CHARACTERIZATION OF GENDER IN GRADE THREE READERS

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ABSTRACT.

This project is an examination of bias in Grade 3 readers which
have been approved for use in Alberta's elementary schools by the
Department of Education. The three reading series which are the
subject of the study are Networks (Nelson Canada), Impressions
(Holt, Rinehart & Winston) and Unicorn (McGraw-Hill Ryerson).
Sexism as a form of bias is the primary focus of the study, but
racism and ableism as other forms of bias are also examined. Sex
equity is not achieved in any of the categories of fiction,
non-fiction or myths/legends entries. Females, both adult and
child, are numerically under-represented whether they are primary,
secondary or background characters in the entries. Females as the
subjects of poems are also numerically under-represented. Neither
is balance achieved in illustrations in the readers. There are
fewer illustrations of females than there are of male, shared or
genderless illustrations. Non-white characters are also
under-represented and the illustrations depict these characters in
the countries of their origin, not in a contemporary Canadian
context. Disabled people were entirely absent from one series,
while the three disabled people in the other two series were
females. None of the disabled characters was male. Both female and
male characters conform to sex-role stereotypes of behaviour and
personality. Male characters are aggressive, independent, dominant
and active while female characters are quiet, neat, interested in
their appearance, aware of the feelings of others, gentle and
tactful.

INTRODUCTION.

When I was assigned to teach Grade 3 Language Arts, I found that I was expected to use the Impressions reading series. Interpreting these readers from a feminist perspective, I quickly became aware that males dominated the series numerically and that females were silent if they were visible at all. Thus, I began to use the stories in that particular series very selectively and to choose children's literature to supplement the reading program.

During the 1989/90 school year, the staff at my school was considering the purchase of a different reading series and even a brief look at the two alternatives indicated that males predominated numerically in these series as well. I was, therefore, prompted to make the subject of my project an examination of bias in Grade 3 readers which have been approved for use in Alberta's elementary schools by the Department of Education.

Part I of the study will focus primarily on sexism. For the purposes of this study, I have defined sexism as "Behaviour, policy, language, or other action of men or women which expresses the institutionalized, systematic, comprehensive, or consistent view that women are inferior" (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985). Part I will attempt to disclose sexual bias by examining the readers for balanced numerical representation of female and male characters.

In my initial examination of the readers I could not help but

notice that non-white and disabled people were portrayed in different contexts from white, able people and that they also seemed to be under-represented. In Part I, I will also focus briefly on racism and ableism. For the purposes of the study I have defined racism as "Institutionalized discrimination, prejudice, and oppression based on race, specifically oppression by white people of people of color" (Cameron, 1981, 51). Arachne Rae (1981, 39) defines ableism as "Systematic oppression of a group of people because of what they can or cannot do with their bodies or minds." It is this definition that I will use in this study.(1)

In Part II of the study, I will examine the content of character representation by analysing fiction and non-fiction entries to determine which protagonists demonstrate those qualities stereoptypically attributed to females and males in western patriarchal societies. In other words, I will assess whether or not females and males are portrayed in a stereotypical fashion. For the delineation of female- and male-valued characteristics I am indebted to the work of Inge K. Broverman et al. (1972) who reported that among features valued in males are such characteristics as dominance and leadership while features valued in females are such characteristics as gentleness and awareness of the feelings of others.

The final section will include a recommended series, if any; suggested criteria to help teachers detect bias in reading materials; and a list of children's books which meet those criteria

and which are appropriate for the primary grades.

PART I.

BACKGROUND.

I take a feminist approach to education because the patriarchal ethic pervading our schools is unfair and limiting for both females and males.

Feminist thinking has had an impact on schooling and education but being in K-12 schools particularly is still to experience patriarchy. For feminists, patriarchy means more than a line of descent. It has come to mean a mind-set, a world view, a perspective through which all reality is viewed. Patriarchal thought is characterized by being objective rather than subjective, rational rather than intuitive, linear rather than circular, logical rather than mystical, dissecting rather than unifying, abstract rather than concrete (Taubmann, 1981). Patriarchal behaviour is cool and unemotional rather than warm and emotive, expedient rather than purposeless, aggressive rather than passive, unreflective rather than reflective. Patriarchal institutions such as schools tend to be ordered along hierarchical "chains of command" or "lines of authority" rather than being communal and anarchic; they are exclusive rather than inclusive and are goal directed rather than maintenance oriented. In this society, the patriarchal mentality has tended to be the only way to perceive

reality; those qualities of dominance, competition, hierarchy, objectivity, rationality associated with males and considered innately lacking in females, become the criteria against which all human endeavours must be measured (Daly, 1978).

Schools are the embodiment of patriarchal thinking. Authority moves in a straight line from male Department of Education civil servants to male superintendents to male administrators to female teachers. Attendance at schools is exclusively for people between the ages of 6 to 18. Anyone else who enters a school building is told to report to the Principal's office. Goals of education and curriculum are mandated by male civil servants whose status increases for every year they have been absent from the classroom - if they ever were classroom teachers. Many teachers care for their students but caring as an ethic is not valued in schools(Noddings, 1984).

The reason for focusing on the printed word of Grade 3 readers in my project is twofold. First, it is the most visible kind of sexism and the easiest to document because it is in solid black and white. It can be turned to again and again for checking and reanalysis. Second, the printed page holds a special place in our culture. Print, in most minds, suggests veracity. We, as a culture, respect what we read and teach children to do the same. Even adults who have been educated in critical thinking sometimes experience, as a reflex, the notion that if a statement appears in public print, it must be true. Children with their limited experience are more apt than adults to put their trust in the

printed page. Much of what we do in school is based on building children's trust in books. This is all to the good; how would children learn from their reading if they did not trust the material? But while we are teaching children to put their faith in what they read at school, we are obligated to make sure that school reading material is deserving of that trust.

The subject of sexism and sex role stereotyping in children's reading material has been the subject of much discussion since the 1970s.

