



**Exploring the Theme of Death in Children's Literature:
A Comparative Cultural Study Examining the Two Picture
Books: Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman* (1978) and
Aisha Rafe's *I feel sad, I am human* (2000)**

Nardeen M. N. El-Atrouzy

Faculty of Arts, English Language and Literature Department
Ain Shams University

nardeenatrouzy@gmail.com

Received:09-05-2024

Revised:27-05-2024

Accepted:05-06-2024

Published:28-07-2024

DOI:

Abstract

This research aims to explore the theme of death in Children's Literature. It is a comparative study between the classic wordless British picture book: *The Snowman* (1978) by Raymond Briggs and the Egyptian Aisha Rafe's picture book: *I feel sad, I am human* (2000) from a cultural perspective. Culture is rooted in children's works as it has always been the base of world literature and children are daily subjected to their home culture as much as their adult parents are. The two selected works respectively come from the British and Egyptian cultures. They depict the same concept of loss and acceptance of death, but from different angles and perspectives. The images, analogies and illustrations, along with the character selection, development and growth reflect each individual authentic culture with its inner struggles and challenges. Studying the concept of death in children's works exposes a reality many hide or ignore, fearing that it might be too harsh or inappropriate for our youngsters to read or get involved with at an early age in life. The two picture books speak of death but not in a scary and fearful manner. On the contrary, they depict the theme as a simple fact of life. Modern trends of introducing psychologically disturbing themes are growing, but the way they are handled marks either their success or failure. Death, its representation and handling, is deeply rooted in one's culture, both Briggs and Rafe present distinguished picture books which boldly and skillfully bring forward death as the main theme in the story board that can be easily accepted by children. This paper will highlight this comparative cultural representation and its strong effect on children

Key words: Children's Literature, Comparative Studies, Death and Trauma



Exploring the Theme of Death in Children's Literature A Comparative Cultural Study Examining the Two Picture Books: Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman* (1978) and Aisha Rafe's *I feel sad, I am human* (2000)

This research aims to explore the theme of death in Children's Literature. It is a comparative study between the classic wordless British picture book: *The Snowman* (1978) by Raymond Briggs and the Egyptian Aisha Rafe's picture book: *I feel sad, I am human* (2000) from a cultural perspective. Culture is rooted in children's works as it has always been the base of world literature and children are daily subjected to their home culture as much as their adult parents are. Children's Literature "is connected with the motherland, the land of myths, stories, poetry, language, fantasy and dreams" (Heif 1983: 18). It provides the "possibility of a dialogue between the child and other creatures and objects" (Heif 1983: 19). It includes stories, books, magazines and poems that are written for children. Children's story books, "not only provide new knowledge – by enriching their vocabulary and enhancing their communication skills – but also ensure their emotional support and wellbeing during problematic circumstances in their lives" (Pulimeno 2020: 1). Children's literature, as a form of artistic creativity "presents a therapeutic potential for readers and listeners, in the same way that Greek tragedy was able to 'heal' the spectators" (Laird 2006: 62).

Exploring the theme of death, along with its effects and consequences on children, in picture books for young children is a grave challenge. Selecting specific child-friendly themes has been the accepted topics of Children Literature for decades now, and speaking of taboo topics such as death is a challenge. The old themes of the past, dating as old as the 17th and 18th centuries that show bloody and scary themes have been banned for decades now. The Brothers Grimm, Perrault and Hans Christian Anderson were fairy-tale writers who introduced topics that portray horrific scenes and terrifying sketches that were part of the acceptable past cultural heritage but these themes no longer exist in our modern context. Such topics and themes that would encourage violence and unwanted behaviour were banned and instead mild themes of love and familial ties dominated. However, centuries later, and especially with the flourishing of the psychological studies, a need for humanistic themes became on the rise. If you use the traditional classic approach of a scary theme that intimidates, and relies on frightening "a naughty child into submission, then your 'Remedy' is much worse than the 'disease'. Such were the sensible, considered, and experience-based opinion of the celebrated philosopher, John Locke" (Pickering 1941: 1).



