



HYPER
MEDIA

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SPECIAL PROJECT

Use Of Hypermedia In Children's Stories

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Guide: Prof. Ravi Poovaiah

The Special Project titled *Use Of Hypermedia In Children's Stories*
is approved in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master Of Design in Visual Communication.

Signature

Date

Guide



Examiner

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Any one who wishes to write for children must be able to day-dream and think like a child and must have the ability to roam freely in the world of imagination.

Going through Rabindranath Tagore's poems, one could easily see how he identifies himself with children. For example take his poem, 'Veer Purush'. In this poem, Khokha imagines that he goes to distant places riding in a red horse and escorting his mother who is travelling in a palanquin. Suddenly the dacoits surround the palanquin. Khokha unsheathes his sword, fights bravely, and puts the dacoits to rout. He thus bravely saves his mother. Khokha then fantasises that he sits on the lap of his mother, and is fondled by her. Only a mind which thinks like a child could have written such a poem.

Those who would like to write stories for children should be like a child at heart or atleast should have a good knowledge of child psychology. By the time a person grows up to be an adult, often he tends to forget what it is like to be a child.

A child of two learns through the medium of objects- animate and inanimate. From the age of two he begins to learn through the medium

of words and language. But words ofcourse become meaningful because of pictures. A child learns logic from the age of 7, and by the time he is 11 or 12, this capacity is usually fully developed. It has been observed that children who have not listened to fairy tales - tales which need not be very logical- have their imaginative power stunted.

Carl Jung said that all experiences taken by mankind are stored in the collective conscious. This conscious is affected by the kind of experiences to which an individual is exposed, right from the date of birth from the kind of stories he had been told from the childhood and the experiences undergone by him.

Today's children have a clutch of popular story books all directed towards them and in some cases edited by them. The all pervasive medium of television has left some imprint on the contemporary indian child.

Simply by absorbing both the good and the bad daily experiences, especially in the urban centres, a child is no longer new to the story books an assembly line of professionals has churned out for him/ her.

How much of the 'new enlightenment' has found its way into the different story books published in recent years for children is anybody's guess. Many artistically valuable picture- books are not satisfactory in the literary sense; many of them lack power- hard enough to define- of interesting and stirring the emotions of children.

Children are quite able to find lovable figures with which they can identify themselves in abstract, surrealistic pictures and to follow with absorption the stories thus portrayed, provided these figures and stories really form the substance of the book.

The wave of social criticism and new proposals in the field of juvenile literature, has had the effect of making the traditional story book designer aware of the importance of text and graphic contents. Technology has opened new gates in terms of communication and perception of information.

One such technology that has altered the way in which we perceive information is Hypermedia. It has the power to change the face (and the voice) of personal computing by

--- bringing information to life,

--- creating new and more ways to educate and entertain and

--- enhancing and enriching applications.

Hypermedia PC computing is not just the vision for the future.

It is here today. Hypermedia computing is simple: the integration of sound, animation and photo-quality images, with text and graphics. Yet this simple idea has a remarkable effect on the way people use computers.

Many applications have been designed using the power of hypermedia. This includes Encyclopaedia, Dictionaries, Applications explaining Beethoven's symphony, games and educational applications.

And if educational applications and games can be designed, can story-telling be far behind? Who would n't have wished he/ she could step into his/ her favourite childhood story? The present generation of children can; and discover a fresh new way of reading. Lively animations, talking characters, sound effects, and music, all can combine to bring stories vibrantly to life.

Such questions like, "What makes a children's story?" and "What makes it interesting to a child?" have been raised several times. Is it the form of the story itself, or because of the various elements being used, like fantasy, dream, incidents, suspense, study from nature, animals becoming characters and speaking to one another, inanimate things coming alive, or is it the overall visual style, the kind of illustrations—realistic as well as caricaturised, or the narrative style that interests a child? In a way it is all the above features that make a children's story.

Generally, a story for children consists of

1. Introduction
2. Establishing characters
3. A series of incidents/ events
4. One or more obstacles
5. Suspense built up
6. The climax- how the crisis is averted
7. A quick ending of the story after climax and
8. An underlying moral, if any

How Hypermedia can make a welcome change in this kind of story telling is a question widely being discussed world-wide. Besides exploring the different ways of perceiving events in a story, children can explore the text as well as the pictures and learn words, phrases, sentences etc. Instead of listening passively, they become active participants in the story. They don't just read them. They live them.