One of the most thorough studies was conducted by a Princeton, New Jersey, group called the Women on Words and Images(1972). This group surveyed 134 books used in New Jersey schools. The books represent 18 major textbook companies. Stereotyped sex roles appeared even in the "newer" series. In terms of sheer quantity, boys and men were present in the readers overwhelmingly more often than girls and women. They found a 6:1 ratio of male to female biographies and while women appeared in only 25 different occupations, men appeared in 147. Furthermore, men appeared in a wide range of jobs whereas women were limited to such traditionally female pursuits as teacher, nurse, telephone operator and secretary. In addition to being sex-defined, many of the jobs portrayed were also demeaning (such as fat lady in a circus), and unrealistic for most girls (such as queen, witch, acrobat). A content analysis indicated that, in "active mastery" stories, where the main character exhibited cleverness, problem-solving ability,

bravery, acquisition of skills, and adventurousness, males were the protagonists four times as often as females. By contrast, girls were more often portrayed as passive and dependent, restricting their goals, practising domesticity, being incompetent, and being victimized or humiliated by the opposite sex.

Using these same categories Schulwitz (1976) found the following types of sexist writing in readers: limited roles for females, negative characteristics attributed to females (incapable of problem solving, dependent on male initiative); a preponderance of male characters; limited life or occupational goals for girls and women (depicted as nurses, mothers, secretaries, teachers); and portrayal of females as having less than the full range of human interests, traits, and capabilities.

Marten and Matlin (1976), replicating a 1971 study by Graebner, examined 16 books (8 from first grade, 8 from sixth grade) noting the proportion of women in illustrations, as main characters and in active roles. These books represented five publishers and contained 609 stories. The results of the study were females in illustrations, 28% in 1971, 33% in 1976; females as main characters, 14% previously, 23% in 1976; females in active roles, 67% previously, 55% in 1976. On the other hand, males had even more active roles in the new books, 74% in the old books, 82% in the new ones. The authors also determined the ratio of passive-active activities. They found that males were active 528 times and passive 108 times (5:1), while females were active 106

times, passive 87 times (approximately 1:1).

Rupley, Garcia and Longnion (1981) examined more recent reading materials in detail. They evaluated over 2,750 stories found in four 1976 series, four 1978 series, and five sets of supplementary materials published in 1977 and 1978. They determined the sex dominance of each story by identifying its main character and the main character in each illustration. The researchers independently reviewed and identified each story as either female dominant, male dominant or other. In the 1976 materials, the results were 18% of the main characters were females, 23% other, 61% males; in the 1976 basals, 18% females, 47% other, 35% males; in the 1978 basals, 24% females, 51% other, 26% males; in the 1977-78 supplementary materials, 12% female main characters, 58% other, 29% males. Thus in 1976 there were still twice as many stories about males as females; the male category had shrunk, but the "other" category stories had grown in number. The 1978 basals had almost as many female stories as male stories indicating a trend toward equalization in basals, but not in supplementary materials. Males still appeared more than twice as often as females.

While the above studies do show some progress in equalization of male-female representation in basal material, several of the studies indicate that the nature of female activities has not changed substantially. Textbooks and teaching materials tend to imply that independence, initiative, strength, and ambition are exclusively male traits (Hartman & Judd, 1978; Marten & Matlin,

1976; Schulwitz 1976).

The above research analyses American basal readers; however, from using the Impressions series in the classroom and examining the other two series for this study I believe that the situation in readers used in Alberta to be similar to the findings of the above American research. Because Grade 3 teachers wishing to use a reading series must use one which has been approved by the Department of Education, this study is limited to those series which have been approved by the Department for use in Alberta's grade 3 classrooms. (Board approval is needed to use any other series).

METHODOLOGY.

The Grade 3 basal readers come from three publishing houses. McGraw-Hill Ryerson's Unicorn series consists of three books, Birch Bark, Tall Tales and Awakenings. Nelson Canada's Networks series has four books - Sea Castles, Island Treasures, Winter Welcomes and Sand Sculptures. Holt, Rinehart and Winston's Impressions series contains two books, Over the Mountain and Under the Sea.

Firstly, the books were read and entries categorized into fiction, non-fiction or myths/legends. Fiction was defined as all stories: complete, excerpted or adapted. Non-fiction was defined as all

material dealing with human beings or making reference to human beings through use of pronouns and myths/legends included folk tales, legends and fairy tales.(2)

Within each category of Fiction, Non-Fiction and Myth, three types of characters were identified: primary, secondary and background. Each of these character types was further subdivided into adult female/male and children female/male subdivisions (see sample record sheet, Appendix A). For the myths/legends category, I added a further sub-section of non-human female/male because of the large number of non-human but gendered characters to be found in the myths and legends.

The poetry entries and the illustrations I categorized as either female, male, shared (equal, or nearly equal, representation of females and males), or genderless.

Each character sub-section was totalled for each series and the numbers converted to percentages so that one series could be compared more easily with the other two and the numbers would be more meaningful to readers.

Because females constitute about 51% of most human populations, that percentage of females in each category was used as the criteria for "fair representation."

The question of racial representation was handled by counting the

number of characters and illustrations in the series who are non-white and comparing the numbers within and between each series. The 1986 Census of Canada showed that 13% of the Canadian population is foreign born (I subtracted the 4% born in the United Kingdom and the U.S.A.) and 3% of Canada's population is native therefore I will use 16% as the criteria for "fair representation."(3)

To examine the role of the disabled in the readers, I commented on the gender of the disabled as portrayed in the readers because I found this aspect of their role more interesting than the actual numbers. Furthermore, I was unable to find any statistics about the numbers of disabled people in Canada, let alone Alberta, so I had no criteria for assessing what was "fair representation."

For the character analysis in Part II, I examined each fiction and non-fiction entry in the readers and assessed the personal characteristics demonstrated by main and secondary characters. I wanted to find answers to questions such as: What are the predominant characteristics of a main character? Do characters act on their own initiative or do others prompt them into action? Are they aggressive? Are male characters the leaders and female characters the followers? From these assessments, I was able to tell if the characters are socially stereotyped.