1941 Authors started to introduce the theme of loss into their works to help ease their sudden encounter with life's harsh realities. By introducing the theme of death, instead of harsh killing and mutilation, in a familial context, the child might learn the moral of accepting the loss and moving on. Relatable themes became common only if they are introduced in a simple framework for children to understand and accept. Two very talented authors present the theme of death and how one handles it in their picture books in a very clever way: the British Raymond Briggs in *The Snowman* (1978) and the Egyptian Aisha Rafe in *I feel sad, I am human* (2000). Each author presents the sensitive topic of death from a cultural perspective and introduces it to the children to increase their awareness about the sense of losing someone or something.

The question of how children perceive and react to the theme of death and other unfamiliar or rather shocking subject matters has been a concern for many authors and critics of children's books. Children's literature offers youngsters the possibility to acquire a system of values namely, the educational role, to be engaged in motivating learning activities which is a didactic aspect, and to deal with inner conflicts and life difficulties as a psychological value. By introducing what the mind can comprehend and understand, the mind will eventually accept. With this reasoning, Locke stresses the belief that children "must be reasoned with, in order that they shall exercise, develop, and refine their own powers of reasoning" (Pickering 1941 5). Children stories are used by health professionals and educators for therapeutic reasons where they can address unhealthy habits and psychological issues aiming to reform them in the child. In a way, we can use picture books to educate our youngsters about the matters of life and how to handle difficult situations. Locke drew his own conviction that "of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good and evil, useful or not, by their education. It is that which makes the great difference in mankind. Both manners and abilities owe more to education than to anything else" (Pickering 1941 3). This idea was drawn from Locke's own experience as a tutor of young kids. It shows the importance of education using children's books and how they affect the minds of our youngsters. By the beginning of the 19th century, trade in children's books flourished, as "many publishers including John Marshall, J. Harris, Stockdale, Rivington, Longman, and J. Johnson devoted much of their energies to children's books" (Pickering 1941 4). The book became a magical carpet taking its readers, young and old, to far away places to explore new realms. It invited them into the world of imagination, one that was sometimes improbable and unreal, yet exciting and lovable. It was an illuminating experience which taught and delighted. Since culture is crucial for learning, "stories have a fundamental part in shaping the individual's role in the society, becoming a helpful resource from didactic, psychological/therapeutic and pedagogic perspective" (Kuciapinski 2014: 78).



Children's literature offers strategies to "overcome the anxiety and the fear of the unknown, stimulating reflection and re-elaboration of personal criteria to be applied in real life" (Montgomery 2015: 44) with all its hardships and troubles. Reading a picture book or listening to stories "is helpful for children as it promotes pupil's emotional expression and psychological wellbeing" (Bravender 2010: 515). Books occasionally provided moralistic standpoints blended with a cultural milieu coined in a familiar language using a plausible flow of ideas to build a plot that is interesting, exciting and in some cases mesmerising to the young readers. Each and every book a child reads influences his/her future choices and consequently chances in life. Tales, introduced through books, have been told along the years to educate, entertain and increase one's awareness about moral principles and customs. By doing so, these told stories represent an important part of traditional heritage and reinforce tolerance and mutual knowledge among different people all over the world.

Many thinkers, educators and philosophers, like Locke, were convinced "that a good education would be crucial to ... success" (Pickering 1941 6). A properly chosen book stimulates children's power of observation, reason, memory and imagination, broadening the range of experiences, compelling the readers to reflect on their behaviours, and find out possible solutions to their problems while providing entertainment. Persistent concepts in many children's books, like "good or evil, useful or not" (Pickering 1941 7), were stressed by authors as a theory to educate and entertain. This theory of the past generations was based on Locke's theory which was provided in "the Eighteenth Century with what seemed to be a scientific basis for the study of human development and an explanation of the crucial formative influence of education" (Pickering 1941 7). Like Locke, Colby believed that "the fundamental requirements for children's books are much the same as those for adult books" (29). Children "by the age of six or seven", he explained, "start reading on their own picture books and start reasoning and finding logic in what is presented to them", they become "alert", apprehensive, "appreciative and capable of reasoning, but physically and emotionally still need protection" (Colby 1967: 29) of the adult. The child "was not a diminutive adult. Instead, he was the father of man", he contended that the "little, and almost insensible impressions on our tender infancies ... (had) very important and lasting consequences" (Pickering 1941 7). There were no innate ideas or principles in the mind, and a child's mind, initially resembles an 'empty cabinet' or a 'white paper' that is void of all characters. Experience on which knowledge was founded and based furnished this 'cabinet' with ideas through feelings of 'sensations' and 'reflections'. Locke further asserts that the "great source of most of the ideas we have, was the senses" and following this line of thought, "Educators linked Locke's theory of origin of ideas to his theory of association of ideas. The latter explained the growth of habits and lent weight to the belief in the necessity of a



