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### Katherine Paterson's influence on childhood development

We grew up reading books of different literary genres such as poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Books are important in early childhood development since “children are very impressionable during the formative years, and children’s literature can help them develop into caring, intelligent, and friendly people” (Crippen). It also helps students to develop their creativity and personality. Authors in children's literature play an important role in childhood development. Katherine Paterson is one of the authors that have made great contributions in children's literature. In her works, there is always a lesson behind it that everyone can apply in the future and states issues that children will face during their process of growth. For example, *The Great Gilly Hopkin* and *Bridge to Terabithia*.

As a reader, it is important for us to know about an author’s background information. By knowing their background, we can understand how the plots are created. For example, Katherine Paterson's parents were missionaries living in China when she was born. During World War II she fled with her family. They moved back to the United States when Katherine was young. So she "thinks this experience helped her to become a writer because she had to watch other people and wasn't included naturally in groups at school. That helped develop her imagination because she had to make up her own friends"(Paterson). Just like we are influenced by the world around us, and have different experiences that affect our writing. Similar to us, that an author is influenced by his or her past when writing a book. As a writer, their content and writing style is

deeply influenced by their early life. Therefore, the more we know about the author, the more we understand the central idea and message of their works.

“Children in foster care have disproportionately high rates of physical, developmental, and mental health problems and often have many unmet medical and mental health care needs.”(Developmental Issues for Young Children in Foster Care) For example, *The Great Gilly Hopkins* address how the issue of foster care affects children. It is about an eleven year old foster child who looks forward to reunite with her biological mother. Gilly is a selfish and immature girl. “Nobody wants to tangle with the great Galadriel Hopkins. She is too clever and too hard to manage.”(Paterson 4) However, her attitude changed after she got along with her new foster family, Trotter, W.E., and Mr. Randolph. “My family’s been sick.”(Paterson 142). It is the first time that she called them “her family”. She realized how much she loves her foster family after she went to Virginia with her grandmother. This book is realistic in that it includes real life problems. In this novel, Katherine shows how difficult the life of a foster parent and child could be, being that she was only able to handle her foster child for only a couple of months. This book can relate to many foster children who are disappointed with their life and portrays a foster child’s emotional problems. Foster parents will also be able to relate to Trotter as they had to deal with kids like Gilly. The moral of this book teaches “that all that stuff about happy endings is lies and the only ending in this world is death”(Paterson 177). No matter how hard we try and how much we want it, some stories just don’t have a happy ending. Just like in real life, everything won’t go smoothly and the way you want it to be.

Paterson also wrote *Bridge to Terabithia* based on her son’s childhood friend who was hit and killed by lightning. This novel helps children to develop emotional intelligence. The novel tells the story of Jess Aron and his friend, Leslie Burke. But there is a girl, Leslie, who is better

and faster than him. Instead of being jealous of Leslie, he admires her and becomes close friends. They face difficulties in their life. "We need a place, Leslie said, "just for us. It would be so secret that we would never tell anyone in the whole world about it."(Paterson 38) Therefore, they created a magical kingdom. In this magical kingdom they are able to escape from reality. Unfortunately, a terrible accident happens. Leslie drowned in the stream when the rope broke and she hit herself on the rock. Jess is heartbroken about her death. In his heart, "Leslie was more than his friend. She was his other, more exciting self-his way to Terabithia and all the worlds beyond."(Paterson 46) At first he doesn't want to believe she has died, but he realizes the power of their friendship gives him the strength to solve his problems and overcome his weaknesses. Leslie's death teaches Jess that people around him can be taken any time which is similar to Katherine's son's friend who was suddenly killed by lightning. The moral in this book teaches us that we must cherish every moment with our friends and family and that friendship is necessary for every person.

"Books give us practice doing difficult things in life. In a way, they prepare us for things that we are going to have to face or someone you know and care about is going through."(Paterson) Katherine's works contribute a lot in young adult's literature and childhood development. Therefore, as the result of her works, she received many awards. For example, Newbery medals, two National Book Awards, and Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1998. She was also named a Living Legend by the Library of Congress.

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