

STORYTELLING IN THE HOME, SCHOOL, AND LIBRARY, 1890-1920

by

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A THESIS

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This thesis explores the intersection of artistry, professionalism, and maternalism in the storytelling revival that occurred in the United States from 1890-1920, influencing a variety of child-centered reform movements. Though storytelling was practiced by men and women alike, it was portrayed as a maternal skill. However, storytelling's perceived multiplicity of uses led it to be interpreted in diverse ways. Such interpretations—particularly potent in the home, school, and library—displayed tensions inherent in the public role of these institutions, particularly in their approach to “child-centeredness.” In the school, teachers embraced the nurturing potential of storytelling, arguing that it allowed them to teach more effectively. In the library, however, such an approach was rejected as antithetical to the efficient nature of the institution. The way these institutions conceived of storytelling shows that nurturing imperatives, though pervasive in child-centered reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was not the only way to conceive of child-centeredness.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. STORYTELLING IN THE HOME, 1890-1920: FAMILY TIME AND THE TRADITIONAL HOUSEHOLD	15
III. STORYTELLING AND THE CHILD-CENTERED SCHOOL CURRICULUM, 1890-1920.....	50
IV. THE LIBRARY STORY HOUR, 1900-1920: A BUSINESS MODEL.....	80
V. CONCLUSION	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	117

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. A Chautauquan summer storytelling course, 1913	6
2. Representing books published on storytelling	8
3. Student of Mothercraft practicing storytelling	23
4. Preparing to tell stories for the children's hour	42
5. Friedrich Froebel	57
6. Story hour at Bancroft School	70

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From 1890 to 1920, storytelling experienced what many called a “revival” or “renaissance.” Enthusiasts argued that storytelling’s newfound importance heralded the rejuvenation of an ancient instructional art that had been vanquished by both the printing press and the fragmentation of family life. Storytelling was also seen as innovative, a way to instruct and entertain children that made use of their natural liking for stories. “Progressives,” which include political and social reformers, as well as those employed by and actively seeking to shape Progressive Era public institutions, saw in children an enormous potential to change society, and in storytelling, a way to educate children effectively. Storytelling was given the greatest significance in the settings perceived as most important to a child’s development: the home, public school, and library. Teachers and children’s librarians thought of themselves as working in tandem with the home to provide services to the child, but, since some of their duties overlapped, sought to define this relationship more clearly. Storytelling shows that while mothers, teachers, and librarians each developed their own approach to the child-centeredness of their work, they interpreted the maternal implications of their work in ways that suited the goals of the institutions for which they worked. Women used storytelling to help define their own relationship, as female professionals, to children.

Those who wrote about storytelling conceived of it as an ancient art that was essential to normal to human development. “Story-telling is almost the oldest art in the world,” professional storyteller Marie Shedlock explained, “—the first conscious form of

literary communication.”¹ It was perceived by all but librarians as the natural way humans transmitted knowledge to the next generation, an oral tradition almost lost because of the proliferation of books. Children were attracted to stories such as myths and fables because they represented the “childhood” of the human race. Many reformers believed child development followed the rule of “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny,” that children mimicked the same process of development human civilization had undergone. Children were thus like native peoples, finding awe and wonder in the basic processes of the world. Stories, since they were common among tribal peoples, were necessary for a child’s proper development toward a more civilized state. This notion provided a historical, philosophical, and scientific framework for storytelling that supplemented its artistry. This was part of its appeal—storytelling was attractive to those who favored romantic notions of childhood, as well as those who favored more rational approaches. Different aspects of storytelling were emphasized according to the perspective of those who advised it.

Though infrequently, many of themes surrounding storytelling in the Progressive Era had been raised during the Antebellum period. The *Youth’s Companion*, the most popular children’s periodical of the time, argued in 1843 that telling purely fanciful stories was not appropriate for children. But it proposed, “There is, however, a class of stories which may not be true in the incidents or circumstances related, but which may be correct in the representation they make of real life, and may be told for the purpose of

¹ Marie Shedlock, *The Art of the Story-Teller* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1917), xiii.

giving instruction, by an easy and familiar method, in religious truth or moral duty.”²

Ministers began to use storytelling in their sermons, valuing the technique for communicating the everyday applications of the Bible.³ An article passionately in support of storytelling in schools and the home appeared in the May 1837 edition of the *American Annals of Education*. “There is no day of life,” the author argued, “in which the parent or teacher may not interest and instruct and improve the minds and hearts of those under his charge, by telling them stories.”⁴ Storytelling, the author proposes, made lessons interesting to children and could improve both their intellects and their morals. Such attitudes laid the groundwork for storytelling in the Progressive Era, but public interest in storytelling appeared to be incubating.

