

**WOBBLE AND LITTLE:
A CHILDREN'S BOOK**

by

Suki Deen

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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To *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The King's Breakfast*, and tea on the ceiling.

This book is dedicated to my mother and father who always taught me the importance of tolerance. This book is also dedicated to my husband, Robert, for always believing in my mythical creatures.

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ABSTRACT

Wobble and Little is a rhyming picture book aimed at children between the ages of five and seven. The book is about friendship, on overcoming obstacles and the issue of bullying. Through writing this children's book I have learned the challenges involved in becoming a children's book author from conceptualization to editing to rewrites to holding the final product. I have researched the best tips and trade secrets on how to write a publishable children's book, talked with children's book authors, read my book to children, and learned the tricks of the trade. This critical analysis serves as a guide to the writing process and the inspiration behind *Wobble and Little*.

Chapter 1

THE STORY BEHIND THE CHILDREN'S BOOK

While many people may assume that writing a children's book is an easy feat, this could not be further from the truth. Writing children's literature, much like writing any literature, requires thorough research, dedication, revisions and patience. It requires observations of the world around us, an understanding of the likes and dislikes of children, and a tight grasp of the English language. Children's book authors learn quickly the importance of words and how to use *fewer* words to evoke *more* meaning. Once started, the book may begin to take on many new forms, characters might die off or morph into something new, and new scenes and settings may emerge. Along the way children's book authors must learn to adapt, listen and learn as their manuscripts evolve. They must also learn not to overanalyze their writing. As Maurice Sendak, author and illustrator of the critically acclaimed picture book *Where the Wild Things Are*, once said:

“You cannot write for children. They're much too complicated. You can only write books that are of interest to them.” (“Maurice Sendak”, 1).

So I set about writing a book that I believed would appeal to children. I didn't really write it for notoriety, money, or fame. I wrote it because the themes and the characters meant something to me. This critical analysis will aim to illuminate the writing process behind the story of *Wobble and Little*. In the year leading up to the submission of this capstone project this book has taken on numerous shapes and forms. I feel that it is important to break down this writing process to further defend

my capstone project. This analysis will serve as an explanation to the development of *Wobble and Little* including: the inspiration behind the story, an examination of the literary influences of *Wobble and Little*, the thematic goals of the book, writing exercises and techniques used to further develop the narrative, and a brief exploration of current children's picture books and how they relate to *Wobble and Little*. Additionally, I will include two illustrations of *Wobble and Little*, because drawing the characters was instrumental in the completion of this book.

In the Beginning

The story of *Wobble and Little* began many years ago in a pink notebook that I kept by the side of my bed. Scrawled in black ink in the middle of the night, the book was very much like most of my writings: it came from somewhere deep inside, I didn't know why I was writing it, and it was unfinished. The book remained incomplete for many years gathering dust until I enrolled in the Master of Liberal Studies (MALS) program at the University of Delaware.

Taking courses at the master's level opened my mind to new avenues of thought. The classes in the MALS program inspired me to think about the future, the past, and the present. I learned about society, history, philosophy, psychology, literature, and more. But mostly, I learned about life. Taking these classes reminded me of my strengths and of my weaknesses. My biggest weakness, I discovered along the way, was my terrible tendency to leave creative works unfinished.

Upon beginning my MALS thesis, I initially decided to pursue a scholarly paper. But no matter how much I tried, I just couldn't put pen to paper and I found myself frustrated and lost. I gave it an honest try, struggled through a semester of writes and re-writes before former MALS dean, Joan Delfattore, pulled me aside and

said, “you have to write about something you are passionate about, something that inspires you.” And then it hit me: there were two characters I had been invested in all along, they had been sitting there gathering dust, and their names were Wobble and Little.

Inspiration

Writing is very much like riding a bike: when you begin you might be a little shaky, you might fall off a few times, but the more you get up and keep going the better you become. When I dusted off the pages of my notebook and took a refreshed look at *Wobble and Little* I was delighted...and disgusted. The writing was terrible, but the characters were loveable. And so I began the long process of getting reacquainted with these two creatures from my subconscious.

While rereading *Wobble and Little* I wrote down things I liked about the story and things I disliked. The story was originally written as prose. It told of a tale of Wobble, a creature that looked like a blob and Little, a creature that resembled a bat, and their love of peanut butter. While peanut butter was the vehicle that brought them together the true story was about friendship. The initial draft of *Wobble and Little* was rough but their personalities were quite clear. An example of the very first opening lines of *Wobble and Little* saved on my computer in 2008:

“Mr. Wobble was an old wobble. He lived in a large home on the top of an even larger mountain. Mr. Wobble woke up every morning and wobbled around. He would wobble forward and then wobble back. He would do this for a very long time before eventually making it out the door.”

Even within my roughest first draft you can see that Wobble has a problem. Wobble lives alone and is isolated on top of a big mountain. He is very

anxious and wobbles when he feels uncomfortable. Through the opening lines I established that he has a problem and that we, as readers, need to learn why he has these problems and how he can overcome them.

When I first introduced Little, so many years ago, this was my initial description of him:

“On the other side of town in a little huddle lived a muddle named Little. They named him Little because he was the littlest muddle of all the muddles. Muddles usually lived in the sun and flew very high in the sky. But Little lived in a cave in the dark and he never flew. Instead, Little crept in the dark.”

Once again, even in its earliest form, *Wobble and Little*, revealed the characters quickly and hints that each character has a problem that needed to be solved. Along the way, after writes and re-writes, I began to lose focus. Soon the writing shifted from the characters and began to focus more on story. Everyone knows a story needs a beginning, middle and end, with a climax in the middle. However writing a story while trying to force the structure does not make for good prose. After months of writes and re-writes, reading books about writing for children, and seeing what other children’s authors were doing, I decided against writing in prose and opted instead to write in poetic verse. As soon as I switched from prose to poetry, *Wobble and Little* finally began to come together.

The Literary Influences I have written poetry since I was a young child; it is something that comes very naturally to me. My mother used to frame my poetry and ask me to read it out loud. Growing up my parents would sing me songs, read my rhyming books and we would make up our own little tunes. I remember to this day a song that my mother used to sing to me:

“The more we are together, together, together,/The more we are together the happier we’ll be./’Cause your friends are my friends and

my friends are your friends,/The more we are together the happier we'll be.”