FINDINGS.

In discussing Tables 1, 2 and 3, I am considering the Fiction, Non-fiction and Myths/legends categories to be sub-divided into women/men and girls/boys sub-sections so that each series is described in six sub-sections.

Table 1.
Percentage distribution of primary characters by age and sex.

W-women
M-men
G-girls
B-boys
*-equal female/male representation

	Fiction				Non-fiction				Myths/legends			
	W	M	G	B	W	M	G	B	W	M	G	B
Networks	13	87	42	58	43	57	57	43	57	43	0	100
Impressions	44	56	19	81	0	100	67	33	36	64	50*	50*
Unicorn	20	80	39	61	0	100	0	100	31	69	33	67

Sex equity is achieved in only two of the sub-sections in two of the series, Networks and Impressions. The Non-fiction girls/boys category and the Myths/legends women/men category of Networks have slightly more female primary characters than male. But the other four sections of Networks primary characters are predominantly male. Of the six sub-sections, Impressions has one section, Non-fiction girls/boys where female characters outnumber male by a ratio of about 2:1. Impressions achieves equity in one sub-section, that of Myths/legends girls/boys. Every sub-section in Unicorn is male dominated.

Although equity is achieved in one sub-section and females are more numerous in three other sub-sections, sex equity is not achieved as females are quite over-shadowed in the other fourteen sub-sections.

Table 2.
Percentage distribution of secondary characters by age and sex.

	Fiction				Non-fiction				Myths/legends			
	W	M	G	B	W	M	G	B	W	M	G	B
Networks	73	27	33	67	60	40	50*	50*	40	60	100	0
Impressions	75	25	40	60	0	0	0	0	64	36	0	100
Unicorn	46	54	0	0	0	0	0	0	60	40	0	100

It is interesting to note that women become more visible as
secondary characters. Networks has a preponderance of female
secondary characters in that four of the six sub-sections have more
female than male characters. Female secondary characters actually
over-shadow male secondary characters in this series. Men are
visible but are under-represented in four of the six sub-sections.

But the same cannot be said of Impressions where only two of the
six sub-sections show female dominance or of Unicorn where females
dominate in one of the six sub-sections.

Although Networks' percentages are impressive, it must be kept in
mind that female characters are dominant among secondary, not
primary, characters.

Table 3.
Percentage distribution of background characters by age and sex.

	Fiction				Non-fiction				Myths/legends			
	W	M	G	B	W	M	G	B	W	M	G	B
Networks	42	58	60	40	0	100	0	0	25	75	0	0
Impressions	57	43	60	40	0	0	0	0	46	54	67	33
Unicorn	50*	50*	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Background characters in Impressions are female dominated but this
is offset by the dismal showing of female background characters in
the other two series each of which has a sub-section from which
females are completely excluded. Networks has one sub-section where
females dominate and Unicorn has one sub-section where equity is
achieved.

Table 4.
Percentage distribution of non-human characters in myths/legends by sex.

Myths/Legends

	% Female	% Male
Networks	0	100
Impressions	18	82
Unicorn	32	68

Females are markedly under-represented in Myths/legends in all three series. Females are entirely excluded from Myths/legends in Networks and males dominate in the other two series. The world of myths/legends, as represented in these series is, a male world.

Table 5.
Percentage distribution of Poems by sex.

	Female	Male	Shared	Genderless
Networks	11	15	11	63
Impressions	9	21	0	70
Unicorn	10	45	3	42

Networks and Impressions have published a preponderance of
genderless poems. Unicorn is the exception where poems with males
subjects dominate. However, sex equity is not achieved in any
series because where it is possible to determine the gender of the
subject of the poem, that gender is more frequently male. In
Impressions, gendered poems are more than twice as likely to be
about males than about females while in Unicorn, that proportion
rises to more than four to one.

Table 6.
Percentage Distribution of Illustrations by sex.

	Female	Male	Shared	Genderless
Networks	12	27	39	22
Impressions	18	32	21	29
Unicorn	7	29	24	40

Once again, balance is not achieved. In every series, the
percentage of female illustrations is the lowest of all four
categories. Most of Networks' illustrations show both females and
males in a single illustration but male dominated illustrations
outnumber female by more than 2:1. Impressions has more
male-dominated pictures than any other sort. Although Unicorn's
illustrations are primarily genderless, illustrations with males as
the primary focus outnumber female illustrations by more than 4:1.

To get a more accurate picture of the place occupied by females in the readers, I determined which category of entry, fiction, non-fiction or myth/legend occurred most frequently.

Table 7.

Percentage of pages devoted to fiction in each series.

Series	Total No. pages	Percentage of pages devoted to fiction
Networks	360	58%
Impressions	496	53%
Unicorn	306	57%

These figures are necessary as they make very clear the obvious dominance of males, both adult and child, in the fiction category in all three series. Readers appear to be about, indeed are apparently aimed toward, little boys who learn to identify with and will grow up to be men.

Except for their visibility as secondary characters in fiction and non-fiction in Networks, females do not exist in large enough numbers to make any impression on young minds. These readers say little or nothing about women's existence in the world. Women's

absence from the readers renders them invisible (Spender, 1982) or
at best marginal (Martel & Peterat, 1988).

The world of these readers is not a shared world. The feminist
ideal of balance, that is, equal numbers of women and men, girls
and boys, are not to be found in any series. No matter what the
criterion or what is being counted - characters, poems,
illustrations - the highest figures are most frequently those for
males. Females are allotted a modicum of representation. Men and
boys as role models for girls and boys are thus vastly
over-represented, while women and girls as role models for girls
and boys are vastly under-represented. The predominance of male
images and a male world is all too evident.