Normally, in most children's stories, a linear structure is followed. A set of incidents occur one after the other. Parallel plots also exist; one incident may be happening at the forest and another at home, at the same time. The different parallel plots are linked together in such a way that at the end it leads to an interesting climax. (e.g. the story of "*Little Red Ridinghood*"). But linearity still prevails. There is no cross jumping even in stories which has some sub-stories.

In printed medium, stories are either narrated by a third person (say, the author), or told by a character in the story itself. Each has its unique style and kids like to read them. Another interesting point to note here is that children mostly prefer to listen to, or read a new story every time. Normally, children are interested in listening to *known* stories told in a different manner every time.

SOME CONCEPTS FOR STORIES TOLD IN HYPERMEDIA

With the kind of flexibility that hypermedia offers, one can tell stories in an interesting way to children. In terms of the structuring of information, the following concepts were worked out:

1. A single frame - connected to multiple elements that are animated.
2. A story - with different endings
3. A story - with many 'middles' but a single ending
4. Giving three different stories and letting the child to create a fourth story
5. Providing characters and asking the child to build his own story using them
6. Giving a known story - but giving multiple options to restructure the same (i.e) encourage the child to develop the character he likes most. For example, making the 'loser' a 'winner'.
7. Providing multiple random options, which makes the child 'jump' from one 'node' to another (i.e) a 'never ending story'

8. Giving the story a clear dimension and then jumble up the incidents, thereby giving the child the option to arrange them in the sequence he feels is the right, and then discovering the 'correct' story.

The above concepts, if effectively combined together in a single application along with animation, sound effects etc. will make an interesting hypermedia application.

The concept of a storybook- with options of going to different 'pages', where there are multiple elements that are animated is the one used widely in many of the existing hypermedia applications for children.

The most popular amongst them are:

'Just Grandma And Me' - Broderbund's Living Books

'Sleeping Beauty' - A Talking Tale

'Talking Jungle Safari'

'The Zoo Keeper'

The 'talking tales' normally have the text being read out as it appears on screen along with the relevant illustrations and sound effects.

'Just Grandma And Me'