Calls for storytelling became more widespread and urgent in the 1890s, fueled largely by a rapidly growing sense among reformers and experts that children had needs distinct from those of adults, needs which a well-functioning society should meet. “Schemes proliferated for the benefit of children,” observes historian David MacLeod, “Optimists were ready to proclaim theirs the age of the child and the twentieth the century of the child.”⁵ The middle class idealized a “sheltered” childhood, in which children would not be introduced to the world of work and adult concerns until they were

² G., “Story Telling,” *The Youth’s Companion*, Vol. 16 No. 38 (26 January 1843), 150.

³ David S. Reynolds, “From Doctrine to Narrative: The Rise of Pulpit Storytelling in America,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 32 No.5 (Winter 1980): 479-498.

⁴ “Story Telling in Schools,” *American Annals of Education* (May 1837): 218. (article 217-9)

⁵ David I. MacLeod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), xi.

in their late teens, a trend encouraged by growing affluence and a lower birth rate. Ideals of adult-child interaction had been changing since before midcentury, becoming more “sympathetic” as well as more intellectual: adults believed that the thoughts, feelings, and desires of children were worthy of study and consideration, and that there should be special goods and services to meet these needs. This framework of interaction, praised mostly by the middle class, grew in importance during the Progressive Era. Efforts to structure society in a way more sympathetic to the needs of children spurred a variety of reform activities, from the regulation of child labor, to providing specialized services to children (such as playgrounds), to studying children as biologically and psychologically distinct from adults. Such social, political, and intellectual endeavors were taken up by both men and women, but child-centered endeavors usually had maternal implications. This was not only because caring for children was still primarily a female-typed responsibility, but because women argued their inherent maternal abilities gave them special knowledge of and authority over children.

The storytelling movement in America was a vibrant one, a reforming mission in its own right and a component of many others. By the 1870s, well-known writers on parenting such as Catharine Beecher and Jacob Abbott were praising storytelling’s powers, and publishers began to market story collections specifically for telling stories aloud. In the 1890s, telling stories to children gained greater renown as a technique used in kindergartens, educational programs for young children run by specially trained female “kindergarteners” who were believed to be particularly good teachers because of their maternal qualities. In the 1890s, an array of other educational movements took up the

banner of storytelling, particularly the child study movement, led by psychologist G. Stanley Hall, which deduced that storytelling was an essential need of children in order for them to develop properly morally and intellectually. In the early 1900s, less romantic psychologists such as John Dewey would draw similar conclusions, and physicians would advise parents to tell stories in the home to create a positive environment for children. Parenting experts, and those involved with the domestic science and Mothercraft movements, argued storytelling was a component of a successful mother's education. Settlement houses, the playground movement, and the Protestant Sunday School movement all made use of storytelling for educational and recreational purposes. These diverse professions, movements, and institutions saw promise in the power storytelling had over children.

Storytelling was a subject of interest and study to adults across the United States. The National Storytellers' League, founded in 1903 by public school teachers taking summer courses in Knoxville, Tennessee, organized local chapters of citizens interested in refining their storytelling abilities and holding public storytelling festivals. The membership of storytelling clubs, though primarily composed of educators and parents, also boasted an array of other male and female professionals. It was an organization confined to the middle class, but spread across the U.S., with local chapters popular (sometimes upward of 80 regular attendees) in both small and large urban areas. The national organization published the monthly *Storytellers' Magazine*, filled with tales for telling as well as articles on storytelling methodology, theory, and science, such as, "The

Psycho-Therapeutic Value of Story Telling,” and “The Bible as a Story Book.”⁶

Attendees were frequently those who used storytelling in their professions, such as teaching and librarianship, suggesting that for many, storytelling was both a professional skill they wished to hone as well a pastime they enjoyed.



Figure 1, A Chautauquan summer storytelling course, 1913, almost certainly at Wooster College, Ohio. The preponderance of women would have been typical. The course was taught by Mabel C. Bragg, perhaps the same Mabel C. Bragg whose *Pony Engine* was the inspiration for the popular children’s book *The Little Engine that Could*. From *The Storytellers’ Magazine*, Vol. I No.4 (October 1913), 189.