To examine the representation of non-white peoples in the readers,
I counted all texts and illustrations which featured non-white
people and found that 11% of the entries in Networks, 10% in
Impressions and 6% of the entries in Unicorn showed, or were about,
non-white people. Using data from the 1986 Census of Canada, I
established 16% as the criteria for "fair representation". Not one
of the series reaches the 16% figure. My personal experience in the
classroom would reinforce the finding that non-white people are
numerically under-represented in the readers as a minimum of 20% of
the student body has been non-white in any of the fourteen years I
have taught in Alberta's schools. Other elements in the
representation deserve further comment. Not one of the text
entries had as their protagonists both non-white and white peoples.

All the text entries about non-white people had only non-whites as their characters. The illustrations were almost as segregationist in that only photos or drawings of children showed both white and non-white children together. There were no photos or drawings of adult whites and non-whites together. In these readers, the worlds of non-whites and whites are certainly distinct and separate. One has to wonder about the effect of this separateness on children.

Furthermore, in the nine readers only 21 entries out of a total of 224 featured non-white people. And of these only one, a fiction entry about robots, showed or was about non-white people in a contemporary setting in North America. All the other entries were folk tales set in foreign countries such as Africa, China, Japan or Trinidad. Young non-white Canadians have indeed a paucity of adult role-models exhibiting success at learning a living in the country of their parents' choice.

The last "-ism" about which I want to comment is that of ableism. Altogether there were three entries out of a total number of 224 entries in the readers about disabled people. Networks had one entry about deafness; Impressions had one entry about blindness and another about a person confined to a wheel-chair. Unicorn showed an entirely able world - none of its characters was less well-abled. As with racism, as if the under-representation of less well-able people was not enough, all of the disabled characters were female. Not only are women peripheral in these readers, barely visible, but they belong to the only gender which seems to suffer

from physical disabilities.

Another respect in which the readers do not reflect reality is in the predominance of the nuclear-family. Networks had one non-fiction entry about possible variants on the traditional family structure and one fiction entry featuring possibly a single-mother in that there were no overt references to a father. Impressions had two fiction entries which could have had single-mothers as their adult protagonists in that there were no references to fathers. Unicorn had no discernible family structures different from the nuclear-family. It has been my experience in Lethbridge's classrooms that at least 30% of families are not nuclear-families. Some years this figure is closer to 50%. Yet again, the text of the readers does not reflect the lived world of many Grade 3 children. As with sexism and racism, such exclusion suggests reluctance on the part of the publishers to face a reality which is not male, white, able and middle-class.

PART II.

CHARACTER REPRESENTATION.

In using the Impressions series with my Grade 3 classes, I became conscious of the stereotyped occupations of women in the readers. Therefore I examined each book to identify which occupations were allocated to each gender. To examine the characters' occupations I listed all the occupations I could find for all the characters in

the readers.

Table 8. Nelson Canada:Networks.

Female Occupations.	Male Occupations.
1. Mother	1. Father
2. School Principal	2. School Principal
3. Pilot	3. Boy
4. Wife	4. Wise Man
5. Brownie troop leader	5. Animal Trainer
6. Assistant troop leader	6. Knight
7. Tour guide	7. Dragon
8. Daughter	8. Son
9. Tapestry maker	9. Squire
10. Hockey player	10. Lord
11. Engineer	11. Wizard
12. Old woman	12. Old Man
13. Artist	13. Armourer
14. Weaver	14. Blacksmith
15. Witch	15. Soldier
16. Secretary	16. Snorkeller
17. Storyteller	17. Farm worker
18. Strong woman	18. King
19. Baby-sitter	19. Coachman
20. Teacher	20. Giant
21. Nurse	21. Teacher
22. Volunteer	22. Piano player

23. Servant-girl

24. Treasure hunter

23. Servant

24. Shipbuilder

25. Harbour Master

26. First mate

27. Welder

28. Shopkeeper

29. Artist

30. Oarsman

31. Sailor

32. Captain

33. Carpenter

34. Burglar

35. Adult student

36. Grandfather

37. Guide

38. Merchant

39. Bishop

40. Governor

41. Sleigh driver

42. Priest

43. Weatherman

44. Fisherman

45. Emperor

46. Philosopher

47. Bargeman

48. Wrestler

49. Building superintendent

50. Letter carrier

51. Shiftworker

52. Bus driver

53. Radiologist

54. Medical doctor

55. Falconer

56. Companion

57. Judge

58. Farmer

59. Richman

60. Hunter

Table 9. Holt, Rinehart & Winston: Impressions

Female Occupations	Male Occupations
1. Daughter	1. Son
2. Mother	2. Father
3. Sister	3. Brother
4. Baby-sitter	4. Rescuer
5. Office worker	5. Detective
6. Girl	6. Woodcutter
7. Witch	7. Giant
8. Village woman	8. Baker
9. Wise woman	9. Wise Man

10. Maiden

11. Veterinarian

12. Old woman

13. Queen

14. Widow

15. Grandmother

10. Ox-cart man

11. Street-car driver

12. Factory worker

13. King

14. Widower

15. Shopkeeper

16. Milkman

17. Newspaper deliverer

18. Fireman

19. Farmer

20. Chipman

21. Sleigh driver

22. Ghoul

23. Artist

24. Hunter

25. Fisherman

26. Musher

27. Husband

28. Chief

29. Prince

30. Shepherd

31. Hermit

32. Villager

33. King

34. Duke

35. Horseman

36. Archer

37. Swordsman

38. Chief

39. Peddler

40. Stranger

41. Judge

42. Servant

43. Coach

44. Manager

45. Painter

Table 10. McGraw-Hill Ryerson: Unicorn

Female Occupations	Male Occuptions
1. Mother	1. Father
2. Young woman	2. Wise man
3. Daughter	3. Son
4. Girl	4. Boy
5. Aunt	5. Uncle
6. Princess	6. Prince
7. Wife	7. Giant
8. Teacher	8. Messenger
9. Grandmother	9. Farmer
10. School nurse	10. Young brave
11. Electronics expert	11. Dragon

12. Old lady

13. Witch

12. Pirate

13. Leprechaun

14. Farm boy

15. Cobbler

16. Adventurer

17. Custodian

18. Painter

19. Robot

20. Logger

21. Bull cook

22. Horse trader

23. Fisherman

24. Inventor

25. Conductor

26. Weatherman

27. Captain

28. Miner

29. Homesteader

30. Maple syrup producer

In each of the series, male occupations outnumber female occupations by at least two to one. Impressions has slightly more than three times as many male occupations as there are female occupations.