highly structured early education ... when one came into the understanding, its associate appeared with it” (Pickering 1941 9).

We encounter in children's works what is called, “imaginative literature, including poetry, drama, fiction, certain kinds of essays and speculations ... (such books) would simply involve determining the intelligibility, attractiveness, persuasiveness, importance, and usefulness of whatever could be learned from them” (Egoff et al. 1980: 39). It is “known that stories – by reproducing fictional situations that match with children's real problems – allow them to feel comfortable and safe in difficult circumstances, ensuring emotional security and providing healthier ways to deal with internal struggles, life adversities and stresses” (Rozalski 2010: 34). Learning from books, whether linguistic or moral lessons has become a tool for many parents and educators to maximize the benefit of reading the story with children. Falling under the contemporary term: ‘Creative Dramatics’, a story book can be given a whole new dimension and it can be made use of in many ways. First, we can highlight the linguistic function of a language, be that introducing new vocabulary words, grammatical usage or structure and word order. Second, the themes, values and lessons the story's plot presents create an interesting channel of moral educational content. In the past, ‘imaginative literature’ was read for and by children for entertainment reasons only, today, most children's books serve an edutainment function which is part edutainment and part educational, both linguistically and morally.

In culture studies traditions, “culture is understood both as a way of life – encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities, and so forth” (Johnson 1987: 17). Hall explains the meaning of culture as “the cultural, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society ... [as well as] ... the contradictory forms of ‘common sense’ which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life” (Hall 2016: 26). The strong bond between man and his homeland has always been a central backbone in many children's works. The protective role one bears and assumes over the years from one generation to the other is rooted in the past inherited heritage and culture from the ancestors. It is handed from father to son, and each must carry his responsibilities.

The first thing that is culturally taught to youngsters is the importance of the connecting bond between man and his homeland. Abdulla Abu Heif, the writer, critic and thinker says: “What distinguishes the child is his culture. In his culture lies his identity and his culture determines the paths of his up-bringing and organisation. It also gives a clear indication of style, quality and strength of his character” (Heif 1983: 16). The whole community is responsible for bringing up the child, “the culture of the child is an educational product based on the education in the first place connected to the influence of his mentor be that an



author, an artist, a technician, a supervisor, a father or a mother” (Heif 1983: 16). The adult community helps shape his culture and consequently, his identity. The bond is engraved in the minds as sacred. It is not an option for any soul to move away from one's land simply because it defines one's identity and who he is. Picture books with characters “compensate what young people may lack, by presenting positive patterns of behaviours and constructive models through the characters they could identify with” (Gibbs 1994: 8). *The Snowman*, in Briggs' story, takes our little hero to where things originally started in the North pole and how Christmas began. Similarly, Ahmed's father, in Rafe's story, tells him about how his father before him lived and thrived on Egyptian soil. The two young boys are introduced to the concept of belonging to one's land. This act reflects the authentic and rich cultural backgrounds each author is trying to highlight. Cultural studies being an interdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field operates in the tension between its tendencies to include anthropological as well as a humanistic conception of culture. The central goal of cultural studies is “to enable people to understand what is going on, and especially to provide ways of thinking strategies for survival, and resources for resistance” (Hall 2016: 22).

