

Employed Symbols to Character Building in Teaching Narrative

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Abstract:- Children are the asset of the nation that must have good characters and creativity. They have good period called the golden age that is the best time to explore everything around them. Therefore, the role of parents and teachers is very important to educate the children as well as possible. Children Literature could become the option for parents to give them the source of reading in order to develop their imagination. Theodor Seuss Geisel known as Dr. Seuss has written more than 60 children's books including several of the most popular children's books of all time. One of them entitled *Horton Hatches the Egg* belongs to narrative text which could represent the symbols to character buildings in learning process. This study aims to describe how symbols could employ the character building on students' views in teaching narrative. It could be formulated in the research question; how could the employed symbols in *Horton Hatches the Egg* represent the character building on students' view? This study uses descriptive qualitative by conducting an analysis of students' writing and interview related to the used symbols in *Horton Hatches the Egg* in representing the character building. Students coming from the third grade of Junior High School used a trait checklist to find out the character traits wrapped into symbols to represent their views on character building. The result shows that good character traits such as responsible, social care, self discipline and creative wrapped into symbols of character could be reflected to students' views by connecting the given illustration in the texts and students' social life.

Keywords:- Symbols, Dr. Seuss, Character Building, narrative.

I. INTRODUCTION

The habit of reading will be obtained by children when they get interested so that they are indirectly able to get the knowledge they really need. However, this cannot be achieved if teachers and parents are not able to act as facilitators for children. They must come to the child's imagination and deliver them in understanding the presented texts. Mental and representation development of children could be engaged by social interaction with adults even their collaboration (Leontiev.2020, Bernal et al 2011). Reading materials are very influential to stimulate reading habits for children. If the child is able to understand the reading materials well, there will be an interest in reading fondness so that there is a transfer of potential cognitive mindset (moral values) and makes the generation of positive character in the golden period. The formation of this character is also stated in the Indonesian curriculum,

for example character, honesty, intelligence, resilience, caring, independence, logical leadership, hard work, responsibility, self-confidence, curiosity, love of science, the right to awareness and obligations of oneself and others, adherence to social rules, respect for the work and achievements of others, nationalism, and respect for diversity (National Education Ministry Strategic Plan of Indonesia at Year 2010-2014). Narrative text is a description of a problem or phenomenon arranged in a generic structure including orientation, complications, and resolution (Bamberg. 1997:12). The orientation describes when the event occurred, who was involved and where the incident occurred. Complications explain the problems that arise while orientation is a way out of these problems. There is an additional element of coda which is the author's choice to complete the narrative text. This coda explains the attitude of a character on finding a way out of the problem (William & Rose. 2008:52). This narrative text is learnt by junior high school students. It is hoped that the provision of narrative text can stimulate reading habits and also foster spiritual attitudes, social attitudes, knowledge and skills.

The study on *Horton Hatches the Egg* belonging to narrative text written by Dr. Seuss had been done using different topics of research including economics, feminism, and adoption. Richard B. Freeman (2011) argued that "economic growth requires long-term investments", as represented by Horton's sitting on the egg, and that trust is important in a well-functioning economy, as what by Horton's repeated utterances, "*I meant what I said, and I said what I meant.*". Fiminis perspective was given by Alison Lurie (1990) which stated that there were fetal rights and negative attitudes possessed by Mayzie. This illustrates that the role of the antagonist was more owned by a woman who was represented in Mayzie than the role of the protagonist in the Children's Book entitled "*Horton Hatches the Egg*". Another thing by Jill Deans (2000) that the book was a manifestation of adoption events starting from the embryo. Horton as a representation of adoptive parents who were much better than their own parents depicted in the figure of Mayzie. Philip Nel revealed that the symbol of Horton's character was a representation of Geisel's longing for children. Both Deans and Nel revealed that the book could not be separated from the real life between Geisel and his wife.