Perhaps even more startling is that in all three series, female
kinship-based occupations outnumber male kinship-based occupations.
In other words, the private realm of hearth and home is woman's
domain. Being a woman seems to be inextricably linked in the minds
of these publishers with being a wife and mother. Motherhood is
perceived as an ongoing activity, which begins, rather than ends,
with the birth of a child, and which demands years of a woman's
life; whereas fatherhood is a discrete activity which demands very
little time. Only one male, the adult student father in the
Networks' story "Days with Daddy" is portrayed as being actively
involved in housework. While biological reproduction is seen as
central in women's lives, it is viewed as peripheral for men.

Parallel occupations occur only in Queen and King, mother and
father, grandmother and grandfather, wife and husband, sister and
brother, widow and widower, wise woman and wise man, teacher,
artist and servant. As can be seen, the majority of these
occupations are kinship-based.

Of the female occupations listed, very few require females to work
outside the home. Of Networks' twenty-four female occupations,
seven require work outside the home; of Impressions' fifteen
occupations, only one, that of veterinarian, would be sited out of
the home; and three of Unicorn's thirteen occupations would be away
from the home. The portrayal of such a small number of women who
work outside the home is a distortion of reality which even Grade 3
students might question as many, if not most, of their mothers do

work outside the home.

The female ghetto occupations of teaching, nursing and secretarial work appear in the series. Teaching and nursing appear in Networks and Unicorn, while secretarial work appears in Networks and Impressions. In all the readers' 1,162 pages of text, women are found working in only five non-traditional occupations: one woman in Unicorn is an electronics expert; Networks features a female school principal, a pilot and an engineer; while the lone woman who works outside the home in Impressions is a veterinarian.

The texts suggest that range and diversity of experience are what the world offers males but not females. Employment is signified as being integral to male identity but peripheral to female, while marriage and parenthood are integral to female identity but peripheral to male.

I now want to assess the personal characteristsics demonstrated by the protagonists in the readers. Do the readers reflect normative conceptions of male-valued and female-valued characteristics? Over a six-year period, Broverman et al. (1972) examined the nature of sex-role standards in our society. Because they were concerned with measuring current sex-role perceptions, they rejected traditional masculinity-femininity scales and developed their own sex-role questionnaire. Responses were obtained from 599 men and 383 women, both married and single, who ranged in age from 17 to 60 years and in education from the elementary school level to the advanced

graduate degree level. The researchers conceptualized sex roles as the degree to which men and women are perceived to possess any particular trait. They found that a strong consensus about the differing characteristics of men and women existed across groups which differ in sex, age, religion, marital status and educational level. They also found that characteristics ascribed to men are positvely valued more often than characteristics ascribed to women. The positively-valued masculine traits form a cluster of related behaviours which entail competence, rationality, and assertion; the positively-valued feminine traits form a cluster which reflect warmth and expressiveness.

Broverman found the following characteristics to be among those valued in males:

Table 11. Male-valued characteristics.

1) very dominant

2) almost always acts as a leader

3) not at all easily influenced

4) very aggressive

5) not at all uncomfortable about
   being aggressive

6) very independent

7) not at all emotional

8) very worldly

9) very adventurous

10) likes math and science very much

11) not at all excitable in a minor

crisis

12) very direct

13) can make decisions easily.

The following table shows some of the characteristics Broverman found to be valued in females:

Table 12. Female-valued characteristics.

1) very gentle

2) very aware of feelings of others

3) doesn't use harsh language at all

4) easily expresses tender feelings

5) enjoys art and literature

The male characters in the readers exhibit many of the stereotyped characteristics valued in males in this society. For example, they frequently take a leadership role in the action. Males dominated the story line in 46 out of 76 of the stories. Marvin, in "One Zillion Valentines"(Under the Sea, Impressions), persuaded Milton that the way to get Valentines is to send them and this could be done at minimal cost by making, rather than buying, them. The left-over Valentines they sold. The hermit, Kenji Moto (Under the Sea, Impressions), deliberately burns his rice fields so that the villagers living on the sea-shore below him will run up the hill to help extinguish the flames and thus be saved from the fast approaching tsunami. Simon, in the story "A Salmon for Simon" digs

a channel to the sea to save a large, stranded salmon from certain death. His sisters, who had been clam-digging with him, were home. Little Ts'ao in the Chinese folk tale "How to Weigh an Elephant" is even smarter than his father who knows all the books of Confucius by heart and is the wisest man in the village. Only Little Ts'ao can figure out how to weigh a massive elephant using a principle similar to Archimedes'. Charlie in "Why I Like Charlie", (Sea Castles, Networks), invents a way to rescue a cat stranded up a tree as do two men in the story "The Climbing Cat" (Awakenings, Unicorn). Paul Bunyan invents doughnuts in Tall Tales (Unicorn). When "Robot Visits School" (Tall Tales, Unicorn), robot is found to be malfunctioning and is dispatched to the school nurse for a diagnosis. Nurse soon realizes that fixing a robot is beyond her capabilities and sends the robot to the male custodian who swiftly finds the loose wires causing the problem. Jonathan is sent on an errand across the mountains by his mother (Birch Bark, Unicorn). In another Unicorn story, father and son remove a bear from the vicinity of their barn. Mother speaks twice in this 7-page story and is unable to participate in the action as she is confined to domestic duties. The only latch-key child in the readers is a boy who is portrayed as behaving independently.