The impact of being strongly connected, concerned and rooted with the ancestor's land sets the background settings of the two stories. Such tales are “very interesting for children because they show real aspects of family and community life, reinforcing the relations with the parents and highlighting ethical values related to social life” (Zeece 1997: 40). In the globalization era, characterized by deep socio-economic changes and the collapsing of many traditional social issues, the cultural heritage of folk-tales became easily available both for parents and teachers. The picture book became a very helpful tool for promoting individual personal growth, social interaction and development. In this “culturalistic” perspective, children belong to “a specific cultural niche that could help young people to move into life, allowing them to understand who they are as human beings and how they can contribute to the progress of the world” (Boyd 2011: 108). Finding culturally appropriate and acceptable picture books can be a big challenge with diverse themes. The first question most adults should ask themselves before choosing a book for their children is whether it is suitable for them or not: age wise, language wise and culture wise. “Parents, librarians, and educators often express alarm at what their children read. They are generally concerned, firstly, that the child shall not be made frightened or unhappy; secondly, that it should not be prematurely sexually aroused; and thirdly, that it shall not be encouraged to behave in aggressive or delinquent ways” (Egoff et al. 1980: 96). The second question is about how useful will the book be to the child; is it

a wholesome one. Or an up-to-date one. Or an informative one.
Or even a broadening one. The questions I would ask would



tend to be: Will this book call into play my child's imagination? Will it invite the exercise of genuine compassion or humour or even irony? Will it exploit his capacity for being curious? Will its language challenge his awareness of rhythms and structures? Will its characters and events call for – and even strengthen – his understanding of human motives and circumstances, of causes and effects? Egoff et al. 1980: 42

Authors make use of what is 'familiar' to the child, of what he/she has seen and encountered before. This makes it much easier to relate with the characters and interact with the story. The 'subject-matter', 'character' and 'setting' pave the way to the comprehension and consequently the acceptance of the story by the child. Critics such as Egoff, Stubbs and Ashley argue that the child "cannot be expected to show interest in the unfamiliar and even that literature should make no demands upon him that transcend the literal limits of his own experience" (1980: 46). This familiar sense found in most books presented to children aligns with the idea that "Since a very small child's environment is limited and his greatest needs are security and protection, the requirements for such books are: 1. Familiar and appealing subject matter ... He (The child) is interested in his family, himself, the daily routine of existence, common objects and well-known animals, especially pets" (Colby 1967: 24). Human values introducing the concepts of "birth and death" can build "tension and terror and doubt" (Egoff et al. 1980: 49). The talk of such sensitive topics breeds discomfort among adults, let alone children. However natural and lifelike such themes are, adults feel the need to shelter children from the harsh realities of life. "Because we love and cherish the childlike, we naturally seek to preserve it and to translate even children's reading into terms that reject many of the adult 'facts of life' as somehow corrupting" (Egoff et al. 1980: 48). This results in a huge gap in understanding between the adult values and their representation in stories on the one hand and the children's reading and perception of these same ideas but in a totally different way on the other. This merge of ideologies is best described as combining "the urgency and authenticity of life as we know it with the excitement and wonder of life as it may yet be known" (Egoff et al. 1980: 51).

Many writers of Children's Literature have attempted "to invest the familiar with the romantic, to exploit, as it were, the potential magic that is latent in everyday reality; or they seek to introduce the strange and incredible into the midst of the commonplace" (Egoff et al. 1980: 48). For famous authors like

Defoe, Swift, Blake, Coleridge, Melville, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Kipling ... Childhood for them was sacred and superior, in its vitality and powers of perception, to maturity,



which was compromised through having accommodated itself too much to the world. In one way or another these writers believed that the recollected vitality of childhood sustained a man, if anything did, throughout his entire life and that, conversely, civilization – Wordsworth's 'prison house'- was deadly

Egoff et al. 1980: 75

At the back of the adult's anxiety is usually "the belief that children are innocent little creatures who must not have unpleasant ideas put into their heads" (Egoff et al. 1980: 96).