It's an incredibly simple rhyme and yet it evokes such meaning: the song is about friendship, acceptance and community. I believe that poetry is a great way to reach children because it can capture their attention and their imagination. Hidden within each whimsical stanza may lie a real moral value or a learning experiences. To me poetry is life. Words are beautiful and when put together in rhyme, they just stand out more. When my parents would read A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* to me so many years ago, the repetitive lines got stuck in my head. Whenever we would read the book together again, those words would still be clear in my mind. *Winnie the Pooh* was really the first book that I learned to read. That was due, in part, to those wonderful rhymes.

Some of my favorite children's books to this day are written in rhyme. While researching *Wobble and Little* I discovered the importance of getting back to my roots and thinking like a child. When I thought back on the books I adored when I was young, three came to mind: *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss, *When We Were Very Young* by A.A. Milne and *Revolt Rhymes* by Roald Dahl. To this day I can still recite all the words to the *King's Breakfast* in the book *When We Were Very Young* by A.A. Milne:

“Butter eh?/ And he bounced out of bed./ “Nobody, he said,/ As he kissed her/ Tenderly,/ “Nobody,” he said,/ As he slid down the banisters,/ “Nobody,/ My darling,/ Could call me/ A fussy man –/ But/ I do like a little bit of butter for my bread.” (Milne, 59).

While researching *Wobble and Little* I threw myself back into these words that I knew so well. What did I like about this story? What was it about the rhymes that drew me in? In the *King's Breakfast* the protagonist, the king, has one main desire: to have a little butter for his bread. It seems like the simplest thing but it is

really something that children can relate to. The rhythm of the poem pushes you along almost like you are sliding down the banister with the king. It slows down and speeds up at all the right points. It makes you want that butter on your bread so much that when you do get to that last line, you almost want to go to the kitchen and make yourself some toast. A.A. Milne truly was a master at his craft.

Another one of my favorite children's books was Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*. You never know the name of the main protagonist and yet you feel so connected to him. Sam-I-Am, a very annoying creature that has come to get under the protagonist's skin, forcefully asks if he wants to try green eggs and ham. Seuss really shows the frustration, anger, and explosive rage in his tone with short lines like:

“I would not, could not in a boat,/I could not, would not in a boat./ I do not want them here or there, I do not want them anywhere!” (Seuss, 24).

Roald Dahl was another poetic master that caught my attention as a young child. Not only were his poems fun to read, but they were also incredibly hilarious. Humor is such a great tool to captivate any reader. Consider this line from Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes*. Dahl is writing a revamped version of Cinderella.

“The shoe was long and very wide,/(A normal foot would get lost inside.)/And also it smelled a wee bit stinky,/(The owner's feet were hot and sticky.)” (Dahl, 9).

Dahl's sense of humor really stands out in this stanza and I always loved his asides. His informal, chit-chatty style of writing was appealing to me then as it is now because he makes me feel like he is reading this story directly to me. His *Revolting Rhymes* are twisted, humorous and fun much like life. When reading any of Dahl's books I can get lost in his magical, fantastical worlds. This element of fantasy that

Dahl, Seuss and Milne all seem to evoke so effortlessly, is something that took me a while to find while writing *Wobble and Little*, but when I did it was glorious.

Somewhere between rereading the classics I loved – Dr. Seuss and A.A. Milne and Roald Dahl – I found my voice. It was a little quiet at first but the more I wrote and the more comfortable I got with my rhyming and tone, it became more of a roar. What started as a simple writing exercise (to take my prose and turned it into poetry) developed into something much larger; and I soon realized that poetry was really something *Wobble and Little* had needed all along.

Chapter 2

FINDING MY VOICE

When I decided to write *Wobble and Little* as a poem initially it came completely naturally to me. I did not scrutinize the line, meter or rhythm, I just wrote it out and put it down on the page. But going back to revise it was not an easy task. My advisor, David Teague, encouraged me to make sure that each of the rhymes was a true rhyme. “Children are very quick to hear discrepancies,” he warned. And so I had to get back to the rhymes, make sure they were perfect and sometimes I had to throw out stanzas all together. At times it was infuriating because if you need a word to rhyme with “peanut butter” the quick news is that you are not going to find it. Children are also your quickest critics, getting easily bored and distracted if a rhyme is out of place or if a rhythm is interrupted. As former U.S. Poet Laureate and critic, William Jay Smith says,

“[The] basic requirement [of a writer for children], so often forgotten, is consummate skill; only the most accomplished poetic technician should be allowed to write for children.” (Helbig,195).

He goes on to say that poems specifically written for children must be, “graphic, lilting, precise, concrete, and above all, well-written.” (Helbig,195).

While editing, revising and refining the poetry of *Wobble and Little* I was careful to consider every word, every stanza, and every line. Through each of my edits (and there were many) I tried to refine that skill that I had acquired so long ago as a child. Was each line moving my plot forward? Was it developing my characters? Was

it whimsical, funny, sad or trite? It wasn't easy but overtime, as I began to define my voice as a writer, it became a little clearer.

As you read *Wobble and Little* you might find influences from all three writers (Dahl, Milne and Seuss). Consider this from stanza from *Wobble and Little*:

*“Oh boggles, thought Wobble/
And he let out a huff./ How do I get
myself/ Into this stuff?”*

I believe this stanza is very much inspired by *The King's Breakfast* by Milne. The choice of words and the form of this stanza all seem to emulate Milne, and yet it came from somewhere deep inside of me. As you read *Wobble and Little* you might come across other stanzas that are clearly influenced by my three favorite children's book writers, but as they say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

In *Finding Your Writer's Voice: A Guide to Creative Fiction* by Thaisa Frank and Dorothy Wall, the authors encourage each writer to find his or her own “raw voice.” They explain how once a writer finds their own voice and rhythm the rest will come naturally. Frank and Wall write:

“Every writer has a natural voice, and every natural voice has its own way of telling a story. It has its own rhythm, pace, sense of detail, anecdote, and – if allowed to improvise – this natural voice can discover the story's content and form.” (Frank and Wall, xv).