The storytelling movement reached the middle class from an array of sources. Storytelling courses became a regular part of Chautauqua summer classes at least by the 1890s, and, eventually, was a popular offering of state university summer extension

⁶ Frances E. Foote, “The Psycho-Therapeutic Value of Story Telling,” *Storytellers’ Magazine*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (June 1913), 30-31; Richard Morse Hodge, “The Bible as a Story Book,” *Storytellers’ Magazine*, Vol. 1 No. 5 (November 1913), 294-297.

courses (see figure 1). Public lectures, sponsored by libraries, study groups, and kindergarten associations were found in many regions of the United States. Major publications pointed out the virtues of storytelling. “Is there any gift to be envied and emulated... like that of the story-teller?” queried an article in an 1894 *Harper’s Bazaar*.⁷ The author rhapsodizes about the storyteller’s powers of entertainment and subtle instruction. By 1911 the *New York Times* was commenting on storytelling’s development as a “conscious art,” with a “surprising number of books [that] have been written on the subject and its entire machinery taken apart in order to show precisely how the wheels go around.”⁸ Storytelling manuals sought to give readers practical advice on storytelling, such as on posture, enunciation, and tone. But they did not simply show the “machinery:” they also put forth a philosophy of storytelling’s importance for children and for society generally, arguing that storytelling was a tradition vital to the human race, but one that required resuscitation. Most books on storytelling method also contained selections of stories arranged either by subject, age group of audience, or the moral lesson it taught. Such books proliferated in the 1910s, with publication peaking between 1915 and 1920, mirroring a somewhat less dramatic downturn in public interest (see figure 2).⁹ The authors of storytelling manuals were typically professional storytellers, many of

⁷ “Story-Telling,” *Harper’s Bazar*, Vol. 27, No. 31 (4 August 1894), 61.

⁸ “Story-Telling as a Fine Art,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1911, B780.

⁹ This graph represents books that contain not only stories, but at least a chapter on storytelling method or philosophy; there were significantly more books published as collections of stories for storytelling. The first book that devoted *most* of its material to storytelling method (as opposed to stories to tell), was Sara Cone Bryant’s 1905 *How to Tell Stories to Children*. Since no comprehensive bibliography of books of storytelling exists, this graph aims to be representative, not complete.

whom had begun their careers as kindergarteners, primary teachers or librarians. Despite identifying themselves as artists, writers of such books argued their skills were accessible to anyone with proper guidance and practice.

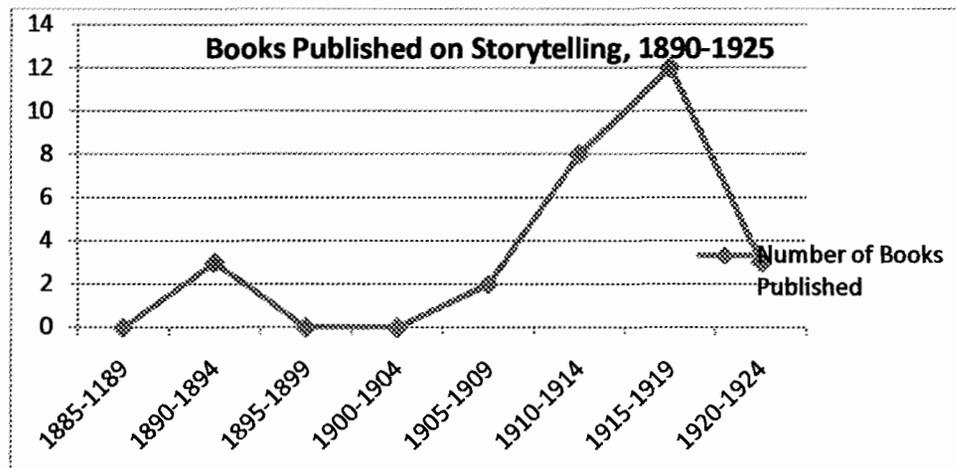


Figure 2, Representing books published on storytelling, with at least one chapter of storytelling methodology (collections only of stories for telling are not included in this figure).