Learning from stories "can stimulate and offer promising insights in other areas of children's cognitive development such as problem solving and reasoning skills" (Forgan 2002: 76). The lessons taught, "through implicit meanings embodied in stories, children indirectly acquire pedagogical messages, able to influence their global personality and stimulate a social sense of duty" (Hunt 2006: 27). Among the taught lessons of life is the feeling of loss caused by death which forms the central solid core of the two books, *The Snowman* and *I feel sad, I am human*. It begins with the first few pictures of the former and the first couple of narrative lines in the latter. A sad tone is present since the very beginning anticipating something unpleasant to take place soon. Later, the pictures convey the meaning of death to the two young boys, "The art of letting the illustrations tell at least half the story" (Colby 1967: 11) is a technique that is generously applied in both stories. Briggs abstains from using a single word throughout his book while Rafe uses simplified Classical Arabic and relies heavily on the illustrations. In these two picture books, actions and their presentations speak more than words. Both authors successfully present picture books "whose content is expressed through ... images ... The story (is) told with pictures (and) has a language of its own: the visual language, and therefore it is with this language that a picture book must express itself" (Colby 1967: 12). The illustrations thus add a whole new dimension to the picture book, that of the visual through which one can add "wit, colour, light, (and) life itself at the same time" (Colby 1967: 12).

The two picture books; *The Snowman* by Briggs and *I feel sad, I am human* by Rafe feature a young boy who befriends a snowman and a dog, respectively. The "content and form of the narrative – such as characters, events, and the story – are very important: characters can be more or less similar to the readers, thus producing a different persuasive effect" (Bal 1997: 97). The choice of a 'familiar' child's creation, a man made of snow that is common to that side of the world and an animal pet, a dog, gives ample scope for the child to first familiarize him/her-self with the incidents and second, learn new facts, like those about the



nature of the cold countries with snow, and about dogs. "Many of the most memorable characters in Modern British and American children's books are animals" (Pickering 1941 3). Such 'animals' and likable characters are there to arouse a feeling of interest in young readers. Both authors here, Briggs and Rafe, present their main characters in an attractive manner for children to easily relate to and like. The two young boys along with their non-human friends, the snowman and the dog, are used as "devices by the author(s) in hopes of imitating that mixture of the ludicrous and the sentimental" (Pickering 1941 30). The development of the plot in both books is very similar, as each boy ventures on a journey of learning about the meaning of loss and death, a sophisticated concept rarely addressed by children's authors because of the negativity and sadness it has to offer. However, both authors carefully handle the topic material and present it in a well-organized manner that adds to the child's experience constructively, rather than be scary or intimidating. The journey invites the young reader to get involved and learn how to accept loss. Both story lines are simple and easy to follow. With the end of *The Snowman*'s story, the snowman leaves his friend, the little boy and melts away when the sun comes out with the dawn of a new day at the end of the book. Whereas in *I feel sad, I am human*, Ahmed begins his story with the death of his pet dog, Antar, and continues the journey until it is concluded with acceptance and the fulfilled feeling of moving on. The experience gained from both stories is the notion that it is important to grieve so that you can accept death and move forward with your life. Losing someone close can be one of the most devastating challenges one can face in life, let alone if this person is still a little human being with minimal experience in life. The grieving process is different and can vary from one person to another, each can react and cope differently as people experience different emotions when in mourning like the feelings of shock, anger, sadness and depression. As time passes, such feelings become less intense and can even gradually and eventually become a memory, but only if they are handled well and given the right medium to be expressed instead of bottling them inside and allowing them to cause mental problems.

Briggs' character, Snowman is a fantasy character. He is able to fly and carry the boy with him to a faraway fantasy land, leaving behind his home, where the real life is anchored.

Fantasy differs from the stories of reality, first of all in the originality of its conception and its imaginative virtuosity – the tossing up of ideas like fantastic, brilliant balls of the most dazzling color and variety, changing before the eye. There are delicious surprises, breath-taking events, the introduction of unheard beings ... Where is the limit to these enchanting beings? No limit – that is the delight of it ... In fantasy, a premise must be established, a certain logic laid down,



boundary lines drawn. The author works within a frame of reference. He gives himself, perhaps unconsciously, a certain discipline.
Colby 1967: 14

However, after the fun time is over, the snowman brings the boy back home where he belongs. Next day with the first rays of the sun arriving, the boy wakes up to the unfortunate sad news of the melting of the snowman, his friend. Briggs brings back his boy from the fantasy world to reality and teaches him to accept it by embracing the memory of the fun time the boy had with the snowman. He takes the symbolic scarf left behind by the snowman as a memorable keepsake to remind him of the good time they had together.