Discovering this “raw voice” required some practice. Luckily, Frank and Wall provide some interesting exercises. In one exercise Frank and Wall explain how singing a story allows you to listen to the story in greater detail and grasp your rhythm. While it did feel a little silly, singing a portion of *Wobble and Little* did help me hear my rhythm better. Another exercise Frank and Wall describe is to imagine a place you used to talk when you were a child. Go back to that place in your mind and write down how you used to speak. The first thing that came to mind while doing this exercise was

riding in the back seat of my car. When I was young we would carpool to school. I was about four or five years old and I remember distinctly not knowing how to read. While the older kids would read us stories and picture books, I wished I could read too. Instead, I would make up stories, and pretend that I was reading them from the picture books. This method worked and the younger kids would actually get absorbed in my stories, asking questions like, “what happened next?” My plan was foolproof until an older child laughed at me and said, “That’s not what it says! You’re making it up!” And so I had to go back to listening to the stories instead of imagining them.

Next Frank and Wall argue the importance of discovering how your characters talk. Does Little have a lisp? Does he get words messed up? Does Wobble have a deep voice? Does he have an accent? Writing this down I added to my notes: Little’s voice is squeaky and high. His big teeth are growing in so sometimes he spits when he talks. Wobble’s voice is deep and jovial with an English accent.

Reading *Finding Your Writer’s Voice* also encouraged me to read my stanzas out loud. It was really helpful in deciphering where things just didn’t sound right or times when I thought the story, rhyme or rhythm were off. I continued to do this exercise throughout the writing process. I also used two tutors at the writer’s center who were really helpful in reading my story to me. Sometimes hearing someone else read your words helps you crystallize where things were going wrong. Robert, my fiancé, also helped me in drumming out the rhythm while I read. Hearing the parts where the rhyme did not flow assisted me in the editing process.

Other Writing Exercises

One piece of advice stressed in *Writing and Illustrating Children’s Books for Publication: Two Perspectives* by Berthe Amoss and Eric Suben is to really get to know the books that children like. “There is no better way to learn than to scrutinize

the work of published authors.” (Amoss and Suben, 45). And so I embarked on re-reading the books that I used to love as a child and some new books that I had never heard of. I tried to immerse myself in the world of children’s books. In an exercise Amoss and Suben call the “Anatomy of a Children’s book” they explain how breaking down popular children’s books helps the reader understand why they like what they don’t like.

Below are some examples of the anatomy of some children’s books that I have enjoyed over the years:

Buckingham Palace by A.A. Milne

My mother used to read this poem to me as a child. By about the tenth time we read it, I knew it off by heart. It’s a poem that I could probably still recite to this day.

The Plot: Christopher Robin goes to Buckingham Palace to watch the changing guards. He goes down with Alice, who I always assumed (though we were never told) is his nanny. Alice is marrying one of the changing guards. Alice and Christopher Robin contemplate what the King is doing.

The Illustrations: Small black and white ink drawings. The illustrations do not drive the text however they act as great accompaniments. Because they are simple they allow the reader to imagine more.

Why it is Great: The repetitive nature of the poem sounds like a drum. Each stanza begins the same way: “They’re changing guards at Buckingham Palace/ Christopher Robin went down with Alice.” A.A. Milne writes a poem about guards and makes the rhythm sound like a marching band – its genius! For younger children the repetitive nature only serves to teach the children how to read and understand what is going on.

Toot and Puddle by Holly Hobbie

The Plot: Toot likes to go on adventures while Puddle likes to stay home. Toot decides to go around the world sending his friend Puddle postcards along the way. Puddle is meanwhile getting into adventures of his own at home. They come together in the end and it makes them realize how much they missed each other.

The Illustrations: The book would be great without illustrations, however, I believe Hobbie's illustrations are remarkable and really help to push the plot forward. The pigs engaged in different activities, the intricate details of the illustrations all help to make the reader feel fully engaged. There is so much to see on any given page that you feel compelled to stop and look.

Why it is Great: The character development. By the end of the book you really feel like you know Toot and Puddle. You know what they like, what they dislike, you know about the parts of the world Toot is traveling to and you know about Woodcock Pocket. Most of all you understand their friendship and how it grows.

Chapter 3

AWAKENING THE INNER CHILD

Throughout this process I began to write down things that I used to enjoy as a child. One of the first things that popped into my mind was peanut butter. When I was a child growing up in Nairobi, Kenya I would rush home from school and make myself a peanut butter sandwich. Unlike in America where the staple is peanut butter and jam, we would have peanut butter and butter. I would think about those sandwiches when I was sitting on the bus. I would imagine how I was going to take off my shoes and devour it, tearing it in half and eating from the middle. In *Wobble and Little* peanut butter acts as a vehicle that brings the two characters together. While it is really secondary to the main themes, peanut butter is necessary because it firstly, creates a reason that the two should happen to meet. And secondly, it is a part of the story that many children can relate to. Just like in the King's Breakfast when the king was craving a bit of butter, I used the peanut butter as a simple, necessary craving that needs to be fulfilled.

As a child I had a large number of friends. My parents, who themselves were in an interracial relationship, always encouraged me to see a person for who they were, not what they looked like. Therefore my house always looked like the United Nations, with friends from every walk of life. My friends came from all different races; they were tall or short, big or small, straight or gay. Never once did I pass judgment on any one of them. To me they were just Helen, Abby, Mumbi, Boaa, Nazia and Joy-Loi. We may have been a motley crew to passersby, but we were real

friends. As we got older and some of my friends got bullied or picked on, I was the first to stand up to their tormentors. It really hurt me to see the people I cared about treated in such a way. In my young mind I couldn't comprehend how people could be so mean. What did these bullies have to gain? Why were they doing these terrible things? To this day bullying is completely unacceptable to me.

I chose bullying as central themes because I want children to understand that they are not alone in this, and that they should never feel alone against the people that bully them. In *Wobble and Little* I wanted to stress that bullying is a real problem in our society, not only among children but also among adults. Bullying is completely something I do not tolerate and I wanted to show how true friends could lend a helping hand. Bullying and friendship were the two main themes of my book and I believe in the light of recent tragedies including that of a college student who flung himself off the George Washington Bridge after being tormented about his sexuality, these themes are very current. I hope that even if I can only reach one child that is being bullied, I will feel satisfied. In "Victims, Bulling and, Bystanders in K-3 Literature" an article in *The Reader*, bullying and the importance of tackling this subject in children's literature is discussed:

"Being bullied can result in the often imperceptible crushing of a child's spirit that takes place over time in the very schools and classrooms that caring teachers and administrators have worked so hard to make safe. But teachers are not powerless against the destructiveness of bullying behavior. They can begin by gathering the children close and opening a book..." (Entenmen, Hendricks and Muman, 352).