The term “professional storyteller” has practical meaning but does not adequately reflect the complexities of storytellers’ professional situation. No statistics on professional storytellers exist, as “storyteller” was not listed as an occupation in either the 1910 or 1920 census. However, the profession was not confined to a few of rare artistic talent, but was practiced in many urban areas. Some large schools and libraries hired professional storytellers to ensure both that stories were told well and that busy educators could attend to other duties. Playgrounds and settlement houses occasionally hired

professional storytellers, as did, conversely, wealthy families, for entertainment.¹⁰

Storytellers were also popular entertainers at summer resorts. There appear to have been only about a dozen professional storytellers who were well-known enough to regularly appear in national newspapers and to attract crowds at public lectures, and give private ones at colleges. Those prominent figures, such as Marie Shedlock, Seamus McManus, Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen, and Richard Thomas Wyche, portrayed themselves as artists, like the troubadours of the past, as well as holders of hard-earned expertise. Though they acknowledged that to become a master storyteller took many years, they also argued anyone could learn to tell stories well enough for a private or public setting. Shedlock, for example, one of the most vocal about storytelling's artistry, proposed storytellers were "simple narrator[s]... busy displaying the machinery" of their craft whereas professional elocutionists, by contrast, are "anxious to conceal the art."¹¹ Storytellers had expertise, but they argued against erudite knowledge. Rather, they proposed that they were particularly skilled. They were concurrently educators and artists, teaching the public about their craft, and perceiving their calling in poetic and spiritual terms.

The majority of people who took up storytelling during the Progressive Era did so as a parental or professional skill, not as a profession. During the Progressive Era women

¹⁰ For a profile of a professional storyteller to families, see "Story Telling as a Fine Art," *New York Times*, 20 December 1908, X5.

¹¹ Marie Shedlock, *The Art of the Story-Teller*, xiv. Shedlock was perhaps the most beloved and quirky storyteller of the Progressive Era. Imbued with a strong talent for showmanship, she frequently appeared in the costume of a fairy godmother. Her reference to the "machinery" of storytelling is curious, since she was one of the staunchest supporters of storytelling as an art. However, writers on storytelling emphasized the simplicity of learning storytelling, the key elements of which they explained in their books;

sought entry into a wide variety of professions that required significant understanding and skills, but less frequently esoteric knowledge. Women primarily gained entry to such fields as teaching, librarianship, nursing, and settlement work, professions that were supposedly suited to women's capacities for nurturance. Storytelling too was often portrayed as an aptitude inherent in women, because its historical purpose, Progressives argued, was to entertain and instruct children. At the same time, storytelling required practice and was essentially performative. Because storytelling was conceived of as an art as well as a skill acquired through practice and refinement, it was an asset to professional women, and women who wanted to professionalize and intellectualize motherhood, because they appeared more skilled. Many women appear to have thoroughly enjoyed storytelling as a part of their work, but the practical reason why so many women told stories was simple: women worked with children, and storytelling was primarily conceived of as a technique for teaching and forming relationships with children.

In the home, storytelling reinforced the centrality of the family to the child's life. By the 1890s, the bedtime story was supposed to be a time of physical seclusion for mother and child, in which they would exchange confidences prompted by a well-chosen story. Such an exchange would strengthen the bond between mother and child, while emphasizing a moral lesson communicated by the mother and selected through a thorough knowledge of the child's needs. Morality could be taught more generally through the "children's hour," a daily evening gathering for all members of the family. Such gatherings promoted a roughly egalitarian and participatory model for family

events, in which each person, regardless of age, could tell a story or read a passage of a book aloud. The sympathetic mother was not the only educative force in the child's home life, but she was responsible for reifying the importance of the home in the social lives of individual family members. Storytelling reaffirmed the importance of the institution of which women were the primary force of authority.

Storytelling became integrated into the primary school by the early 1900s, part of a shift in the perception of the teacher-student relationship as well as the curriculum. Initially championed by kindergarten teachers, the use of the story spread throughout the early primary grades in the 1890s through the 1910s. Though kindergartens had primarily been an urban phenomenon, their methods influenced education nationally. Kindergarteners, some of the first specially-trained educators for young children, each boasted at least a year's worth of pedagogical training and had an impressively detailed, though not always consistently interpreted, philosophy behind their efforts, that of the movement's founder, Friedrich Froebel. As kindergartens were absorbed into or included in public primary schools, some of their maternal pedagogy was transmitted throughout the beginning grades. In the primary school, storytelling was adopted because it helped the teacher form affectionate bonds with her students. Such a relationship was supposed to make instruction, as well as discipline, much easier. Primary teachers portrayed their use of storytelling as both efficient and effective—it taught children in a way that also entertained them, thereby improving their absorption of the material. The maternalism of the kindergarten's storytelling was tempered in the primary school by concerns for efficiency.