Females also conform to stereotype and are portrayed as gentle rather than assertive, dependent on others rather than independent, followers rather than leaders, timid rather than adventurous. The Duchess in "The Proud King and the Stubborn Duke" (Under the Sea, Impressions) devises a plan to end a seige by persuading the king

to save the lives of the women and the children and to allow the women to carry out of the beseiged castle the object most precious to them. She then convinces the women that their husbands are their most valuable possession. But the King and the Duke are the key actors in this story too. Ida in "Ida's Idea" (Under the Sea, Impressions) did have an idea - to buy bubble gum for her mother so that her mother would desist from eating Ida's maple sugar doll! In "What for You So Crazy," Francine devises a scheme for rescuing Sample, her cat, but gets stuck herself and an adult male has to rescue her. Francine, and girl readers, will think twice before displaying ingenuity again. Molly Whuppie fights the Giant (Over the Mountain, Impressions) and outwits him only to win the hands of three Princes as spouses for her two sisters and herself. By contrast, males in the readers are not portrayed having to risk life and limb to obtain wives. Males, in fact, do not seek wives at all. Wanda in "Cracking the Code" (Birch Bark, Unicorn) does crack the code but she has a great deal of time to think because in this six-page story she only speaks three times. She is the lone girl attached to a group of four males (one of whom is called "Brains") who dominate the action and conversation.

Male characters also engage in aggressive behaviour. The male wolf in "A War Between the Dog and the Wolf" (Under the Sea, Impressions) declares war on the male dog when their friendship deteriorates. Each gathers an army and a battle ensues. War also ensues in "The Proud King and the Stubborn Duke" when the King, used to getting his own way, is angered by the Duke, who is equally

stubborn and wilful, and refuses to submit to the King. I found

the aggression in "The Legend of the Birch Tree", (Birch Bark,

Unicorn) particularly offensive because the male pine tree --

stately, evergreen, king of the forest, and most importantly states

the text, "fair and wise" -- scars the birch's bark with his sharp

needles because she refuses to accept his pre-eminence. This legend

sanctions male violence towards females and teaches female readers

not to question male authority without being prepared to accept the

consequent punishment. The giant in "Molly Whuppie Fights the

Giant" kills his own daughters mistakenly thinking he is killing

Molly Whuppie and her sisters.

Female characters had active roles in just 9 of the 76 entries

while in the balance of the entries female and male characters

shared the action, e.g. there are two male and two female

characters in "The Price of Eggs" (Under the Sea, Impressions).

Female characters are much more likely to participate in the action

than initiate it. Although Maggie, in "Hockey Stuck" (Island

Treasures, Networks), devises a lesson swapping plan to foil their

parents, it is Cyril who narrates the story and who forces Maggie

to follow his plan for further deceiving their parents so that he

can continue his piano lessons.

I found only one story featuring solely female active characters,

"Badlands Betty," (Sand Sculptures, Networks). Betty is a

successful treasure hunter with a fine lineage in that her

grandmother was the founder of the

Grandmothers-Who-Would-Rather-Hunt-Treasure-Than-Knit-Sweaters Club. Other female adventurers do not fare so well. A "little (Why are no boys described as "little"?) girl" sets out to find a Christmas. She is unable to do this alone and is joined in her quest by a female cat, a dog, a hawk, a fox and a mockingbird all of whom are male. Their quest ends when they discover, a la "The Gods Must Be Crazy" a shiny, green bottle and decide that this object must be a Christmas. This female character ends up looking like a gullible simpleton. ("How Six Found Christmas," Over the Mountain, Impressions). Nora leads her frightened cousin, Brendan, in climbing a mountain but becomes afraid herself when she gets stuck between two rocks (Unicorn). In another adventure story, Leealaura runs away from home, temporarily, because she feels she is not loved by her parents (Impressions). Petronella too leaves home but in the company of her family and her contribution to the action is to plant a garden to remind the family of the Grandmother left behind in Europe (Awakenings, Unicorn).

Another characteristic that Broverman found to be valued in males was "skill in business." Milton and Marvin in "One Zillion Valentines" sell their left-over hand-made Valentines for 5 cents each. "Joe's Junk" (Tall Tales, Unicorn) features a young male who organizes a garage sale to empty his room of junk. This male character demonstrates determination also. His now empty room looks bare so Joe starts collecting junk again. Female characters do not become involved in making money to the same extent. The Piney Woods Peddler earns money for his daughter so that she can buy "some

pretty things"(p. 92, Under the Sea, Impressions). The unfortunate widow in "Price of Eggs" (Under the Sea, Impressions) is castigated by a female neighbour and a male judge for expecting interest on a loan. Thus the lone women who wants what any male would expect is portrayed as "greedy."

Female characters are often motivated to act because of their feelings towards other living creatures, human and animal. I have already mentioned Leealaura who ran away from home to live, temporarily, with animals because she felt her parents no longer loved her. Maggie's mother in "Miracle for Maggie" cares for a duck caught in an oil-slick (Under the Sea, Impressions). Dr. Mary is shown caring for various animals (Dr. Mary's Animals,"Under the Sea, Impressions). Maxie becomes depressed and stays in bed when she fears that no one needs her; she emerges from her bed only when the other occupants of her building reassure her that it is only her daily routine which gets them going in the morning (Networks). Jenny, a cat, takes pity on two stray male cats and persuades her owner to adopt them (Jenny's Adopted Brothers," Awakenings, Unicorn).

Marriage and motherhood also act as motivators for action in female characters. As noted earlier, Molly Whuppie succeeds in marrying off her two sisters and herself. The Indian Cinderella seeks a husband for herself leaving her unworthy sisters high and dry (The Indian Cinderella," Under the Sea, Impressions). A lioness tries, unsuccessfully, to steal an ostrich chick because she is unable to have a cub of her own (Tall Tales, Unicorn).