Rafe's two characters; Ahmed, the young school boy, and Antar, his pet dog, on the other hand never leave the real world. They reach the same conclusion and lesson learnt but by taking small footsteps into the real harsh world. Through a realistic straightforward framework, we find real and factual events happening to the hero. However, the reassuring tone of the father here eases the harshness and replaces the journey of the snowman. The closing lines of introducing a new pet dog comes as a good solution to set the normal acceptance feelings in action. *I feel sad, I am human* is thus a picture book for young children about how to emotionally handle the feelings of loss of a loved one or thing. It is a very helpful tool for parents and educators to use when put in a shocking domestic situation where they have to explain to the child the death of a relative or a pet. The book is also loaded with cultural insinuations embedded in the daily practices and habits of the main characters. Mrs. Rafe cleverly captures a selection of daily phrases that are usually said to children by adults aiming to help them get over their feelings of loss. When asked about the late grandfather, Ahmed's words are: "Did you cry father, men do not cry!", his father answered: "Yes they do. Men are human, and humans mourn and cry. Manhood does not deprive man from his right to feel sad" (Rafe 2014: 12). The confusing and disturbing thoughts children experience after losing a loved one might easily cause depression if not handled well and treated with utmost care and understanding to release the suppressed emotions allowing them to surface in a healthy way. This is how Ahmed's father explains death, the feeling of loss and allowing oneself to shed tears over loved ones as a natural and healthy way of mourning and externalizing one's suppressed feelings of sadness.

The subtitle of the book, *Love – Handling the loss of loved ones*, sets a very sad and melancholic tone for the introduction with the very first lines of the story. Whether it is a loss of a family member, a friend or a pet animal, the child, like his/her adult peer experiences a grave sense of loss and internal pain. The people around him and the surrounding community start feeding him emotions dictating how to get over the state of sadness. Rafe's book begins with a list of some



questions about how one feels when he loses something or someone. A common quote stating: “Don’t feel sad” is a classic advice usually given by parents to their children hoping to ease their emotional suffering. We are introduced next to Ahmed, our young hero and the main character narrating his own personal encounter with the first loss he has experienced: the death of his pet dog and best friend, Antar.

Ahmed is told by an adult that “Men don’t cry” (Rafe 2014: 4), a typical culturally rooted Egyptian advice often told to boys and hardly to girls. This gender specification is in itself a representation of gender bias in the community, one that is widely practiced and enforced on young boys. Crying is considered a weak sign of character and girly, consequently for Ahmed to grow up into a strong man, he should not cry. He is instructed not to show weakness, or else he will be classified and labelled as weak. In another instance in the story, Ahmed gets hit by another boy he is told once again not to shed tears. The repetition of this idea focuses on how it is an important and pressing matter in the Egyptian culture. Our boy is told not to cry for the second time in spite of the physical pain he has to endure. Showing emotion through crying means that the character is weak, hence manhood qualities are questioned. The consequence of such instructions resulted in Ahmed trying to suppress all feelings and emotions. He must teach himself that a broken toy or a bully’s punch at school should not and must not trigger tears in his eyes, especially in public with people around watching. With time, he successfully managed to suppress his feelings and curb his tears to prove his manhood and strength.

Rafe’s young boy loses his pet dog and best friend and tries very hard to hold back his feelings by withdrawing from society and staying very quiet, especially at school. Having to deal with the feelings of anger and fear is very confusing for children, let alone if it is the first time they experience the death of a close loved one. The pictures of the late dog, Antar, keep storming through his mind causing even more confusion and raising more suppressed feelings of loss and sadness. He recalls when his pet came home as a puppy and his mother fed it milk from a small bottle. He remembers how he made it a small cosy bed to sleep in and stay warm. The happy memories made it hard on the young boy to let go and accept his loss, a loss too grave for him, that of his best friend and companion, Antar. It is a “total feeling of loss” (Rafe 7), and it made him question himself about what do people do when they lose a loved one? And how do they deal with the pain and the feelings of heartache? On this journey of self-exploration to find answers to these confusing questions and unprecedented queries, Ahmed decides to ask his father about the picture of his late grandfather that has been hanging on the wall of their house. The boy does not understand how his father is happy in spite of the fact that his grandfather is dead. Seeing his father indifferent, he asks about the way to happiness and his father explains to him the biggest lesson in life. To