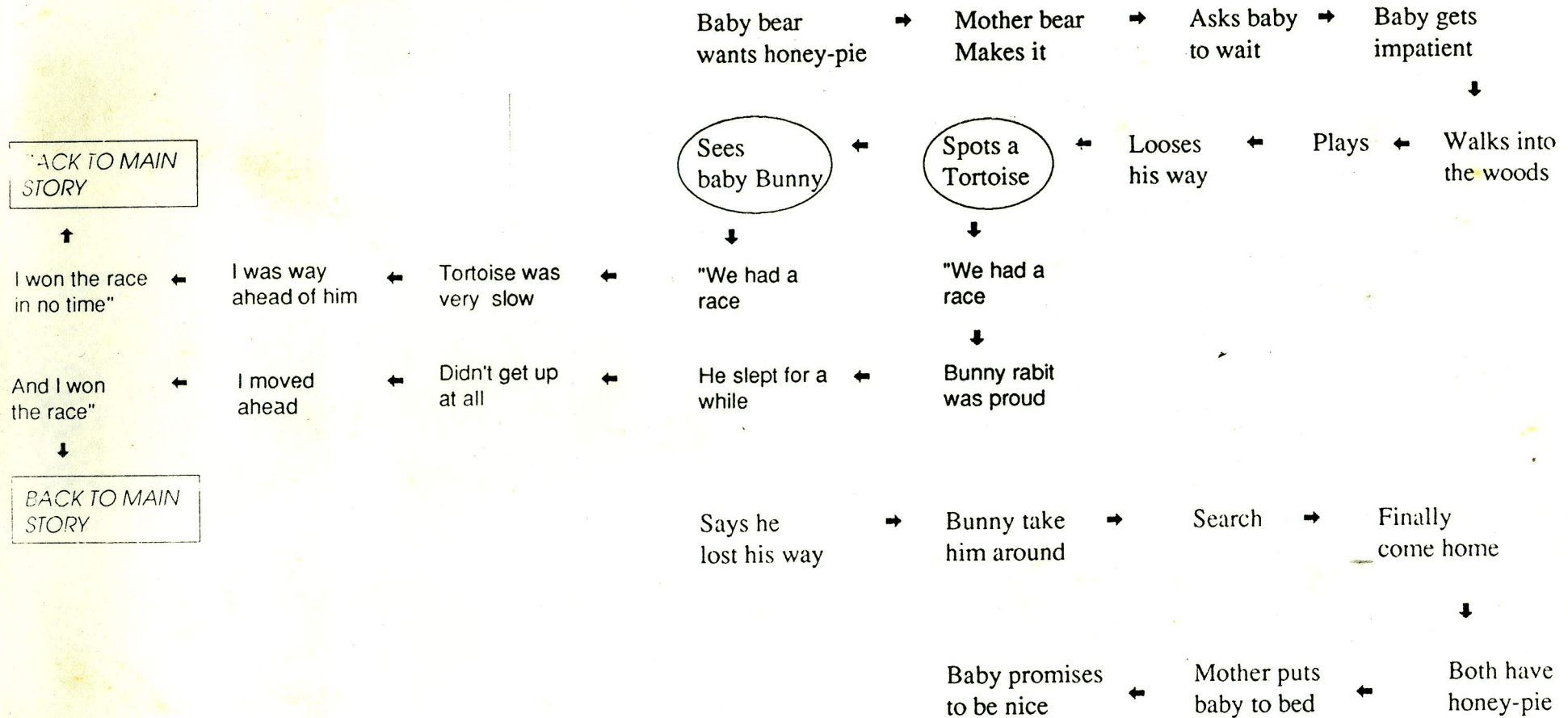
In this CD-ROM title, little Gritter and his Grandma go to the beach, and have a series of adventures. Little Gritter rides a wind-blown umbrella, meets some talented starfish, goes snorkeling, and much more. It also has its translation in Spanish and Japanese. Clicking the various elements on the screen initiates action. For example, clicking the nest wakes up the baby bird. It has some surprise elements built into the story, in the form of animation and sound effects.

'Zoo Keeper'

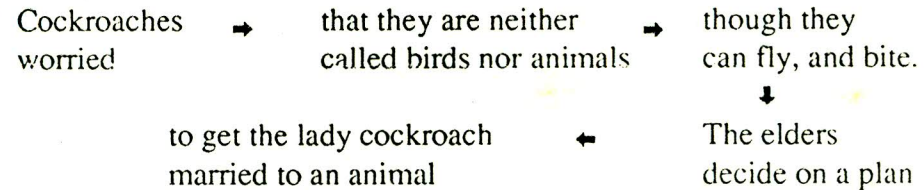
More than just a Multimedia Encyclopaedia of animals, *Zoo Keeper* makes children run the zoo, learning both responsibility and zoology. Filled with graphics, sound effects and animation, the game offers different levels of play, as children work their way upto the level of the head Zoo-keeper. Kids must take care of the animals, and in an environmental touch, later release their charges into the wild to repopulate endangered species. It is aimed at 6 - 11 year olds.

STRUCTURING

1. Story with many middles but a single ending: *The Honey-pie Story*



2. Story which the child reads for a while and then arranges the incidents in the correct sequence: *'The Worry Of The Cockroaches'*



MOUSE

SNAKE

MONGOOSE

DOG

MAN

Cockroaches happy

Here, as the story appears in the disorderly manner, each episode has been given an alphabet tag attached to it. At the end, all that the user has to do is to drag the tags and place them in the correct order.

After this, the story is told in as per the correct order of events.