The article goes on to say that children's literature can be effective in helping children resolve problems with bullies, provide a child with psychological relief and allow children to explore their own feelings. (Entenmen, Hendricks and Muman, 361).

A final theme in the book is loneliness and fear. Although I had many friends as a child, I did spend a lot of time alone. Being an only child you quickly get used to your own company. While others would have a brother or sister to lend a helping hand, I did not. This, in turn, did three things for me: it encouraged me to grow up fast, it allowed me to be independent, and it instilled a fear in me of being completely alone. When you spend a large amount of time communicating with adults, you quickly understand the difference between child and adult. Many people feel children don't comprehend things as well or as swiftly as adults but I find this to be untrue. Children know a lot more than people might think and they are incredibly intuitive. If something is wrong or there is tension in the air, a child will be quick to pick up on it. In many ways *Wobble and Little*, portrays the relationship between an adult and a child and how a friendship can blossom between two people regardless of age. Wobble sees in Little a part of himself that he has kept hidden for many years, the part of himself that is anxious, scared and hurt. He realizes that we all have fears, anxieties, and upsets that we must overcome. Sometimes it takes seeing a child in the same position as you to help you overcome your own fears. Additionally, Wobble and Little feel very isolated and alone. This new budding friendship gives them something to look forward to. They slowly start to come out of their shells.

Developing the Characters

In the book *Writing and Illustrating Children's Book for Publication: Two Perspectives*, Amos and Suben recommend several exercises to thoroughly get to know your characters. When I first began writing *Wobble and Little* I had a vague idea of what they looked like, their mannerisms, the way they talked. But having a blurry idea of your character in your mind is just as bad as having a one-dimensional

character in your book. And thus began a long process of getting to know these two creatures from my subconscious.

Tracy Dil explores character development in *You Can Write Children's Books: Second Edition*. She says writing a character profile can help you really get to know your characters. So I decided to begin by doing two character profiles, one for Wobble and one for Little. Writing these character profiles illuminated the characters for me. Each time I wrote, I would add to these character profiles writing things like, "likes kites" or "collects stamps." And slowly the characters started coming to life. Dil even suggests writing a letter addressed to you, the author, from one of your characters. She explains how some authors find this helpful because they can really hear their character's voice calling to them, loud and clear.

Next, I decided to illustrate the characters. I am not an artist, but I have read that visualizing your characters gives you a better idea of who they are in your mind. It took several failed attempts but I was finally able to bring them to life. Once they were drawn, it was easier to edit, shift and change my text based on my characters, their desires and their feelings. It felt easier to image how they would walk, talk, grin, wink, and laugh. It brought me closer to really telling their stories. (See illustrations page 43 and 44). Writing about the characters and drawing them really helped me bring these two strange creatures from my subconscious to life.

Another exercise that helps further discover the true characters of Wobble and Little was to listen, observe and note conversations between adults and children. Sitting in Barnes and Noble, the local library and Borders Books, was very entertaining and inspiring. At one point in the Barnes and Noble I stopped a few children and asked their parents if I could read them my book. The children were ranging in age from two to twelve. From this experience it was easy for me to see

things they enjoyed about the book and things they didn't. One six year old said to me, "I like peanut butter" and even if that was all the reaction I got, it still felt good to hear a child feeling enthusiastic about my book. I read the book to my coworker's child, Austin, who is 6 years old. His reaction: "I like Wobble, he is nice. Where are the pictures?"

Chapter 4

CURRENT PICTURE BOOKS

In doing the final part of my research I took a look at some of the current bestselling children's picture books on the market. On the top of many of the lists, including the *New York Times Best Sellers List* was *Knuffle Bunny Free* a book written and illustrated by Mo Willems, an award winning children's book author. The style of the book combines real photography and illustrations. The pictures are of real places and this gives you the sense that this book is based on a true story (though it is not). The story follows Trixie, the main character, and her family as they leave for her grandparents' house in Holland. While departing the plane she leaves her favorite knuffle bunny toy on the plane headed to china. In very much a coming of age tale the story explores how Trixie feels about letting go of her favorite toy. Her parents give her a new knuffle bunny but she still can't seem to let go. When they get back on the plane to return home from Holland they find knuffle bunny in the seat pocket. The climax shows Trixie deciding to give knuffle bunny to the crying child behind her.

As author Mo Willems puts it in a *Seattle Times* interview, "In addition to being a book about Trixie letting go, it's about me letting go." (Machpherson,1). He explains that when children are toddlers their parents make decisions for them but when they get older, they have to grow up and make decisions for themselves. Additionally, parents must initially guide their children and then step back and let their children guide themselves. Willems notes, "So it's not just about Trixie being able to

make that decision [about what happens to Knuffle Bunny]; it's also about her parents being able to live with it.” (MacPherson,1)

Similar to *Knuffle Bunny Free*, I believe *Wobble and Little* will be a book that will appeal to both adults and children. I hope the illustrations will really bring the characters to life and add another layer to the story. If I do ever get this book published I would like to work closely with the illustrator to help get more of my points across, like the fact that Wobble is sad that he is alone, and that his frustration is really just a mask for the pain he feels on a daily basis. Also to really know the characters you have to see their facial expressions and their body language. Reading books like *Knuffle Bunny Free* just helped in reinforcing the importance of illustrations, story and flow of a picture book. Reading this also shows me what books are appealing to children in my target age range (six to eight year olds) and what kinds of books their parents are purchasing.

Another popular children’s book is *It’s a Book* by Lane Smith. The story is about a monkey and a jackass, the monkey is reading a book and the jackass is trying to decipher what a book can do. “Does it tweet?” Asks the jackass. The monkey replies, “No. It’s a book.” And so this continues as the jackass asks if it has “Wi-Fi” or if it plays “music.” It is a charming book with wonderful and colorful illustrations, in many ways it reminds me of *Green Eggs and Ham* with two characters being developed in quick, witty dialogue and interesting illustrations. The monkey is clearly annoyed by the jackass’s obvious questions. By the end of the book you not only love both of the characters but you love books. You remember why picture books were so great in the first place.

