



The Importance of Ideology in Shaping Children's Cultural Values through Literature

Rifaat Salman Salih

College of Basic Education – English Dept., University of Zakho – Kurdistan, Kurdistan Region / Iraq

Received: 13 Nov 2023; Received in revised form: 16 Dec 2023; Accepted: 24 Dec 2023; Available online: 31 Dec 2023

©2023 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *This paper discusses the significance of ideology in shaping the cultural values of children through literature. Literature has the power to shape children's worldview and beliefs, and as such, it is crucial to understand the ideologies that underpin the books we offer to young readers. The paper emphasizes the need for critical examination of literature and the promotion of diverse and inclusive literature that accurately reflects the experiences of all individuals. It also highlights the responsibility of authors, publishers, educators, and parents in shaping the values and beliefs of future generations. The paper concludes that by promoting diverse and inclusive literature that encourages critical thinking and fosters empathy, we can help ensure that children grow up to be informed, engaged, and compassionate members of society.*

Keywords— *Ideology, Children's Literature, Cultural Values, Children's Development, Inclusivity, Critical Examination.*



I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is a vibrant and diverse field that encompasses a wide range of literary genres and formats, including picture books, novels, poetry, and nonfiction (Hunt, 2005). It is a genre created specifically for children and young adults, with the aim of providing them with stories, characters, and themes that reflect their experiences. The study of children's literature is interdisciplinary, drawing on fields such as education, psychology, and literary criticism. Scholars in this field examine the content, form, and context of children's literature, as well as the ways in which it is produced, distributed, and consumed. One of the key features of children's literature is its ability to support children's cognitive and socioemotional development (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013). For example, picture books can help young children develop their visual literacy and understanding of narrative structure, while novels can provide older children with opportunities to explore complex social and emotional issues. Children's literature also plays an important role in shaping cultural values and attitudes, as it reflects and reinforces societal norms and beliefs (Nodelman, 2008).

Through the representation of social identities, such as race, gender, and class, children's literature can contribute to the formation of children's identities and worldviews.

Moreover, the study of children's literature is closely tied to the history of childhood and children's culture, as the development of children's literature is linked to changes in ideas about childhood and children's place in society (Hunt, 2005). From early didactic texts to the emergence of the modern children's book in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children's literature has evolved alongside changes in social, political, and cultural contexts. Children's literature plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural values and beliefs of young readers (Davies & Jenkins, 2013). The ideology conveyed through literature can have a profound impact on the way children understand and interpret the world around them. As literature is used as a tool for socialization, teaching children the values, beliefs, and behaviours that are considered acceptable within their culture (Heath, 1983), it is important to critically examine the ideology conveyed in children's literature to ensure that it aligns with the values and beliefs that we want to promote within society. This paper will explore the importance of

ideology in shaping children's cultural values through literature and highlight the need for diverse and inclusive literature that represents a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

II. IDEOLOGY

Ideology is a set of beliefs, values, and principles that shape the way people view the world and make decisions (Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). For example, a person who subscribes to a capitalist ideology may prioritize individualism and free-market competition, and may view government regulation as an infringement on personal freedom. On the other hand, a person who subscribes to a socialist ideology may prioritize collective welfare and view government regulation as necessary for promoting social justice. Ideology can also shape how people view social issues such as gender, race, and ethnicity. For instance, a person who subscribes to a patriarchal ideology may believe that men are naturally superior to women and that women should be submissive and fulfil traditional gender roles. In contrast, a person who subscribes to a feminist ideology may believe in gender equality and advocate for women's empowerment.

Moreover, ideology can shape how people view historical events and current affairs. For example, a person who subscribes to a nationalist ideology may view their country's history as heroic and just, and may be more inclined to support policies that promote their country's interests, even if it means disregarding the interests of other nations. It encompasses a wide range of ideas and perspectives, from political and economic systems to social and cultural norms (van Dijk, 2014). At its core, ideology is a way of understanding the world and making sense of complex social, political, and economic systems. For instance, people who subscribe to a capitalist ideology believe that free-market competition is the best way to allocate resources and create wealth, while those who subscribe to a socialist ideology believe that resources should be distributed more equally and that the government should play a larger role in regulating the economy.