3. Giving different characters with in-built text and asking the child to build his/ her own story

The various pictures provided on the screen were that of

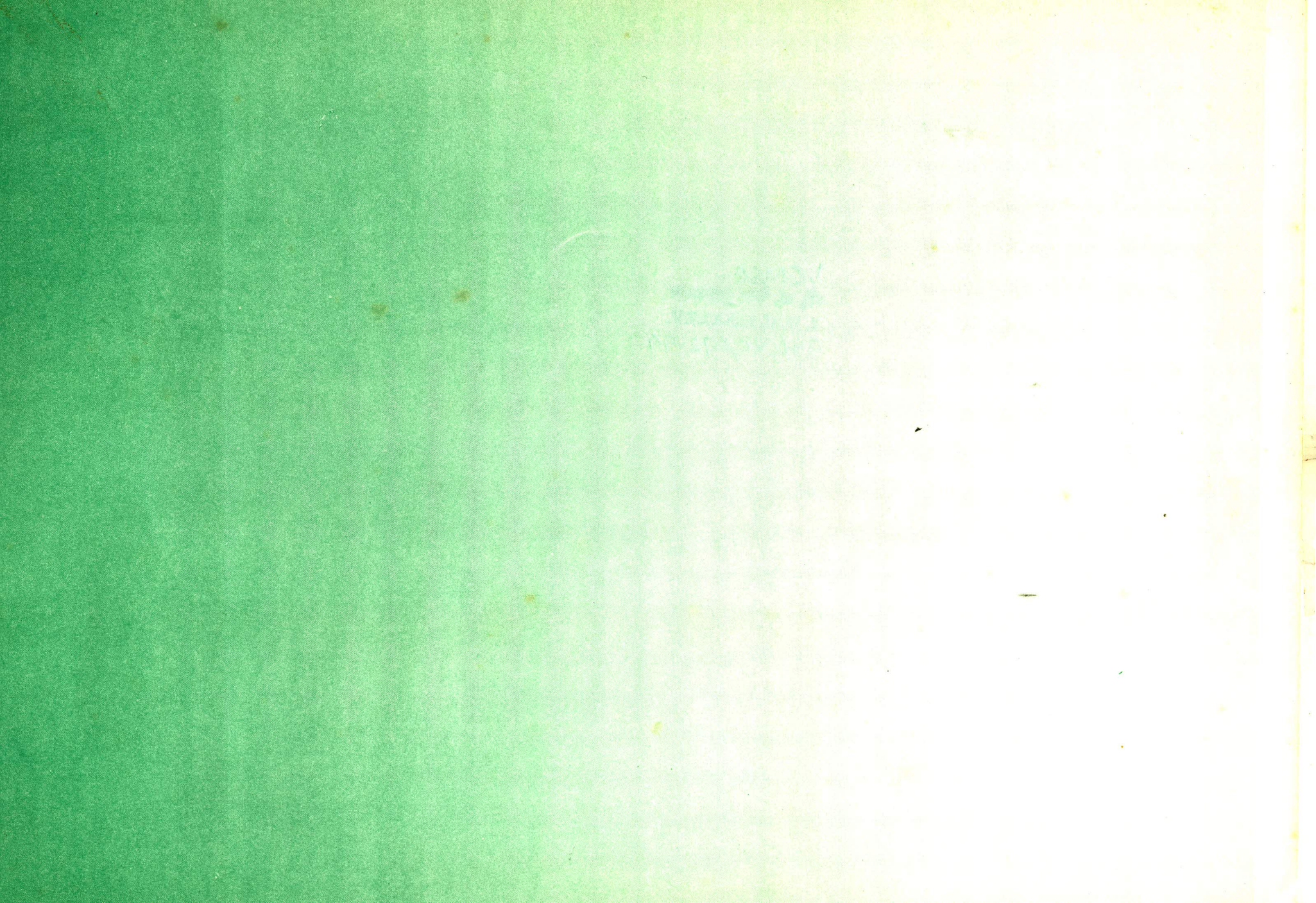
- a girl in red dress, dancing and playing with her dog.
- the same girl sitting on a merry-go-round
- a woman walking
- a juggler doing tricks
- an mother rabbit with her baby
- a hen
- a duck
- a calf
- a squirrel
- a girl doing skipping
- a boy reading a paper
- a chef bringing a cake
- a park
- a boy walking with a fishing net
- the same boy running
- a teddy bear

These characters, when drawn to the boxes kept at the left side of the screen, read out the text related to them. For example, clicking on the girl and dragging to the box would display, "I felt so happy that I started dancing".

These texts are so designed that whatever be the sequence of appearances of the different characters, they would make sense and fit into a different story every time.

This kind of an application would create awareness amongst the children using it, in terms of the flexibility of the language. Also, it would be a creative exercise, especially in a case where repetition of a character gives a different text which makes sense, and not the same text which would have appeared earlier.

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