Those who practiced and wrote about children's librarianship, by contrast, rejected the maternal motives many of the writers on pedagogy celebrated. Librarians were in a much more precarious position professionally than teachers, since the public sought their services voluntarily. In the 1870s libraries began to revoke long-standing policies, such as closed stacks (which did not allow patrons to select their own books), and the exclusion of children and sometimes women. By the early 1900s, separate children's sections had become regular features of the library, and librarians could specialize in children's services when they attended the new colleges of library science. Though the adoption of storytelling occasioned debate in the early 1900s, by the 1910s the library story hour emerged as one of the institution's most powerful tools for persuading children to read good literature. The library was modeled to run like a successful business, and storytelling was a form of "advertising" for the library's products—books. Youths would forge a lifelong relationship with the library, which would ensure the library popular support. At the same time, librarians argued leading children to good literature would have a reforming effect on society, both morally and intellectually. The strategy of the library ultimately rested on persuasion, though it was defined with the rhetoric of business.

In each realm, women were defining their place through defining their relationship with children. Conventional wisdom as well as the advice of experts such as physicians, ministers, and educators held that women were fundamentally nurturing and emotionally sensitive toward children. The influence of middle-class women was supposed to be exerted in the home, providing husband and children with emotional

support and moral guidance. Yet women were moving into careers as early as the 1820s and 30s, primarily as teachers, and, particularly after the Civil War, as nurses, librarians, and social workers, jobs that were supposed to tap their feminine qualities. During the Progressive Era, however, these strengths were redefined. The institutions for which many women worked were transforming, consolidating administrations, providing expanded services to the public (and conceiving of the “public” as much broader than before), and seeking to professionalize their workforces in order to provide better services for and have greater authority over this public. Professionalism was largely conceived of as reliant on erudite knowledge, extensive educational training, and primarily masculine skills of rationality and objectivity. Women who aspired to be professionals in these changing institutions had to make the case for possessing these skills or others that were equally valuable.

Storytelling helps show the strategies women used to do this. Primary school teachers, responding to the nurturing imperatives of child-centered education, retained some maternalist overtones to their work, which helped them appear uniquely adept at working with children. As a gentle and affectionate method of indirect instruction, storytelling embodied many characteristics perceived as maternal. Yet teachers also argued storytelling helped them teach more efficiently and effectively, which heightened the sense that they were professionals that met the needs of the public school system, for which “efficiency” was a byword that indicated proper use of public funds. Children’s librarians, however, had a more precarious professional status than teachers because their services were voluntarily consumed. Their jobs were also more difficult: they truly did

have to be efficient, because, at least in urban areas, they often had to assist hundreds of children a day. At the same time, librarians wished to increase the public's use of their services because their institution's success relied on popular support (not exclusivity as, say, a university did). Storytelling was adopted because it increased the popularity of the library, which in turn increased the perception that it was a vital public service.

Librarians could tell stories while rejecting its nurturing implications, because they sought not to create individual relationships with children, but build a relationship between children and the library as an institution.

Multiple meanings could be imprinted on storytelling, and institutions were one setting in which women could take advantage of this. As Robyn Muncy has observed, employed women of the Progressive Era were developing a different professionalism than men because their status often relied on how extensively, not exclusively, they served the public; yet female professionals' status depended on claims to expertise, too.¹² Storytelling helps show that women teachers and librarians negotiated a relationship with children that suited the goals of the institutions for which they labored. Storytelling reaffirmed the child-centeredness of the home, primary school, and library, but in a way that benefited these institutions and the adults, primarily women, who worked for them.

¹² Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 20-21.

CHAPTER II
STORYTELLING IN THE HOME, 1890-1920: FAMILY TIME
AND THE TRADITIONAL HOUSEHOLD

In 1860 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow published “The Children’s Hour,” a poem that described “a pause in the day’s occupations,” when the speaker gathered his children to him.¹³ The poem would provide inspiration for writers on parenting well into the twentieth century. The idea of a time set aside each evening for families to spend together was an attractive one, particularly to authors who warned parents that urban life was fragmenting the social centrality of the household. Storytelling in the home was portrayed as traditional, not innovative, as it would be in the school and library. Storytelling, as well as reading aloud, was perceived as a way to unite the whole family in the evening, as well as provide an education for the youngest members. Whereas the mother’s bedtime story provided the child with highly individualized moral instruction that strengthened their personal bond, in the home, storytelling and reading aloud facilitated a mutually participatory family education, in which children as well as adults enjoyed and learned from great works of literature. Such activities emphasized the importance of the home, even when many of the family’s daily activities took place outside of it.