This study discussed the other side of views. *Horton Hatches the Egg* was used as teaching materials of narrative text in the classroom for the third grade of junior high school that explored meaning of symbolic objects to represent the character building in teaching and learning process.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The hidden meaning can be explored through the learning process, which is the study of a symbol. Pierce places the study of symbols as part of the study of signs. This is closely related to the meaning of an object as a form of conventional habit (Berger.1995). The concept of symbol is more complex than icon and index. Icon could be known from the similarities between signifier and signified. Meanwhile, index in the study of sign could be known from the causal connections. A key is needed to find the meaning of the symbol itself which is obtained from the learning process of conventional community of cultural studies because the meaning of the symbol is a reflection of the cultural phenomenon. Analysis related to symbols cannot be carried out based on the meaning of their literal meanings. Ratho (2020) investigated the relation between semiotic and symbolic interpretation in the concept of language processing on deconstructing physic and linguistics at Mirror Stage that changed the demand representation which means that The study on symbols belong to multidisciplinary concepts. Texts, codes, utterances, or social situation could become the key to explore the meaning of symbols. Additionally, symbolic representation could reflect a political situation (Stokke et al 2009). That's why, delivering the messages is one of the functions of symbol.

Authors usually use the conventional symbols to deliver the hidden meanings. The Eagle is one of the symbolic characters that represents a symbol of strength. The dove is a symbol of peace and the lion is conventionally defined as a symbol of fear and strength. On the other hand, when studying the symbols of the flag of a country such as America, the number of white lines in the American flag indicates thirteen colonies. While the fifty states of America are symbolized by the number of stars in the flag of that country. Other conventional studies can be in the form of red color which can be interpreted as the meaning of fear, passion, blood, and danger (Robertson. 2015). Death, crime, causality, and grievances are symbolized in black. Purple symbolizes royalty and white represents clarity and purity. Conventional plant symbols have hidden meanings such as roses are symbols of true love and romance (Fontana.1994:53). Symbols in the form of objects such as wedding rings or fiancées are symbols of the establishment of a bond. Teddy bears can represent friendship if brown color means friendship, while white teddy bears show true love. On the other hand, Jung (1969:4) argued that the meaning of the symbol was created from a thought arising from the human subconscious so that the meaning of the symbol itself could be interpreted in various ways. This means that the meaning of the symbol cannot be fully defined.

Meaning of symbols could be interpreted variously after learning process based on the human's mind referring to the concept of signifier and signified. The meaning of symbols obtained from the function of the text itself is able to provide an interpretation that is owned by the reader through the process of reading activities, but the meaning of the symbol itself is sometimes only the author who is

able to interpret the existence of symbols in a function of the text. Additionally, the Formal Operation level is owned by junior high school students. They have learnt in elementary school for 6 years so they have been able to develop a systemic hypothesis on the reading process. The social phenomena they have experienced could provide a lot of experiences so that their identity searching in the form of self-identity has emerged. Stages of the Imagination Process from past experiences obtained by children at the mental representation level are able to form good characters. They have been able to classify positive and negative values so that their experiences can be used as planning attitudes for the future (Kramphen. 1991:21).

Narrative Text is learnt by the students in the third grade of Junior High School in Indonesia. According to Piaget (1950) that those students belong to children categorized in the stage of formal operation. They are able to develop their hypothesis to solve their life problems even they could use their past experiences to face the troubles. Therefore, the children could set their future goals based on the previous experiences and their prior knowledge. Mishra (2020) stated that oral narrative in the form of folk narrative was effective for children in learning process. Previous research had been done by Reparaz et al (2015) about Parental involvement in school of Spain and Germany. The result showed that students' achievements could be influenced by the role of parents. However it did not happen to the all factors related to parental participations in reaching higher achievements for students. It could be figured out that students in Junior High School belonging to formal operation stage need parents' participation to support students' achievement in order to be the role models for the students. Ghamrawi (2015) stated that matching the character traits with the curriculum was not fully aware. Acquire spiritual attitudes (to fully appreciate and understand religion), social (discipline, responsibility, caring (tolerance, mutual cooperation, polite, confident, in interacting effectively with the social and natural environment within the reach of association and existence), knowledge, and skills have been stated in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation 2016 Number 024 Appendix 37th for third graders of Junior High School through intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities. The provision of narrative reading materials entitled "Horton Hatches the Egg" is expected to be able to foster social attitudes for students. Character formation cannot be separated from cultural values which are very likely to be obtained from a place, but the consumption of that culture will mediate for them (Gay et al. 1997:23). Theodor Seuss Geisel incorporates the values of good and bad characters through the symbols he created based on the characteristics of the children themselves so that children's literature could continue to develop and use as consumption to stimulate children's reading habits. Ahuvia (2011) did a research on Theodor Seuss Geisel related to his critique of Materialism. It explored more on his creativity to the way he worked in created symbols to convey the messages. In that research, Seuss was a felicitor who could bring happiness to others on his imaginations and creativity.

III. MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHOD

The teacher presented narrative material using text written by Dr. Seuss entitled "Horton Hatches the Egg" using an LCD. This aimed to make it easier for children or students in the guided reading process in the classroom which was carried out from page one to the next pages. Children's reading material was not only in the form of text but was equipped with pictures. It was certainly interesting for students to understand the function of the text itself. It started with a process in which Horton, an elephant, helped Mayzie, a bird, to incubate the only egg she had. Mayzie wanted to take a vacation because she was bored with the routine. With full of obstacles Horton was hatching the egg to replace the role of Mayzie until a hunter came who transported it along with trees, nests and eggs used in the incubation process to the City of America. Unexpectedly, it turned out that the egg was incubated by the elephant hatched. Everyone was surprised including Mayzie and Horton because the egg that Mayzie wanted to ask became an elephant bird.

This study used a descriptive qualitative. The data of the research was all kind of activities related to the exploration of symbols in teaching narrative to represent the character building in teaching and learning process. The data in this research were sentences which were written by the students after reading *Horton Hatches the Egg* referring to the focus of research the Egg and all students' utterances which the research got during interview were related to symbol representation in building the character.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF STUDY

The result showed that students could represent the symbols in *Horton Hatches the Egg* to character building by guided reading conducted by the teacher in teaching narrative text. Students could define the character traits by using the trait checklist as guidance in having interview to them. Those trait checklists determine the specific traits which were owned by the students. Then, they could reflect the certain character traits symbolized in the characters used in *Horton Hatches the Egg*. Representing the symbols to character building could be enriched by exploring the meanings of the used symbols. The teacher read loudly to the sentences which were used to describe the illustration given by the author. The meanings of the sentences were explained by pointing to the picture in that page when there were certain vocabularies which were difficult to understand their meanings. It needed to switch the language as well from English to Indonesian to comprehend the meaning of certain vocabularies that could not be clarified by using the picture on that page. First of all, the teacher gave the list of good character traits which they remembered. The list of character traits have already been stated in curriculum as well. This was conducted to gain their prior knowledge how far they understood those traits. Then, their understandings were connected to the objects which were used to symbolize the character traits. After reading *Horton Hatches the Egg*, the teacher asked the students to catch the character traits owned by the characters in the texts. The students could mention the

characters. They mentioned Horton as an elephant, Mayzie as a bird, and Hunters. They mentioned that those characters had certain character traits. In their writing, they mentioned the following sentences

Mayzie is described to the one which is not good because she does not fulfill her promise

The point above means that the student caught the negative traits owned by Mayzie. She could not fulfill her promise. Student gave a judgment to Mayzie that she was not good. That judgment could become a measurement in student's view that fulfilling a promise is one of criteria to have a good character. Additionally, the student wrote the following sentences

Mayzie tended to be selfish instead of hatching her egg furthermore she had vocation to the beach by luring an elephant to hatch her egg

Student gave a judgment to the Mayzie that she was selfish. It strengthened the more bad characters owned by Mayzie which belonged to bad ones. She ignored her promised and even became selfish animal by luring an elephant to hatch her egg. On the other hand, the student could give more detail to the reason why Mayzie belonged to selfish animals. She preferred having vocation to hatch her own egg in order to get the happiness. The students clarified the effort done by Mayzie to lure an elephant was not once. She had lured an elephant many times. Additional judgment and attitude delivered by the student was as follows;

What the bird did, was not worth imitating by the reader because it would be shunned by his/her friends

The information written by the student belonged to attitude which could reflect her own social life. Student's social reflection could be known by looking at the part of complication in *Horton Hatches the Egg*. Mayzie was not shunned by her friends furthermore, Horton who helped Mayzie were shunned by other animals because they thought that Horton was doing an irrational action. This judgment appeared to student's social life that having bad characters such as selfish and irresponsible would be shunned by many other friends. Bad characters including irresponsible and selfish were symbolized in the object of bird named Mayzie in *Horton Hatches the Egg*. That symbol represented the bad characters which could give the student's judgment to the certain object or case. Mayzie did some bad attitudes to Horton (an elephant) who helped her in hatching the egg. She had lured Horton many times to get her own happiness in vocation. She did not fulfill her promise as well. It symbolizes the irresponsible action owned by Mayzie. It means that Mayzie was symbol of selfish and irresponsible animal. Those actions are not needed to be imitated by the reader in order to have many friends. Having many friends became the student's social life which was reflected by giving judgment to the illustrated symbol of Mayzie in the story. On the other hand, the student gave a comment to the Horton (an

elephant) which had good character traits clarified to the following sentences

Horton was illustrated as the one who was kind and helpful for his friends.