Ideology also shapes social and cultural norms, such as gender roles, racial and ethnic identities, and religious beliefs. For example, people who subscribe to a patriarchal ideology may believe that men should hold positions of power and authority, while women should be subordinate and fulfil traditional gender roles. People who subscribe to a multicultural ideology, on the other hand, believe that cultural diversity should be celebrated and that all cultures have equal value and worth. Ideology is significant in shaping the way people view the world because it provides a framework for understanding and

interpreting complex social phenomena (Jost et al., 2009). It influences how people perceive and evaluate events and individuals, as well as how they make judgments and decisions (van Dijk, 2014).

In other words, ideology shapes the way people think about and interact with the world around them. In the context of children's literature, ideology plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural values and beliefs of young readers (Davies & Jenkins, 2013). The messages conveyed in literature can have a significant impact on children's perceptions of the world, shaping their attitudes and behaviours in relation to issues such as race, gender, and social class (Clark & Higonnet, 2017). As such, it is important to critically examine the ideology conveyed in children's literature to ensure that it aligns with the values and beliefs that we want to promote within society.

III. THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN SOCIALIZATION

Literature plays a key role in socializing children and transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors (Heath, 1983). Through stories, children learn about their culture's norms and expectations, as well as its heroes and villains. Literature can also help children develop empathy and understanding of others who are different from themselves (Davies & Jenkins, 2013). For example, a child who reads a book about a character with a disability may gain a better understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by people with disabilities. Similarly, a child who reads a book about a character from a different cultural background may gain insight into different customs, beliefs, and ways of life.

Through literature, children can also learn about issues related to social justice and equality. For example, books that address topics such as racism, prejudice, and discrimination can help children develop a deeper understanding of these issues and the impact they have on individuals and communities. In addition to exposing children to different perspectives and experiences, literature can also provide opportunities for children to practice empathy and understanding. By engaging with characters in a story and imagining their thoughts and feelings, children can develop their ability to empathize with others and see the world from different points of view. Overall, literature can play an important role in helping children develop empathy and understanding of others who are different from themselves. By reading diverse books and engaging with a wide range of perspectives and experiences, children can expand their understanding of the world and develop a greater sense of compassion and empathy for others.

Children's literature is particularly important in shaping the cultural values and beliefs of young readers. As children

are still developing their understanding of the world and their place within it, literature can have a profound impact on their perceptions of themselves and others (Clark & Higonnet, 2017). Through literature, children can learn about different cultures, customs, and ways of life, and begin to form their own ideas about what is right and wrong, just and unjust. When children read books that feature characters from different cultural backgrounds, they are exposed to different customs, beliefs, and values. This exposure can help children appreciate the diversity of the world and develop a greater sense of cultural awareness and sensitivity. In addition to exposing children to different cultures, literature can also raise important ethical and moral questions that encourage children to think critically about what is right and wrong. For example, a book that explores issues related to social justice or equality may prompt children to consider their own beliefs and values and how they align with the values of their society.

Through literature, children can also gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of others, which can help them, develop their own sense of empathy and understanding. By reading stories about characters from different walks of life, they begin to appreciate the challenges and joys of other people's experiences, and develop a greater sense of compassion for others. However, literature can also perpetuate negative stereotypes and reinforce harmful cultural norms if not carefully selected and critically examined. For example, if a child is exposed only to literature that reinforces gender stereotypes, they may develop a limited and biased view of what it means to be a boy or girl (Davies & Jenkins, 2013). As such, it is important to carefully select and critically examine the literature that is presented to children to ensure that it promotes positive cultural values and does not reinforce harmful stereotypes. Children's minds are still developing, and what they read can have a profound impact on their worldview and how they see themselves and others. Exposure to stereotypes and negative cultural values can lead to the internalization of harmful beliefs and attitudes.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The ideology conveyed in children's literature can vary widely depending on the author, publisher, and cultural context in which the literature is produced. Authors may draw upon their own cultural values and beliefs to shape the stories they tell, while publishers may prioritize certain themes or messages in order to appeal to a particular audience (Braga, 2022). Additionally, the cultural context in which the literature is produced may shape the values and beliefs that are considered acceptable or desirable to convey

through literature. For example, in Western literature, individualism and independence are often valued and celebrated, while in other cultures, collectivism and interdependence may be emphasized (Taylor, 2003).