This book also brings up a hot topic: are picture books a thing of the past? According to a recent article in the *New York Times* it would seem that some schools and parents are questioning if children really need picture books. As the article states:

“Parents have begun pressing their kindergartners and first graders to leave the picture book behind and move on to more text-heavy chapter books. Publishers cite pressures from parents who are mindful of increasingly rigorous standardized testing in schools.” (Bosman, 1).

Bookstores are watching picture books gathering dust and publishers are producing fewer picture books yearly. (Bosman, 2). While living in a digital age we have to ask – is the Internet taking over? Are more children turning to the Internet to read? Or their Kindle? These are all questions that spring to mind when reading *It's a Book* by Lane Smith, and I believe if a children's book can bring up such compelling questions while still being entertaining, it is a sure sign of a great book.

Additionally, reading *It's a Book* got me thinking about building tension and frustration in a character. Wobble goes through the same irritation as the monkey in *It's a Book*. It is interesting to see the character development and the different stages the monkey goes through from nonchalant to a little annoyed, to frustrated, to hopping mad.

Chapter 5

IN CONCLUSION

Writing this children's book has been such a rewarding experience and I am so fortunate to be enrolled in a degree program that promotes creative thinking. The long process of writing *Wobble and Little* has opened my eyes and I truly believe I have emerged as a stronger writer. When I began in the Master of Liberal Studies program I didn't think I needed to learn anything more about writing. I thought I had learned it all as an undergraduate English major at the University of Delaware, and yet I found in doing something as "simple" as writing a children's picture book, that there was such room for growth. Within each of us is an innate ability to see, document and analyze the world around us. Writing gives us the tools we need to turn the mundane into the magical.

When I started with *Wobble and Little* I didn't know where it would lead and, frankly, there were times where I felt like I was walking in the dark. But somehow the story, characters, dialogue and world started to creep from the deepest part of subconscious onto the blank page and there, in my most innocent state, was where the story had existed all along. When I released the ego (as Freud would say) and instead really just wrote the story for the sake of writing the story, the book finally began to come together. I believe that the story would have stayed collecting dust in that pink notebook had it not been for this capstone project. The exercises I practiced, the vast number of revisions and the support of my advisor, second reader and two fabulous friends at the Writing Center, helped me turn *Wobble and Little* from a half

finished thought into a polished, well-planned, researched manuscript. With a few more tweaks I feel comfortable submitting this book to agents and publishers, something I would have never thought about just nine months ago.

Analyzing my actions through this critical analysis has also been a worthwhile endeavor. In a way writing this analysis was a form of self-exploration. Why do I write the things that I do? Where do they come from? And, most importantly, what does it all mean? Taking this trip down memory lane left me feeling incredibly nostalgic and I have thoroughly enjoyed taking that journey again. Watching the old cartoons I used to love and reading the first books I ever learned to read was exciting to say the least. At the end of the day even if my book never gets published this has been such a fulfilling experience. In many ways as I stand here at a crossroads of my life teetering between the world of adult responsibility and childlike playfulness, I realize that I am Wobble and Little. The characters are many people but in their truest form they are both different factions of me: the adult scared by life's mistreatment and the bright-eyed bushy-tailed child ready to go conquer the world. Connecting the two characters through my writing has been a spiritual journey too, and I have decided that I can be both. I hope to write a second, third and fourth adventure with my two favorite characters Wobble and Little and see where they lead me. Until then I will be satisfied with the finished story that I now hold in my hands and thankful for the path that led me to the completion of *Wobble and Little*.

“And by and by Christopher Robin came to an end of things, and he was silent, and he sat there, looking out over the world, just wishing it wouldn't stop.” (Milne, 170).

WOBBLE AND LITTLE

By Suki Deen

While everyone else
Was snuggling down,
Two strange-looking creatures
Crept into the town.

Wobble was shoved,
He was pushed and then poked
On the bus into town
He was thoroughly soaked.

Oh Boggles, he sighed
And off fell his hat,
Then his newspaper dropped
And his coffee went SPLAT.

But when he bent down
He heard giggles and sneers,
They laughed as he wobbled
And trembled with fear.

“Look at him!” Yelled a boy
“He’s so weird and gross!”
“Ewww,” said another
“Don’t get too close!”

Wobble felt sad
He was red in the face,
At that moment he felt
Such an utter disgrace.

But not too far away,
In the deep, dreary wood
Stood another strange creature
Who was misunderstood.

Little was playing
In the puddles of dirt,
He loved when the rain
Would soak through his shirt.

With thick muddy feet
He would stomp and giggle
And splash in the mud
With a jump and a wiggle.

But then all at once
He heard a loud noise
And he turned to see
Two, big, mean-looking boys.

They were laughing so hard
They could barely inhale
And Little fell silent
Looking quite pale.

“Look at him,” laughed the boys
As they pointed and jeered.
“He looks silly and dumb
And incredibly weird!”

“That’s mean,” whispered Little
As a cold breeze swept by
And he felt really sad
And he started to cry.

But Wobble and Little
Were destined to meet,
When they entered the
Shop at the end of the street.

For it happened that fate
Would help save the day,
And show them that nothing
Could stand in their way.

Wobble was saddened
By the people’s mean tone,

Now more than ever
He felt awfully alone.

Back in his school days
He never had friends
Or those really close people
Who you love without end.

But he always had peanuts
They made him feel good
And so he would eat them
Whenever he could.

Because Wobble loved food
And the stuff he loved most,
Was peanut butter spread
Thick - on a warm slice of toast.

Little ate peanuts
Almost every day,
They gave him a boost
For more time to play.

And while he was bouncing
And running about,
His mother would yell
And holler and shout.

“Little Bartholomew
Alexander Jones
You are going to fall down
And break all your bones.

“Come here this instant
And stop with the play
You must buy some
More peanut butter today.”

“And while you are there
Won't you get me some toast?
It costs about a shilling
Two at the most.”

