

HUMOUR AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In honour of Marsha's fabulous issue on humour, I thought I would explore the topic as it relates to children's literature.

The history of humour in children's literature is very brief. Prior to the middle of the 18th century, literature for children, as we know it today, was virtually nonexistent. Though *Mother Goose* rhymes and humorous folk tales existed prior to this time, they originated in the oral tradition and didn't distinguish books for children from books for adults. Books for children existed solely for the purpose of moral instruction. Lewis Carroll's *ALICE IN WONDERLAND* changed all that, with its nonsense poetry and humorous dialogue.

Approaches to the study of the child's developing sense of humour vary. Some people believe that subtle humour is inappropriate for young children and recommend books, which are both simple and obvious. Still others feel that children should be exposed to different forms of subtle humour, which vary in complexity as the child matures. They maintain that young children enjoy word play - the way words sound, puns and even repartee and allusion. With that thought in mind here are some humorous riddles that children will love to tell again and again. Remember, our job as adults, parents and caregivers, is to act as if each re-telling of a riddle or knock-knock joke is as funny as the first time we heard it!

Q. Where does a lamb go for a haircut?

A. The ba-ba shop!

Q. What does a frog say when it washes car windows?

A. Rub it, rub it, rub it!

Q. Why is the public library always the tallest building in town?

A. Because it has so many stories!

Humour and laughter help children deal with feelings of anger, curiosity and inferiority. Books that help children laugh are the books that help them survive. Some of my favourite funny books for children are by Dr. Seuss, Dennis Lee and Beverly Cleary. I could reread Cleary's *ELLEN TEBBITS* dozens of times and still laugh at the scene in Ellen's ballet class, where she constantly has to be yanking up her long woolen underwear! A new book at the Grand Fork's Public Library called *WILD ABOUT BOOKS* by Judy Sierra is hilarious in its depiction of animals reading at the zoo. It is written in the style of Dr. Seuss and will have both adults and children giggling. Check it out.

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