As well, physical appearance plays a role in motivating female characters. The only fat person in the series is a female ig whose male companion tries, unsuccessfully, to help her lose weight. The Indian Cinderella (Birch Bark, Unicorn) was scarred by her jealous sisters; when her future sister-in-law bathes her, the scars disappear suggesting that an ugly woman couldn't possibly marry a handsome, young prince or an ugly old prince for that matter. Mona won't allow Potter ig to come to her party because he was critical of her large feet. He makes four attempts to gate-crash and Mona relents when he denies the criticism. Once at the party, he repeats the criticism and is ejected. But readers are left the with impression that Mona will relent yet again as the story concludes with a fifth gate-crashing ruse on the part of the indefatigible Potter. Neither Mona nor the overweight Emily Pig are as persistent or determined as Potter. (There's a Party at Mona's Tonight," Over the Mountain, Impressions).

Five witches make their appearance in the readers. Three are featured in a Hallowe'en section; the other two are painted in most unflattering terms and are decried for their nefarious actions. A nameless witch, so ugly that she looked like a bad dream, changed a handsome male frog into a prince and then into a princess which the prince found most embarrassing (The Strange Story of the Frog Who Became a Prince," Awakenings, Unicorn). The witch, Yedida, changed Caleb into a dog. Caleb's wife, Kate, is rendered distraught by this action as she thinks he has deserted her. She is incapable of initiating action to remedy matters and has to depend on outside

male help to have Caleb restored to her.

I have examined the readers at some length for male-valued characteristics and female-valued characteristics because the first two male-valued charactistics listed in Table 11 (domainance, almost always acts as a leader) presuppose the oppression of women. These two items could not obtain without presupposing that the opposite poles of these features were descriptive of other people. Dominant personalities require submissive people whom they can dominate. Since dominance is valued only in males in our society, it follows that submissiveness will be seen as a valuable female characteristic.

Unfortunately, the readers abound in male protagonists exhibiting those characteristics which presuppose the oppression of another group. If the male characters are domineering and almost always act as leaders and these are seen as characteristics valuable only in males, the female characters are the ones who are dominated and the ones who are led.

The next six male-valued characteristics listed in Table 11 also exemplify this feature but not as strongly. While it is logically possible that the world should contain only individuals who were not at all easily influenced, very aggressive, not at all uncomfortable about being aggressive, not at all emotional, very worldly, very independent, such a world would not be a very comfortable one in which to live.

The last six male-valued features (Table 11) are of an entirely different kind. Neither logic nor the concept of a cohesive society is disturbed by the possibility that everyone be adventurous, like math and science very much, not be excitable in a minor crisis, be skilled in business, be very direct, and be capable of making decisions easily. For one set of people to like math and science very much does not presuppose that another group dislike these disciplines, unlike the dominance of one set of people, which does presuppose the submissiveness of another set. Although it may be unlikely that all individuals would develop these features, such an occurrence would not threaten social cohesiveness in the same way in which universal aggression would.

It is important to notice that all the female-valued characteristics fit under this third and last type. For one set of people to be very gentle, very aware of the feelings of others, not to use harsh language, to express tender feelings with ease, and to enjoy art and literature does not demand another set of people

defined by the opposite poles of these features. Furthermore, the greater the number of people in any society to possess these features, the happier and healthier such a society would be. (Ayim, 1987)

PART III.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

If teachers wish to use a reading series in the classroom they must use one approved by the Department of Education. However, teachers may use children's literature as the basis of their reading programs. Therefore, I would recommend that teachers adopt a literature-based approach to their programs rather than use a reading series. In Appendix B I have listed books which I have found appropriate to use in the classroom. This list has been developed over time and I have found the books to be free of bias as far as I can judge. The list is not definitive and is continually expanding as I discover more titles.

As an aid to teachers who might want to evaluate either reading series or children's books, I have listed in Table 13 criteria which teachers can use in examining reading materials for sexism.

Table 13. Evaluating Sexism in Readers.

1. Number of stories where main character is:

<div align="right">Female   Male</div>

2. Number of illustrations of:

<div align="right">Female   Male</div>

   a. in foreground

   b. in background

3. Number of times children are shown:

<div align="right">Female   Male</div>

   a. in active play

   b. using initiative

   c. displaying independence

   d. solving problems

   e. earning money

   f. receiving recognition

   g. being inventive

   h. involved in sports

   i. fearful or helpless

   j. receiving help

   k. being gentle

   l. being aware of others' feelings

   m. expressing feelings with ease

   n. enjoying aesthetic experiences

4. Number of times adults are shown:

	Female	Male
a. in different occupations		
b. playing with children		
c. taking children on outings		
d. teaching skills, e.g., drawing		
e. giving tenderness		
f. scolding children		

In addition, teachers could ask themselves these questions about the readers:

Are boys allowed to show their emotions?

Are girls rewarded for intelligence rather than beauty?

Are there any derogatory comments directed at girls in general?

Are mothers shown working outside the home?

If so, in what kinds of jobs?

Are there any stories about one-parent families?

Are there any families without children?

Are baby-sitters shown?

SUMMARY.

The world of these readers is a male-dominated world where important initiatives and actions come from men. Women are seldom

recognized as having the power to initiate key events. Men are the world as it is seen, and sometimes women share this world, but the extent of their participation is essentially determined by men.

Women's powers of creation, beyond procreation, are rarely recognized. Boys are men-in-training who will inherit the world and the responsibility for it, whether they want it or not. Girls are disassociated from everyone:- from men whose world will not be theirs, from women who have no power or clear direciton to offer them, from boys who competitively reject them, and finally even from other girls who are as isolated as they are.

There are very few surprises for child readers in these series. Upon reading the first paragraph or looking at the illustrations, the reader knows who the story is going to be about. Usually, it is a boy. He sets or is given his challenge. His support system to reach his success will consist of a weaker person, who could be another boy, a girl or a woman. What remains is a variation on the theme.

Girls are usually set up for failure, so that a boy or a man will come to her rescue and sort out the problems. She will never turn to another girl or woman for help, nor will a girl or woman consider herself capable of coming to the aid of a girl in difficulty. The reader world is a boys' world, boys who will grow up to be men who are capable, competent, and in control.