Student caught the elephant had positive character trait. He was kind and helpful for his friends. It means that Horton had the character trait of social care. In the story, Horton helped Mayzie to hatch the egg. He did not help any other animals. However, the student gave a comment that Horton helped his friends. Helping many friends became the point to the student's view reflected to her social life. What the student had written could reflect her social life after knowing the character trait owned by Horton. It shows that the trait of social care which was symbolized to the character of Horton could represent the student's social life. Additionally, the student wrote the following sentences

had been willing to sacrifice body and soul to incubate bird's egg for years despite the heat, rain, snow, and get bullying from his friends but he did not reply. He remained to be patient and incubated the egg

The student caught the character trait of social care. Horton had been willing to sacrifice his body and soul to help Mayzie (the bird). The student was able to catch the factors which belonged to sudden urges such as the heat, rain, snow, and bullying. It means that the additional traits could be reflected to the student's mind that Horton had the character of self discipline. The student could catch the action which had been done by Horton to control him from the sudden urges. So he did not undermine his overall goal to keep the promise in hatching the egg. The student also wrote the word *bullying*. The student could appear the term of *bullying* which was inspired from the story. Other animals gathered round and shouted with glee even yelled to Horton that he was an absurd animal which pretended to look like a bird. That phenomenon appeared to the student's social life. Then they called that event as bullying. In that event, Horton had a character trait of self discipline although he got bullying from other animals. The student added a judgment by writing the following question;

The reader should emulate what the Elephant is doing because even if he gets bullying, he doesn't reply and he is willing to sacrifice his life.

Student gave a judgment and suggestion to the reader. It means that the student thought that bullying should not be done. It causes the pain for someone. This point is given to the reader as well. It means that the student was able to represent the character trait of self- discipline and social care which were symbolized in the character of Horton to build up good attitude. No bullying was a good attitude which must be done. It was the student's point of view. The student gave the comment to other character as well. Hunters were illustrated as the brilliant ones. The student mentioned in her writing as follows;

The hunters are described as being intelligent because they did not kill the elephant but they used him in the circus and finally the elephant met a lazy bird.

The information above shows that the student could find the character trait of creative. It could be proved by giving a judgment to the hunters. They did not kill the Horton. In the story, the hunters had three rifles which were aiming to Horton. When they looked at the Horton's attitude, they changed their mind not to kill the Horton. They dared to do something completely new in to create a unique show performed by an elephant who was hatching the egg on the tree. The hunters turned their ideas and imagined what it would be like if Horton was used in the circus. That phenomenon was able to give the students' view on having a creativity as something which was not usual. It could be categorized as brilliant action. Killing the animals in the hunters' point of views was the usual thing. However, they did not kill the animal. They could see other side which is more precious or valuable. Based on the phenomenon above, the student could catch the character trait of creative which is symbolized in the character of hunters. The illustration given in the story forced the student as a reader to think differently to the usual event to be more valuable. The student could write more information about the creativity as follows;

The egg that was hatched by an elephant cracked and looked like a little elephant.

This phenomenon was able to give more on creativity. It could touch the student's feeling. After Horton had hatched the egg for fifty one weeks passing the obstacles such as autumn, winter, snow, storm, light, springtime, bullying, long travelling in a wagon by ship, and seasick, he made the egg crack. Although the egg belonged to Mayzie, it cracked into a little elephant who had wings like a bird. What the author had illustrated could touch the student as a reader to be an important point that self discipline is needed. That trait was symbolized in the character of Horton. On the other hand, the character trait of creative was symbolized in the character of hunters. In teaching and learning process, the data could be illustrated in the form of interaction between teacher and students

Teacher Question:

What do you think about Horton, Mayzie, and hunters?

Students' Responses

Horton was responsible animals

Mayzie was a liar

Hunters are creative and kind

the students could find the meanings of the used symbols by understanding the texts guided by the teacher in the process of reading. Some of students were interviewed after the reading process was over. The students clarified that the Mayzie, a bird was a liar because she was not back to Horton to hatch her egg. She decided to enjoy her life in Palm Beach. On the other hand the Horton had to keep the egg from the snow and ice, thunder, lightning, and rain.