Sympathetic mothering, proposed in the early 1800s, gained force among the white middle class during the Progressive Era. As Julia Grant has summarized, “Instead

¹³ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Children’s Hour,” line III.

of stringent adherence to the old adage, Spare the rod and spoil the child, the new advice stressed the importance of maintaining the bond of affection between mother and child—meanwhile gently steering the child in the right direction.”¹⁴ Such methods had been extolled by writers on childcare since the Antebellum period. Progressive mothers participated in movements to intellectualize child rearing, such as child study, in which mothers closely observed their children’s behavior and tried to calibrate their parenting to suit the child’s individual needs. For example, child study, founded by the developmental psychologist G. Stanley Hall in the 1890s, viewed childhood romantically. It was one of many social, educative, and pedagogical movements that increasingly valued understanding the child as an individual. Through a strong relationship with and study of the child, mothers would understand how to mold their morals and behavior, thereby being more effective parents. In the 1910s, child psychology was increasingly perceived as a method for understanding and meeting the needs of children. The exigencies of such movements permeated parenting advice books.

Other endeavors aimed to create coursework or academies to prepare girls and young women to be mothers, proposing that although women were naturally maternal, they required a rigorous education to be successful mothers. Classes run by kindergarten teachers for mothers had been popular in urban areas since the mid-nineteenth century, encouraging Romantic notions of childhood as well as pragmatic techniques for home education and child-rearing. During the Progressive Era, mothers interested in child-rearing techniques met in mothers’ clubs to discuss the advice of physicians,

¹⁴ Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 27.

psychologists, ministers, and other parenting experts whose ideas were published in periodicals and parenting manuals, or proposed at public lectures. The domestic science or home economic movement was founded in 1899 to bring scientific expertise to bear on household management. Conversely, the more sentimentalist mothercraft movement, which founded its first school in 1911, provided Froebelian-inspired courses on childcare and home education for young women to prepare them for motherhood. Such movements usually tended toward either sentimental maternalism, which tended to define motherhood in Romantic terms, or progressive maternalism, which associated their efforts more strongly with scientific efforts.¹⁵ Sentimental maternalism tended to dominate from 1890-1910, and progressive maternalism from 1910-1920, but both were significant throughout the time period. Though storytelling appealed to both perspectives, it was more strongly grounded in the sentimental tradition.

Historians of parenting at the turn of the century have generally accepted that “parenting” typically meant “mothering” during this time. Julia Grant points out that by the 1920s a shift was beginning from “sentimental motherhood” to “more gender-neutral ‘parenting.’”¹⁶ In fact, parenting was an ideal as well as mothering during the Progressive Era. What today might be called “family time,” though often orchestrated by mothers, was supposed to be crucial to a child’s development. The story-telling and reading aloud, by children, parents, and elders, was supposed to provide family unity, moral development, and transmit a literary and cultural heritage to children. Such

¹⁵ Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (Fall 1993), 110-11.

¹⁶ Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book*, 58.

educative work was not only the province of the mother, but the whole family. Many historians have focused on “scientific motherhood,” detailing the influence of scientific authority on mothers, particularly mothers of young children.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, that development represented a crucial a paradigm shift in parenting, in which mothers sought the advice of experts to supplement their own maternal abilities and the support and advice offered by friends and kinship networks. But less emphasis has been placed on education in the home, which, despite the expansion of the public school system, remained a focus of home activities.

Such activities, though often occurring at a specific time of the day, were supposed to be opportunities for unstructured enjoyment. Progressive Era writers on parenting perceived the children’s hour as time of relaxation and pleasure apart from the busy activities of their lives. By contrast, some historians have argued that the period saw parents distancing themselves emotionally from their children. Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg argue that “emphasis on procedure and detachment was part of a larger cultural movement at the turn of the century to rationalize, organize, and control the complexities of modern life.”¹⁸ According to Peter Stearns, parenting became increasingly more “anxious,” and professionalism began to “replac[e] sentimentality” at

¹⁷ Rima Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and Century of Advice about Children* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 2003); Daniel Beekman, *The Mechanical Baby* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence & Hill Co., 1978); Ralph La Rossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁸ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 121.

this time.¹⁹ Parenting in the Progressive Era has often been characterized as dominated by the advice of scientific experts and the strictures of regularity. On the contrary, the storytelling movement reveals that a romantic perception of childhood could co-exist with these trends.