the young boy's surprize, the father explains how he cried hard and mourned the death of the grandfather. The author here brilliantly puts together a very interesting explanation given by an adult to a child in such a sensitive and difficult emotional context. He explains to him how time heals all pains only if good memories replace the sad feelings one holds in his heart when he says: "sorrow leaves behind deep wounds in the heart but these hurtful feelings change to beautiful memories about whom we love" (Rafe 2014: 13). He also gives him some tangible tools to help him get over his loss. When asked about how one gets over the loss of someone, the father tells Ahmed: "We can gather pictures of happy moments we spent with our loved ones once ... we can write how we feel ... or create an artistic work of art like a drawing or a sculpture ... or music ... or we can talk about how we feel with someone we trust" (Rafe2014: 13). Self-expression combines all of these expressive modes to improve our psychological state and children need guidance and assurance to practice them in order to break the painful silence and project all the negative feelings stuck inside. It is only when they learn how to release those feelings that they feel relaxed and happy once again.

When Ahmed started following his father's advice, he started to move on and he was ready for a new puppy, this time with the name of 'Fares'. This marked the beginning of a new friendship and a new experience for a whole new set of happy memories. Children cherish memories the same way adults do, and Ahmed cherished the pictures of himself and his late dog, Antar, by hanging them on the wall. He found pleasure in introducing 'Antar' to 'Fares' using his old pictures and was happy to share old stories with his new buddy. When our hero started to face up to his sorrowful feelings, he started to heal, and a new beginning emerged wiping out all the past sad and stressful thoughts. With the melting away of the past, Ahmed experienced a shift in feelings taking him to a whole new level of maturity and understanding.

In Rafe's book, we have an extensive dialogue between Ahmed and his father and it is through verbal communication that our young hero finds solace and comfort once again. Unlike the verbal story of Ahmed, *The Snowman* shows rather than tells the young boy what to do. *The Snowman* shows the boy how happy memories are made to be later cherished and remembered. He teaches him how to feel happy and takes him on an exciting adventure to a world far away, one the boy has never seen before. When the sun comes up the next morning and the snowman melts away, the boy realizes that the memories they shared the day before can never melt nor be forgotten. The Snowman's scarf is left behind as a reminder of the beautiful day and as a token of true pure friendship and the boy starts to wear it to keep the memory alive in his heart. *The Snowman* shows the lonely boy how to celebrate life. They travel together to celebrate the most loved event of the year, Christmas. A further dimension relevant to health-related



“narrative persuasion” is the context of the presentation used in the narrative: an entertainment format where the reader is unaware that the narrative has a persuasive intention or a narrative frame in which persuasive intent is more explicit (Slater 2002: 173). According to Richard-Amato “students find themselves in the characters or narration, and learn how to behave adequately while facing similar situations in the future life. It happens that the child becomes aware about the topic of the story, unconsciously solves the problems, increasing self-confidence, with positive implications for personality development” (1988: 119). Both books share together an unforgettable experience and all this was done without a single uttered word throughout the book. Like Ahmed’s father who shows his son how to open his heart once again to feel better, the Snowman educated the young boy about the joys of life. Both boys learn, grow, mature and feel happier than before. The adults in the stories are the ones who teach and mentor to bring the young boys to a better and happier state.

The challenging theme of death is presented by the two bold authors, Briggs and Rafe in their respective picture books; *The Snowman* and *I feel sad, I am human*. A journey through life and death begins with the former and ends with the latter’s conclusion that life will go on and wounds will heal. The Snowman stresses the importance of friendship, love and other emotional values that make people human through a brief life span of a few hours. Ahmed, on the other hand struggles more and for a longer duration, trying to find comfort and solace in a harsh, highly demanding and highly judgemental community after the death of his pet and best friend. Both picture books share an originality of idea or individuality of presentation. In spite of their different cultural orientation, the two stories share a serious topic in a very smooth way settling the child into a flow of the plot, each in its own way, where strength and conviction strongly show from beginning to end.