They explained that Horton was struggle as well to keep his promise although he was caught by the hunters to go to the town and circus, but he was still hatching the egg. Finally Horton was given an elephant bird as the result of his hard works. From the explanation above, it could be got some points that the students could the catch the meaning of elephant symbol representing hard work, responsible, and kindness. Some students were asked about the creativity owned by the hunters. The student also gave her experience on her family life

Mayzie is like my father Sir, everytime I ask to be accompanied in learning, he asks me to come to my mother. So she helps me so much. My father likes flying everywhere, the same with Mayzie

The student gave the illustration that he was like an egg. The owner of the egg did not want to keep the egg as well as possible. In the concept of student the owner of the egg was his father who liked going everywhere. He didn't have any time to teach his son since in the elementary school. The only one who always helps the student is his mother. That's was why he symbolized his mother like a Horton who kept the egg all the time. When the next question was given to the student related to the future value which could be implemented for the student's life he answered such the following data;

When I grow up to be parents, I do not want to be my father. It must have a time for the child. It's bad flying everywhere. His anger came when he was asked

The student was able to illustrate his previous experiences to be connected to the first sample of reading material entitle *Horton Hatches the Egg* even he could give his planning for his future life. He wants to be responsible father. On the other side looking other student gave the secret story referring to Mayzie and Horton connected to friendship.

It is actually our secret, Sir. I will answer because I am asked about this. It is common where there is an assignment, I will do for them. Others looked at my answer, Sir, however ,they are kind to me because of their treats.

In that illustration, the egg was like an assignment. She thought that their friends were like Mayzie and she was a Horton who helped Mayzie in doing the assignments. Then, the elephant bird was like the treats which were given by her friends. It means that the elephant bird was symbolized as the treats which she got. When the next question was given to him about the future value which may be in her mind, she answered

I have ever told to them that it will be bad when understanding nothing to the assignment. But they do not care what I suggest. For me, it's enough when I have reminded them.

Being irresponsible to the assignments they have was bad for them. The given information from the student could be seen that what they had read could be reflected to their life experiences so far the trait could be known before, the students were able to develop their experiences and plan something for their future. On the other side, the symbol of hunters was interpreted as the creative way for students. When the teacher asked them a question "What do you think about the hunters?" The students answered that the hunters did not kill the elephant. It meant that the hunters were kind. Then they got a lot of money of the elephant circus, it meant that the hunters belonged to creative people. After knowing the egg had hatched, the hunters let the elephant free. So, the hunters belonged to be kind people. In the classroom one of the student said

The hunters are like me, Sir, kind and they are not arrogant

The last thing was found that while reading process, the teacher asked a question about Mayzie. One of student whispered "it looks like Syahda". That statement could be heard and the teacher interviewed him why syahda looks like "Mayzie". He clarified that

Syahda does not follow the cleaning schedule in the class. She is not responsible

she was not responsible to the cleaning schedule of the class. She always came late and didn't have any responsibility to come earlier in the time she got in charged to clean the classroom. In the students view, the time schedule was like an egg which must be kept for all students in charge. So they directly pointed to one of the friend who could not obey the cleaning schedule of the class. The given book "Horton Hatches the Egg" could give the reflection to students' lives through the meaning of symbols to represent the character building.

There were four main points including the student's social life that could be reflected in the story *Horton Hatches the Egg*. They are helping friends, having friends, sacrificing, and bullying. In representing symbols to character building in teaching narrative, the teacher must be able to connect events by events which could be reflected to student social life. When the teacher succeeded to explore contents of story by connecting to the student's social life, it could make the students have attitudes to deliver their ideas in writing. They could write the ideas based on their experiences connected to the content of story in *Horton Hatches the Egg*.

V. CONCLUSION

Teaching narrative for students is one of actions which must be done by the teacher because it is stated in the curriculum of Indonesia for Junior High School Students. It should be more valuable to transfer the positive character building when the teacher could explore the educational values in materials. Exploring symbols could become a model in teaching narrative to connect the students' social life and the character traits owned by the characters in narrative text. *Horton Hatches the Egg* written by Dr. Seuss

is one of good models in narrative text which could be used to transfer positive character building by connecting events by events in the story and the students' trending topics of their social lives such as bullying, sacrificing in a life, having and helping friends. Additionally, the teacher could connect the character traits between the ones which are owned by the characters in the story and students as their self-character reflections.

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