Family gatherings and home education, valued by advice writers throughout the nineteenth century, continued to be important. Educational historians of the period have focused almost entirely on public schools, perhaps implying by this absence of research that the home was no longer, as in the nineteenth century, an important locus of didactic activity. Though the public school was rapidly expanding its role into areas formerly thought of as the province of the home, this did not mean parents resigned their responsibilities to educate their children at home, too. In fact, materials for such activities—including manuals on storytelling, home theatricals, and affordable family encyclopedias—proliferated during the Progressive Era. Storytelling and reading aloud provided opportunities for mutual enjoyment of parent and child, which were often also pedagogical opportunities. Their goals were not only moral and literary education, but the strengthening of personal relationships.

Storytelling in the home was proposed in parenting manuals at least as early as the 1870s, and indicated the themes that Progressives would vocally champion. Catharine Beecher advised mothers to tell fretful and impatient children stories to divert them from their feelings. The success of storytelling, she argued, “strongly shows the importance of learning to govern children without the employment of angry tones, which always

¹⁹ Peter Stearns, *Anxious Parents, A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 41.

produce irritation.”²⁰ While storytelling exemplified non-coercive discipline for Beecher, Jacob Abbott, in *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young*, conceived of it as more educative. Stories should communicate moral lessons, he argued, especially at bedtime, when the child is in “a contented and happy frame of mind.”²¹ For Abbott, as for many writers after him, storytelling was about making use of a child’s natural inclinations. Abbott also indicated storytelling was a pedagogical tool for family members, not only mothers. Through storytelling the parent was able to, “establish as close a connection as possible of affection and sympathy” with the child.²² This is borne out later in *Gentle Measures*, when an adolescent boy encourages his younger male and female cousins to keep their room clean by telling them a story, revealing that such a technique is not the province of parents alone, but can be employed by other family members.²³ Many Progressive Era writers would conceive of storytelling in the home as a feminine skill and a mother’s responsibility, as Beecher had perceived it. But ideals of family education persisted.

Sympathetic Mothering and the Bedtime Story

²⁰ Catharine Beecher, *Miss Beecher’s Housekeeper and Healthkeeper* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers: 1874), 409.

²¹ Jacob Abbott, *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers: 1871), 22.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 109-10.

By the early 1900s, just slightly earlier than it achieved a firm place in the school and library, storytelling was considered by writers on parenting and the home as a skill a capable mother should possess. Storytelling was part of the canon of domestic skills championed by such movements (see figure 1), and a plethora of books specifically marketed for the bedtime story had been in circulation since the 1870s.²⁴ Much of this attitude toward storytelling, at least, could be a result of the influence of kindergarten methods, which were recommended by prominent Progressive women from the radical social thinker Charlotte Perkins Gilman to the more conservative Alice Birney, founder of the National Congress of Mothers. Storytelling tapped into progressive women's desires for self-education. Mothers' clubs, local groups of women organized for the purposes of mutual support and the studying of practical and theoretical aspects of parenting, would take up storytelling as one of their subjects. Periodicals such as *American Motherhood* and *Home Progress* published programs for mothers' clubs each month, and in the latter storytelling often fell under the headings of both "moral improvement" and "mental training." Discussions of storytelling in such publications positioned the activity as one an educated mother should learn. "The thoughtful mother,"

²⁴ Louise Chandler Moulton's *Bed-time Stories* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873), *New Bed-time Stories* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1880), and *More Bed-time Stories* (Boston, Roberts Brothers: 1890), the rights to which were bought by Little, Brown, and Co., who printed them during the Progressive Era. Important also were Minnie E. Kenney, *Mother's Bedtime Tales* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1894), Maud Ballington Booth, *Sleepy Time Stories* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), Lettice Bell, *Go-to-Bed Stories* (publication information unknown, published early 1910s), Forbes Jackson, *Twilight Tales* (early 1910s), William Henry Harding, *Twinkle Twinkle Stories* (1910s), and Thornton W. Burgess's *Bedtime Story-Books series*, published by Little, Brown, and Co. in the late 1910s. Maud Ballington Booth was also a prison activist and was profiled in 1904 by the *Ladies' Home Journal*, Vol. XXXIX No. 1 (July 1904), 150-155.