For what Little loved most,
Even more than his mum
Was peanut butter spread
Thick- on a warm, toasty bun.

When Wobble walked in
He was shaking and weak
He was tired of feeling
Like everyone's freak.

But as he was searching
For the butter and jam,
All he heard was a
A very loud BAM

Then came a CRASH
And a BING and a BOOM,
As soup tins and canisters
Rolled cross the room.

And there Little stood
Tins up to his chin,
Looking at Wobble
With a mischievous grin.

Oh boggles, thought Wobble
With a sigh and a huff.
How do I get myself
Into this stuff?

But then Wobble heard
A troublesome noise,
And turned to see
Two mean-looking boys.

They were laughing so hard
They could barely inhale
And Wobble was frozen
Looking quite pale.

But for once in his life
The laughter he heard
Was not aimed at him

But at another small nerd.

“He fell on his butt,
Look what he did!
What a weird and
Dumb and strange little kid!”

“That’s mean,” whispered Little
As people walked by
And he felt really sad
And he started to cry.

Wobble looked at Little
He was trembling, alone
And he felt a warm glow
In his cold heart of stone.

At then his own childhood
Replayed in his head
He remembered the teasing,
The tears that he shed.

So Wobble bent down
“Hey there little guy
Don’t you ever let bullies
Make you want to cry.”

And with left over tears
Little stood tall,
And in that moment
He didn’t feel so small.

“Go away!” He yelled
And he looked in their eyes
“Why don’t you pick
On someone your own size?”

Wobble was amazed
By Little’s tough tone,
And all of the courage
And strength that he’d shown.

Then off ran the boys

Crying out for their mums
Squealing and shrieking
And sucking their thumbs.

“Up there,” pointed Little
“Peanut Butter delight,
I tried hard to grab it
With all of my might!”

Peanut butter, thought Wobble
And he let out a smile
Boy, had it been a while,
Since he let out a smile.

“I’ll try and reach it,”
Said Wobble sincerely,
And he stretched and he reached
He was very close, really.

But he couldn’t reach it
Try as he could,
Even from every
Angle he stood.

“Hey,” thought Wobble,
“If you stood on my shoulder.
Together we’d be strong,
Real strong, like a boulder.”

“But I’m scared,” Little cried
“And what if I fall?”
“I won’t let you,” said Wobble
“No sir, not at all.”

So Wobble and Little,
Oh, what a great team,
Stretched and stretched and stretched for that jar
Of delicious, brown cream.

“I can’t do it,” cried Little
As he reached for the jar
“There is just no way
I can reach that far.”

“Now, now,” Wobble hushed
Don’t you ever give up.
Because life’s about trying
No matter how tough.”

Then Little understood,
He could do it himself,
And he launched himself up
To that very high shelf.

And success! There it was,
Right there in his hands!
Now Wobble and Little
Became two fast friends.

The End.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amoss, Berthe and Eric Suben. Writing and Illustrating Children's Books for

Publication. 10th Anniversary Ed. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2005.

This book was very inspirational as well as being very positive, informative and fun. The authors combine hands-on exercises with real life experiences, excerpts from some of the great children's books and tips. Some of the best advice came from some of the exercises they suggest. As a children's writer with much experience and many children's books under her belt, Amoss explains how to write a children's book from beginning to end with step by step instructions. She also encourages the author not to give up hope. Eric Suben has published over 40 children's books and has also served as editor in chief for a publishing company. He gives practical advice for those authors looking to publish and tips on how to succeed in the world of editors, agents and publishing companies.

Barrows, Annie. Ivy + Bean. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2006.

Ivy + Bean is a tale two children becoming friends, no matter how different they may seem. While Bean is loud, Ivy is quiet. Their parents encourage them to spend time together and slowly but surely they begin to make friends. Although Bean thinks Ivy is weird and Ivy thinks Bean is weird they slowly come together because opposites attract. They also find that their differences are actually quite complimentary. This book was significant for me because it was my first relatively

current ‘buddy book.’ I saw a lot of similarities to *Wobble and Little* because of their “weird” friendship. It was interesting to read and a fun story with a good moral subtext. This book was also the winner of several book awards.

Bosman, Julie. "Picture Books No Longer a Staple for Children." *The New York Times*. 07 Oct. 2010. Web. 05 Nov. 2010.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/08/us/08picture.html>>.

This article appearing in The New York Times was fascinating to me because I had never thought of picture books taking a hit in our economy. If you told me about farmers, mom and pop stores or institutions of higher education taking a hit, I would understand. But people not buying picture books? Or encouraging children to skip straight to chapter books? It sounds like utter nonsense. Just like the article states children’s books are such a great resource for children and should never be seen as a way to just teach a child to read. I don’t know where I would be without picture books and I hope that parents and school administrators continue to foster the importance of reading picture books to children for years to come.

Carter, James, ed. Talking Books: Children’s Authors Talk about the Craft, Creativity and Process of Writing. London: Routedledge, 1999.

Following children’s authors like Brian Moses, Ian Beck, Alan Durant and Philip Pullman the editor takes us on a journey through the world behind the picture book. I found this book to be helpful to me in recognizing the inspiration behind writing a children’s book. For example “His Dark Materials”, by Pullman while marketed to young adults was actually written for adults *and* youth. Pullman was

influenced by Milton's "*Paradise Lost*" and wanted to write a story that told the inverse of that classic tale.

D'Amico, Camela and Steven D'Amico. *Ella Sets the Stage*. New York, NY: Author A. Levine Books, 2006.

Ella, the elephant, is worried about her school talent show. She is shy and not sure if she has the talents that her other friends might have. While working backstage at the show she finds her own talent lies in helping others. The story is simple and to the point yet pinpoints concerns that real children might face. The illustrations are airy and colorful, complimenting the writing style.

Dahl, Roald. *Revoltin' Rhymes*. New York, NY: Puffin Books, 1982.

Roald Dahl has such a way with words and that could never be more evident than in this gruesome, revolting book of fairytales. His witty, comical and often twisted tales of Cinderella, Snow White and Jack and the Bean Stalk leave the reader wanting more. His writing voice and rhythm are distinct and clear. Whenever I read his rhymes his wording and rhythms get stuck in my head – that's a sign of a great writer! They also inspire me to write rhymes of my own – maybe not revolting ones, but they do none-the-less. The other great thing about Dahl is he appeals to adults and children. This is a skill I would like to develop myself through my writing.

