, that started their annual Sucker Day. The story features a "con man" and the first person in town to meet him, Bobbie Jo Hailey, a ten-year-old who stutters. The book is written for children ages 9-12 and is about swindlers and swindling, friendship and stuttering.

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Stuttering Awareness Game

This game was created by Tammy McMillin, a speech and language pathologist with the Shawnee Mission School District, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

We are all looking for fun ways to find out about or teach others, e.g. children, parents, teachers, etc., about stuttering. Now, Tammy McMillin has devised a Jeopardy-like game utilizing facts, myths, and other information that does just that.

AND it's on the Internet! It was created to be a one or two-player game. After some thought, however, it was determined that it also could be adapted for a group if the computer is hooked up to a COVID that all could see. You can also make a great interactive game using foamboard, game cards and velcro that is perhaps more portable than a computer.

This game is conducive for use with various numbers of players. Players take turns picking category and dollar amount, and after all the cards are chosen, they add up their money to determine the winner.

The questions easily lend themselves to further discussion and discoveries. Students can take the Internet site address home and play it by themselves again and also invite parents, friends, etc., to play. Speech strategies can be practiced when asking or answering the questions so therapy is incorporated.

So, log on to: www.quia.com/cb/2807.html.

Let us hear what you think about it. Contact us at: tamaramcmillin@smsd.org or romcmill@smsd.org! We can already envision several variations which could range in types of questions, levels of difficulty, etc.

Glue Fingers by Matt Christopher. Boston/Toronto: Little Brown and Company, Reading Level: 5-9.

"This book is primarily a sports story. The drama of the story revolves around Billy Joe's courage. He goes out for football and succeeds despite his fear of rejection and his stuttering. . . . In this story, the treatment of stuttering as it relates to the theme of courage is problematic. The story implies that it is acceptable to stutter if one also has a showy talent with which to compensate." (Bushey and Martin)

The Golden Bird by Berlie Doherty. London, Heinemann.

This short story is about Andrew who stammers. He thinks everybody at school is laughing at him and does his best not to be noticed. He is generally silent. The book hints that his stammering is attributed to unhappiness since his father died. The end of the story is the only time Andrew speaks and he doesn't stammer. It does not say that Andrew can now speak fluently because he is no longer sad, but one can be left wondering whether the author intended to suggest just that, thus reinforcing the idea that stammering is caused by emotional distress. (Reviewed by Claire Tupling, University of York.)

*I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Reconstruction Era Dairy of Patsy. (Dear America). Scholastic Trade. Reading Level: 9-13.

This Dear America book is about a freed slave girl named Patsy. Although Patsy stutters, she shows courage to speak. Patsy writes about how frustrated she gets with her stuttering. People think she is dumb, but she is really very smart. (This book has received a lot of good reviews by kids.)

The Legend of Veery Bird by Kathleen Hague. San Diego:

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Reading Level: ages 4-10.

"In this story, stuttering is interwoven with timidity and self-consciousness. This stereotype is, perhaps, a minor weakness in the book, but the beauty of the story far outweighs any such shortcoming. (The book) has rich illustrations and an emotionally satisfying plot. It is a lyrical, completely charming, romantic fantasy." (Bushey and Martin)

Lost Boys Never Say Die by Alan Brown and Grant Forsberg. New York: Delacorte Press.

Scheduled to go to camp to work on his stuttering problem while his parents go off to the Arctic, Lewis surreptitiously steal back into his house where he lives a secret life for eight weeks, meeting a new friend who is camping in the nearby woods and who involves Lewis in acting and a new approach to his speech

problem and to life. Interesting reading. Discusses feelings and attitudes about growing up and being teased. (Warmka). (Editor's Note: When I read this book back in 1993 and found it was out of print, I attempted to get the rights to re-publish it myself, unfortunately to no avail. This is a good read, but you will be lucky to find it in the library.)

Midget by Tim Bowler. Oxford University Press.

This is about a fifteen-year-old boy who stutters.

The Skating Rink by Mildred Lee. New York: Seabury Press. Reading Level: 13-18.

"This book is rich in detailed descriptions of stuttering and the stuttering experience. Common theories and superstitions about stuttering are woven into the story." (Bushey and Martin)