The ideologies conveyed in literature can also reflect broader social and political contexts, such as the dominant ideologies of a particular historical period or the cultural values promoted by a particular government or ruling class (Nodelman, 2008). First, literature often reflects the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the society in which it is produced. For example, the literature of the Enlightenment era in Europe promoted reason, individualism, and progress, reflecting the dominant ideologies of that historical period. Second, literature can also comment on or challenge the dominant ideologies of a particular historical period or ruling class. Writers may use their works to expose the injustices and inequalities of a society or to advocate for social and political change. For example, the works of Upton Sinclair and other muckraking journalists in the early 20th century exposed the abuses of the American meatpacking industry, leading to significant reforms in food safety and labour laws. Third, literature is used to promote or reinforce the cultural values promoted by a particular government or ruling class. In totalitarian societies, for example, the regime censors or heavily controls literature to ensure that it promotes the values and beliefs of the ruling party. Conversely, literature can also be used to resist oppressive ideologies and promote alternative perspectives. In short, the ideologies conveyed in literature reflect the historical, social, and political contexts in which it is produced. By examining the themes, characters, and narratives of literary works, we can gain insight into the values and beliefs of the societies that produced them, as well as the ways in which writers have challenged or reinforced dominant ideologies. As such, it is important to critically examine the ideologies conveyed in children's literature, taking into account the author, publisher, and cultural context in which the literature was produced. By doing so, readers can gain a better understanding of the cultural values and beliefs that are being promoted through literature and consider alternative perspectives and ideologies (Nodelman, 2008).

Ideology can shape the messages conveyed in children's literature, including issues related to gender roles, race, and ethnicity. For example, gender roles have long been a topic of discussion in children's literature, with many stories portraying traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Thompson & Findlay, 2017). Girls are often depicted as passive and emotional, while boys are portrayed as active and strong (Taylor, 2003). These portrayals can reinforce gender stereotypes and limit the ways in which children see themselves and others. Similarly, issues related to race and

ethnicity can be influenced by the ideology of the author and the cultural context in which the literature is produced. Some stories may reinforce negative stereotypes or present only a narrow view of a particular racial or ethnic group (Taylor, 2003). Others may promote more representations that are positive or provide opportunities for children to learn about and appreciate different cultures and perspectives. For example, in the children's book "Amazing Grace" by Mary Hoffman, the protagonist, Grace, is a young black girl who aspires to play the role of Peter Pan in a school play. Through her determination and passion, Grace challenges the gender and racial stereotypes of the play and ultimately earns the role (Hoffman, 1991). This book promotes a positive representation of a black girl and challenges traditional gender and racial roles.

V. THE NEED FOR CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Critically examining the ideology conveyed in children's literature is crucial to ensure that it aligns with the values and beliefs that we want to promote within society. Children's literature has the potential to shape children's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and therefore it is important to critically evaluate the messages conveyed in these books (Nikolajeva, 2013). The ideologies conveyed in children's literature can affect children's perceptions of themselves and others, and can shape their understanding of what is considered acceptable or desirable within their culture. By critically examining the ideology conveyed in children's literature, we can identify and challenge stereotypes, biases, and prejudices that may be present in these books (Taylor, 2003). This can help promote more diverse and inclusive representations of different cultures, races, genders, and identities, and provide opportunities for children to learn about and appreciate different perspectives (Nikolajeva, 2013).