Dahl, Roald. *The BFG*. New York, NY: Puffin Books, 1982.

This book was one of the first books I enjoyed reading from cover to cover as a young reader. Looking back on it as an adult I am still drawn into the imaginary

world of Sophie and her friend the Big Friendly Giant (BFG). Dahl creates characters that are so believable you can imagine yourself having tea with them. His made-up words are so comical that you can't help but laugh out loud. This book is a page-turner and one that boy children and adults can enjoy.

DiCamillo, Kate. Mercy Watson to the Rescue. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2005.

Mercy, the pig, exudes personality in this cute children's tale. Reading this book really outlined the importance of building character throughout your children's book. As Author Kate DiCamillo explains on her website, "One day, my friend Alison was going on and on and on about the many virtues of toast. As I listened to her, I could see Mercy nodding in emphatic agreement. Sometimes you don't truly understand a character until you know what she loves above all else."

Dil, Tracy E. You Can Write Children's Books. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2009.

Tracy Dil writes a great step-by-step guide to writing children's book from misconceptions about writing for children, to tracking trends, to tips from the top (from agents and editors). The writing exercises were particularly helpful and I scribbled notes and jotted down ideas all over this book. I was especially attracted to this book because Dil does not write in a boring, dull tone, instead she appeals to the real writer, giving fun and helpful tips and keeping you optimistic along the way.

Entenman, Janis, Timothy J. Mumen, and Cindy Hendricks. "Victims, Bullies, and Bystanders in K-3 Literature." *The Reading Teacher* 59.4 (2005): 352-64. *JSTOR*. Web. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20204359>>.

An interesting read about the bullies, the victims and the innocent bystanders. The authors explain how teachers can help bullies, bystanders and victims of bullying through the power of children's literature. They provide a list of children's books that tackle bullying, some research on the topic of bullying and how teachers are helping fight back against bullying in schools.

Frank, Thaisa and Dorothy Wall. Finding Your Writer's Voice. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

Singing your manuscript? That is the advice Frank and Wall give when encouraging writers to find their own voice. The authors explain how when you first start writing you might "steal" other writer's voice but it is imperative that you find your own. This book gives tips on listening, understanding your own voice, strengthening your voice, understanding how your characters speak and using your voice to discover your story. Using exercises in this book really helped refine my writing voice and further develop my story.

Helbig, Alethea K. ""Trends in Poetry for Children"" *Children's Literature* 6 (1977): 195-202. *Project MUSE*. Web. 01 Nov. 2010.

<http://muse.jhu.edu/.../childrens_literature/v006/6.fordyce.html>.

Although written in the 1970's this article shares great tips for writing poetry for children including the importance of rhythm, meter and rhyme. Helbig includes a

number of emerging poets at the time including Nikki Giovanni, who ironically enough I met and wrote an article about a few years ago. Her poetry is unique, interesting and beautiful.

Henkes, Kevin. Wemberly Worried. Hong Kong: South China, 2000.

I identified with *Wemberly Worried* on a personal level. As a child I remember the first time I had a panic attack, it was on the way to school and my stomach was in knots. My mother even took me to the doctor later that day to see what was wrong. Kevin Henkes tackles a very real childhood problem in this book by explaining to children that it is okay to worry about some things but to not let yourself worry about the whole world and allow anxiety to get the better of you.

Hobbie, Holly. Toot & Puddle. Hong Kong, China: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1997.

A charming book about two piglet friends who are different in many ways. Toot loves adventure and travelling while Puddle likes to do activities at home. Toot sets about on a world trip for a year sending Puddle postcards along the way. Holly Hobbie serves as writer and illustrator. Her illustrations tell as much of a story as her words do. Her characters are brought to life in the activities they partake in. The reader feels they know these two piglets by the end of the 32-page picture book.

Lamb, Nancy: The Art and Craft of Storytelling. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2008.

Reading about writing is important as it may open your eyes to your strengths and your flaws. Lamb constructs a book for the writer who is already a writer but wants to do better. Crafting a beginning, middle and end, setting the scene, adding story elements and structuring plots are just a few tips she gives in this comprehensive book.

Macpherson, Karen. "Kids' Book Creator Mo Willems on 'Knuffle Bunny Free'."

Seattle Times Newspaper. Web. 16 Nov. 2010.

<http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/books/2013051230_kidsbooksmowilliems02.html?prmid=head_main>.

Award-winning author Mo Willems explores themes, the writing process and the inspiration behind his picture book series, “Knuffle Bunny” which culminated in “Knuffle Bunny Free.” I love reading interviews with children’s book authors because you really get a sense of the person behind the book and what the author was trying to achieve. My favorite line in this interview was when Mo Willems said, ““When I make a book, it's because I'm stumbling, and trying to figure something out. I figure if it intrigues me and confuses me enough, hopefully it will do that for my audience, too.”

Marshall, James. George and Martha Tons of Fun. New York, NY: Houghton Muffin Company, 1980.

Two hippos become the best of friends but not without first overcoming their ups and downs. This book is really five short stories about friendship, each one showing children how to negotiate problems. I enjoyed reading buddy books like

this one because they provide moral lessons about all friendships and how we can learn from one another.

"Maurice Sendak." *Wikiquote*. 09 July 2009. Web. 01 Oct. 2010.

<en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Maurice_Sendak>.

This quotation I came across from Maurice Sendak's Boston Globe interview really struck a chord with me. Sendak really drives home the importance of writing for the sake of writing not writing for the ego.

McCannon, Desdemona, Susan Thornton, and Yadzia Williams. *The Encyclopedia of Writing and Illustrating Children's Books*. Philadelphia: Running, 2008. Print.

This colorful book is really a treasure for all writers interested in writing for children. Providing tips, resources, sample story plans, illustrations, and more this is truly an encyclopedia. The important lessons I learned from this book were: picking a target audience and then researching them well, secondly choosing a theme that means something to you (some common themes include courage, friendship, loss, anger, and growing up), and finally writing a story plan. Through writing a story plan (which I did) I was able to have a clear idea of what I wanted my story to achieve.