In responding to the times, and to the concerns educators have expressed about the old stereotypes, the publishers have made some changes. One girl character plays hockey. A very few women work outside the home. One man is an adult student. But these changes do not change the message. Underlying every story is still the understanding of the male-ordered world in which these new circumstances are merely dressing. There may be some new clothing, but the world underneath is still the same.

Not that removing sexism or any other form of oppression will result in ridding this society of oppression. Such an action would be a step in the right direction but it would not necessarily alter the undergirding attitudes and structures that affect and create much of the life in the schools. To infuse reading materials with non-discriminatory depictions of women and men would be an improvement but would not alter the structure of power itself in the schools or the kind of consciousness promulgated by the materials. There need to be changes in societal structures rather than specific, piece-meal changes in schools.

Footnotes.

(1) I also believe that any analysis of an oppression such as sexism needs to include intersecting oppressions because an analysis of women's situation needs to engage with the

specificities of different women's conditions. The assumption of a notion of "women" based primarily on white, able, middle-class North American women is insufficient because white women themselves partake of the privilege afforded white people in many Western societies.

(2) Non-fiction entries which were not about human beings and did not refer to human beings in any way, that is, entries such as would be found in an encyclopaedia were not taken into consideration. Of the 1,162 pages in the readers, 23 were devoted to encyclopaedic material.

(3) The Canadian World Almanac, 1990, Global Press.

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Appendix A.

Record Sheet

1) Name of book:
2) Series:
3) Grade level:
4) Publisher

5) Entries

	Fiction				Non-Fiction				Myths/legends		
Adult		Child		Adult		Child		Adult		Child	
F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M

No. Main Characters

No. Secondary Characters

No. Background Characters

6) Poetry

Female   Male   Shared   Genderless

7) Illustrations

Female   Male   Shared   Genderless

Appendix B.

Recommended Books for Primary Grades.

Aardema, Verna. Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale.

Aiken, Joan. Arabel's Raven.

Ardizzone, Edward. Diana and her Rhinoceros.

Ardozzone, Edward. Lucy Brown and Mr. Grimes.

Ardizzone, Edward. Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain.

Babbit, Natalie. Phoebe's Revolt.

Babbit, Natalie. The Devil's Storybook.

Baldwin, Anne Norris. Sunflowers for Tina.

Bang, Molly. Dawn.

Baum, L. Frank. The Wizard of Oz.

Bemelmans, Ludwig. Madeline.

Bemelmans, Ludwig. Madeline's Rescue.

Blades, Ann. Mary of Mile 18.

Brooke, Leslie L. Johnny Crow's Party.

Burton, Virginia Lee. Katy and the Big Snow.

Byars, Betsy. Go and Hush the Baby.

Byars, Betsy. The Midnight Fox.

Charmatz, Bill. The Little Duster.

Cleary, Beverly. Ramona the Pest. See also others in the Ramona series.

Cresswell, Helen. The Piemakers.

Danish, Barbara. The Dragon and the Doctor.

Eastman, Philip D. and McKie, Roy. Snow.

Eastman, P. D. Are you my Mother?

Estes, Eleanor. The Hundred Dresses.

Estes, Eleanor. The Lost Umbrella of Kim Chu.

Estes, Eleanor. The Moffats.

Flack, Marjorie. The Story about Ping.

Flack, Marjorie. Walter the Lazy Mouse.

Freeman, Don. Tilly Witch.

Gaedderts, Lou Ann. Noisy Nancy Norris.

Gag, Wanda. Millions of Cats.

Garber, Nancy. Amy's Long Night.

Gardam, Jane. Bridget and William.

Gill, Joan. Sara's Granny and the Groodle.

Goffstein, M.B. Goldie the Dollmaker.

Goffstein, M.B. Two Piano Tuners.

Goodsell, Jane. Katie's Magic Glasses.

Graves, Robert. Two Wise Children.

Greenburg, Dan. Jumbo the Boy and Arnold the Elephant.

Gripe, Maria. Hugo and Josephine.

Hoffman, Phyllis. Steffie and Me.

Laurence, Jacob. Harriet and the Promised Land.

Laurence, Margaret. The Olden Days Coat.

Lear, Edward. The Story of the Four Little Children Who Went Round the World.

Lindgren, Astrid. Pippi Longstocking.

Lurie, Alison, retold by. Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folk Tales.

Lystaad, Mary. Millicent the Monster.

MacLachlan, Patricia. Sarah, Plain and Tall.

Marshall, James. George and Martha.

McCloskey, Robert. One Morning in Maine.

Morrow, Elizabeth. The Painted Pig.

Mosel, Arlene. Tikki Tikki Tembo.

Munsch, Robert. The Paperbag Princess. See also other books by Robert Munsch.

Norton, Andre. Outside.

Preston, Edna Mitchell. Horrible Hepzibah.

Roy, Gabrielle. Cliptail.

Segal, Lore. Tell me a Mitzi.

Sendak, Maurice. Where the Wild Things Are.

Sharmat, Marjorie W. Gladys told me to meet her here.

Stamm, Claus. Three Strong Women.

Steig, William. Sylvester and the Magic Pebble.

Steig, William. The Amazing Bone.

Steig, William. The Real Thief.

Storr, Catherine. Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf.

Stren, Patti. Mountain Rose.

Tallon, Robert. The Thing in Delores' Piano.

Thayer, Jane. Quiet on Account of Dinosaur.

Thompson, Kay. Eloise.

Vestly, Anne-Catharina. Aurora and the Little Blue Car.

Viorst, Judith. Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.

Waber, Bernard. Ira Sleeps Over.

Wahl, Jan. A Wolf of my Own.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls. Little House in the Big Woods. See others in the "Little House" series also.

Williams, Jay. The Silver Whistle.

Yashima, Taro. Umbrella. Seafarer

Young, Miriam. Jellybeans for Breakfast.