Furthermore, by promoting literature that aligns with the values and beliefs we want to promote within society, we can help shape the cultural values of future generations. This can contribute to creating a more equitable and just society, where diversity and inclusivity are celebrated and valued. In conclusion, critically examining the ideology conveyed in children's literature is essential to promote more diverse and inclusive representations and to challenge stereotypes and biases. It is an important step in shaping the cultural values of future generations and creating a more equitable and just society.

VI. DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE LITERATURE

Promoting diverse and inclusive literature that represents a wide range of perspectives and experiences is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it can help to combat stereotypes and promote a more positive understanding of different cultures and identities. It is important for children to gain knowledge about other cultures and to understand similarities and differences among people (Grasso, 2016). By reading books that represent a variety of perspectives, children can learn about different cultural traditions, languages, and ways of life, and gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity of the world around them. In addition, promoting diverse literature can also help to address issues of representation and visibility for marginalized groups. According to Bishop (1990), "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (p. ix). By providing books that feature diverse characters and experiences, we can help to provide representation and visibility for marginalized groups and promote a more inclusive society. Finally, promoting diverse literature can also help to challenge dominant cultural narratives and provide a more complex and nuanced understanding of the world. As noted by Myers (2014), "Books transmit values. They explore our common humanity. What is the message when some children are not represented in those books?" (para. 10). By promoting literature that represents a variety of perspectives and experiences, we can provide a more complete picture of the world and challenge dominant cultural narratives that may be exclusionary or harmful.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is critical to acknowledge how strongly ideology influences how literature shapes children's cultural values. It is impossible to overestimate how literature may influence a child's perspective and perception of their role in society. The ideology behind the novels we recommend to young readers must thus be carefully considered. It is also important to stress the importance of reading literature critically. We must actively support writing that is inclusive of all people and accurately represents their experiences. By doing this, we may develop a literary environment that enables young readers to think critically, increases empathy and understanding, and motivates them to participate actively in their communities. Ideology's significance in children's literature ultimately draws attention to the role that parents, educators, publishers, and writers all have in forming the values and beliefs of coming generations. We can contribute to ensuring that the children of today grow up to be

knowledgeable, involved, and compassionate members of society by supporting inclusive, varied literature that builds empathy.

REFERENCES

- [1] Braga, A. (2022, March 22). *The importance of children's representation in literature and media*. Humanium. <https://www.humanium.org/en/the-importance-of-childrens-representation-in-literature-and-media/>
- [2] Chaplin, T. M., & Aldao, A. (2013). Gender differences in emotion expression in children: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(4), 735–765. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030737>
- [3] Emily J.M. Knox. (2022). *Censorship and Children's Literature*. 414–425. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119038276.ch33>
- [4] Grasso, M. (2016). *The importance of multicultural literature - SCIS*. Scisdata.com. <https://www.scisdata.com/connections/issue-96/the-importance-of-multicultural-literature/>
- [5] Grenby, M. O., & Immel, A. (Eds.). (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol9780521868198>
- [6] Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words : language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Hoffman, M., & Binch, C. (2016). *Amazing Grace*. Dial Books For Young Readers.
- [8] Hunt, P. (2005). *Understanding children's literature : key essays from the second edition of The International companion encyclopedia of children's literature*. Routledge.
- [9] Jost, J. T., Federico, C. M., & Napier, J. L. (2009). Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60(1), 307–337. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163600>
- [10] McKinney, C., & Norton, B. (2008). Identity in Language and Literacy Education. *Blackwell Publishing Ltd EBooks*, 192–205. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470694138.ch14>
- [11] Myers, C. (2014, March 15). Opinion | The Apartheid of Children's Literature. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/the-apartheid-of-childrens-literature.html>
- [12] Nikolajeva, M. (2013). Picturebooks and Emotional Literacy. *The Reading Teacher*, 67(4), 249–254. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1229>
- [13] Nodelman, P. (2008). *The hidden adult : defining children's literature*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [14] Taylor, F. (2003). Content Analysis and Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books. *Teaching Sociology*, 31(3), 300–311. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3211327>
- [15] Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Discourse, Ideology and Context. *Folia Linguistica*, 35(1-2). <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.2001.35.1-2.11>