Milne, A.A. *Now We Are Six*. New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books, 1927.

A.A.Milne, a fantastically vivid writer and natural poet, appeals to both children and adults in his collection of poems, *Now We Are Six*. I have been reading this book since I was a child and it is still hard to say which poem I love best. Milne seems to write his poetry with such ease and his words seem to roll right off your

tongue when you read them. I tried to gather inspiration from Milne whenever I could when writing this book.

Milne, A.A. The House at Pooh Corner. New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books, 1928.

Another delightful tale by the Milne, the House at Pooh Corner tells tales of all the characters in the Hundred Acre Wood including Eeyore, Rabbit, Tigger and Piglet. But my favorite friendship of all is that of Christopher Robin and Pooh. Reading and rereading these classic only reaffirms by love of everything Pooh and the world that Milne creates.

Milne, A.A. When We Were Very Young. New York, NY: Dutton Children's Books, 1924.

Possible one of my favorite collections of poetry for children this book may have started my love for poetry. My mother would read me this book when I was young and there are many parts of it that I can recite by heart to this day. Milne creates such loveable characters, settings and stories. This book is a treasure and one I will hold on to for years to come and read to my own children.

Numeroff, Laura. If You Give A Mouse a Cookie. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985.

25 years after it was first published "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie" by Laura Numeroff continues to top best sellers lists across the country. My friend who is a librarian recommended this book to me and I read it as fast as can be. Being a page-turner is only one of the many compliments I could give this book. Not just the simplicity of the words but also the development of plot, character and setting.

Numeroff adds humor that would make a child giggle. It really speaks to the importance of choosing the right words and keeping it straight to the point. The illustrations work amazingly well with the book and leave you wanting more. This book is the first of the series of “If you give...” including “If You Give a Cat a Cupcake” and “If You Give a Moose a Muffin” and “If You Give a Pig a Pancake.”

Pinkney, Jerry, and Aesop. The Lion & the Mouse. New York: Little, Brown and for Young Readers, 2009.

I never thought you could tell a whole picture book with only three or four words but Jerry Pinkney, through his brilliant illustrations, has proven me wrong. This book was a true testament to the idea of “showing” not “telling.” I would recommend this book to any children’s writer or illustrator whether they are just starting out or established in the field. I think it is a great little book based on a classic tale and is sure to delight and excite all the children who stumble upon it.

Rosenfeld, Jordan E. Make a Scene. Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 2008.

Crafting the scene may not always be the first thing that comes to mind when writing your novel but scene, setting and scenery are just as important as character, climax and plot. In *Make a Scene* Rosenfeld explains the importance of hooking the reader with an intriguing opening, layering your scene and building climaxes and leaving your reader with a lasting image.

Rylant, Cynthia. Poppleton. New York, NY: Scholastic, 1997.

Poppleton used to be a city pig until he moved to the suburbs. A warm, evolving character children cannot help but be attracted to this protagonist as he adjusts to his new life in the suburbs. Cynthia Rylant does a great job slowly building character, scene and story in this first of many Poppleton adventures.

Seuss, Dr. Horton Hears a Who! New York, NY: Random House, 1954.

While working on my master's thesis I often surfed used bookstores, libraries and thrift stores for old children's books. I love used books because they have such history and I love finding notes people take, the odd inscription or that strange coffee stain. When I found *Horton Hears a Who!* Tucked behind a pile of used books at Rainbow Records, I was ecstatic. It had been years since I read the tale and so when I settled down to read it, all these childhood memories came rushing back to me. His rhymes could not get out of my head and as I sat down to write more of *Wobble and Little* I felt a rush of creative freedom. Reading this book truly helped me overcome my writer's block and find my writing voice.

Seuss, Dr. The Sneetches and Other Stories. New York: Random House, 1961.

Hidden beneath the rhythmical rhymes, funny looking creatures and strange names, Dr. Seuss embeds real moral lessons for kids. *The Sneetches* is actually a story about being outcast, discriminated against and feeling ostracized. While writing *Wobble and Little* I very much related to this tale. Bullying and discrimination are not right and changing yourself to appease the bullies is just as bad. Dr. Seuss shows how you can make children feel comfortable with themselves without overtly saying it.

Shannon, David. A Bad Case of Stripes. New York, NY: The Blue Sky Press, 1998.

I genuinely enjoyed everything about this book. The creativity of David Shannon just exudes through his text and especially through his fantastic illustrations.

Camilla has come down with a bad case of the stripes after worrying about what other people think of her. She must struggle to regain her own identity and come to terms that being different and eating beans is perfectly fine, no matter what other people think.

Smith, Lane. It's a Book. New York: Roaring Brook, 2010.

Lane Smith's book is an insight into the younger generation. Will they know what a book is? Will there still be books? Or will we only have electronic, glowing screens in the future? It is an interesting question to ponder and Smith does just that in this quirky best seller. The book still appeals to kids because of the characters, plot and drive. Just like in *Green Eggs and Ham*, the main character just wants to be left alone. Unfortunately this jackass keeps asking him what a book is.

Teague, David. Franklin's Big Dreams. New York, NY: Disney Hyperion Books, 2010.

This wonderful children's book written by my advisor, David Teague, gives you a window into the imaginary world of Franklin, a young boy with big dreams. The words are so rich and evocative; each word seems to have a distinct purpose to move the plot forward. This illustrator, Boris Kulikov, is amazing. With each page he creates a window into the imagination. Teague also uses repetition to create a

distinct flow of the narrative. Children love repetition but they also love surprise.

Teague delivers with a twist ending that sends you rocketing into outer space.

Figure 1.1

Wobble as Illustrated by Suki Deen



Wobble: *Outwardly grumpy but has a heart of gold. Forgetful, lonely, bitter by the world, organized, pragmatic, home-body, structured, thoughtful, tame, secretly adventurous, timely, systematic, longs for family, longs for friends, clean, well-read, intelligent, quiet.*

Figure 2.1

Little as Illustrated by Suki Deen



Little: *Excited, easily distracted, funny, a jokester, idealistic, playful, a little warrior, likes to get into things he shouldn't, dramatic, easily jumpy, has a sweet tooth, talkative, competitive, simply satisfied, emotional, creative.*