Children learn from the two books: *The Snowman* and *I feel Sad, I am Human* a reality that is very difficult to express and very hard to grasp. The two books and their presentation of a sensitive subject matter; of accepting the sense of loss when losing a loved one to death, create a smooth medium for children to learn as they are led from one truth to another. The two pleasurable stories widen the children’s enjoyment, knowledge and experience to handle serious life matters that will be coming their way in the future.



References:

- Amato, A. (1988). Making It Happen. Longman: New York Press.
- Bal, M. (1997). Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Boyd, R., Ridshardson, and J., Henrich, J. (2011). "The cultural niche: Why social learning is essential for human adaptation". *Proc Natl Acad Sci, Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2011 Jun 28;108 Suppl 2(Suppl 2):10918-25. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1100290108. Epub 2011 Jun 20. PMID: 21690340; PMCID: PMC3131818. pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21690340/
- Brevender, T., Russell, A., Chung, and R.J., Armstrong, Sc. (2010). "A novel intervention: a pilot study of children's literature and healthy lifestyles". *Pediatrics*, Mar;125(3):e513-7. doi: 10.1542/peds.2009-1666. Epub 2010 Feb.
- Briggs, R. (1978). The Snowman. Hamish Hamilton: UK Press.
- Colby, P. (1967). Writing, Illustrating, Editing Children's Books. Hastings House: New York Press.
- Egoff, Sh., Stubbs, T. and Ashley, E. (1980). Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature. Second Edition. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Forgan, W. (2002). "Using bibliography to teach problem solving". *Interv. Sch Clin.* [bibliotherapy.article.intervention.pdf \(jimforgan.com\)](http://bibliotherapy.article.intervention.pdf(jimforgan.com))
- Gibbs, J., and Earley, J. Using Children's Literature to Develop Core Values. Bloomington, I.N.: Phi Delta Kappa Press.
- Hall, S. (2016). Cultural Studies1983: A Theoretical History. London: Duke University Press.
- Heif, A. (1983). Children's Literature: Theory and Practice. Arab Book Union Publishers: Damascus Press.
- Hunt, P. (2006). Understanding Children's Literature. London: Routledge Press.
- Johnson, D., and Lewis, R. (1987). Literacy Through Literature. Court St., Portsmouth: Heinemnn Educational Books, Inc. Press.
- Kuciapinski, J. (2014). "The therapeutic and educational properties of fairytale therapy in early stages of children's development". *Pedagog Rodz.* [PDF The Therapeutic and Educational Properties of Fairytale Therapy in the Early Stages of Children's Development \(researchgate.net\)](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/275011117)
- Laird, A. ed. (2006). Ancient Literary Criticism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grossberg, L., Nelson C., and Treichler A. (1992). Cultural Studies. Routledge: New York, London Press.
- Montgomery, P., and Maunders, K. 2015). "The effectiveness of creative bibliography for internalizing, externalizing and prosocial behaviors in children: a systematic review". *Child Youth Serv. Rev.* [The effectiveness](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/275011117)



-
- [of creative bibliotherapy for internalizing, externalizing, and prosocial behaviors in children: A systematic review - ScienceDirect](#)
- Pickering, Jr. (1941). Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth Century England. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Pulimeno M, Piscitelli P, and Colazzo S. (2020). "Children's literature to promote students' global development and wellbeing. Health Promot Perspect". [Children's literature to promote students' global development and wellbeing - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)
- Rafe, A. (2014). I feel sad, I am human. The Human Foundation: Nahdet Masr Press.
- Rozalski, M., Stewart, A., and Miller, J. (2010). "Bibliography: Helping children cope with life's challenges". Kappa Delta Pi Record. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271996460 Bibliotherapy Helping Children Cope with Life's Challenges](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271996460_Bibliotherapy_Helping_Children_Cope_with_Life's_Challenges)
- Slater, D., Rouner D. (2002). "Entertainment-education an elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion". *Communication Theory*, Volume 12, Issue 2, 1 May 2002, Pages 173–191, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00265.x>
- Summerfield, J. (1984). Fantasy and Reason. Children's Literature in the Eighteenth Century. Mathue and Co. Ltd. Press.
- Zeece, D. (1997). "Bringing books to life: Literature-based storytelling". *Early Child Educ. J.*, [Bringing Books to Life: Literature-Based Storytelling | Early Childhood Education Journal \(springer.com\)](#)