commented Julia Clark Hallam, “begins very early with the telling of stories.”²⁵ On the other hand, reading aloud was often positioned as a sufficient substitute for storytelling, because storytelling in the home put more emphasis on the careful selection of the story than the performance of it. Telling bedtime stories in the home was both a way to be a more effective mother and a way to intellectualize the domestic sphere; it required a thoughtful study of one’s child to ensure that the story told would best shape his or her nature. It also required the ability to create or select meaningful stories that would provide the child with emotional comfort as well as examples of good behavior. Even though children were receiving most of their instruction from the school, mothers still perceived themselves as responsible for a great deal of education in the home, especially moral education. The strong bond forged during the bedtime story facilitated this instruction.

²⁵ Julia Clark Hallam, *Studies in Child Development: A Manual for Mothers and Mothers’ Clubs* (Chicago: Row, Peterson and Co.), 154.



FIGURE 3. A STUDENT OF MOTHERCRAFT PRACTICING STORYTELLING.

Figure 3, Student of Mothercraft practicing storytelling. By the early 1900s, storytelling had become part of the educated and successful mother's canon of skills. From Mary L. Read, "Mothercraft," *The Journal of Hereditary*, Vol. VII No. 8 (August 1918): 338. Originally published Mary L. Read, *The Mothercraft Manual* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1922 [1916]), ii.

Storytelling was portrayed as a skill mothers possessed innately, though they needed both education and practice to develop the skill fully. Nora Archibald Smith, a prominent kindergarten advocate, maintained in a *Ladies' Home Journal* article series that storytelling was crucial to the identity of a woman and mother. "Since the beginning of the world," she argued, "mothers have been story-tellers, forced to practice the art whether they would or not, and since it was not considered essential that they should receive instruction in the schools a larger capacity remained in their minds for the storage

of myth and fable and legend.”²⁶ Smith argues in part that women were forced to become storytellers because of their confinement to the domestic sphere. At the same time she points out their lack of formal instruction, she valorizes the capacities of their minds in remembering myths and fables. “When we talk to women of storytelling,” Smith continues, “then we talk to them of something which is theirs by inheritance as much as an aptitude for needlework, although like the art it needs practice to attain perfection.”²⁷ Smith characterizes storytelling as an “aptitude,” something inherent in woman’s nature, yet needing practice and refinement. Though her position seems paradoxical, it did not appear so to Progressive-Era writers on parenting, who, like many of their nineteenth-century precedents, considered women inherently nurturing, though they needed education to provide them the actual skills of motherhood. Storytelling was no different. “Long before teachers or text-books appeared,” Edward Porter St. John argued, “instruction was given in story form to the children who gathered about the mother’s knee... modern mothers, not knowing why they do it, use the same magic to gain the same ends.”²⁸ To St. John, women’s power of story-telling was innate to the point of being subconscious. However, he, as well as many other writers, described either village elders or the troubadours, not mothers, as the origins of public storytelling. Women thus

²⁶ Nora Archibald Smith, “The Kindergarten Possible to Every Home and Village: In Five Articles, of Which This is the Fourth, Stories and Story-Telling,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, Vol. XVI No. 3 (February 1899), 22.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Edward Porter St. John, *Stories and Story-Telling in Moral and Religious Education* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1910), viii.

had the natural talent for storytelling only in the private sphere, and only with their own children. It was a private and not public performance.

Fathers did not share this inclination to nurture through narrative, though they could learn storytelling, to the benefit of their relationship with their children. Fathers, or men more generally, were never described as having a natural talent for storytelling, though perhaps references to troubadours and minstrels suggested one. However, writers assumed there would be more serious obstacles to fathers' ability to tell stories—little engagement with their children. Walter Hervey wrote that at the bedtime hour, “the interests and distractions of the active day fade.” The child, “turns with intense eagerness, all the greater for his previous absence and absorption in school” to his parents, or, as Hervey described it: “to his mother—and to his father, if his father be parent and not merely progenitor—for companionship, for confidences, for story-telling, for reading literature, and for worship.”²⁹ Fathers could help create a domestic sanctuary, but they were rarely able or inclined to do so. Edna Lyman, however, argued that storytelling and reading aloud, “is a duty, and should be a pleasure, which fathers might well assume, since there is so small a realm where they can cultivate the spirit of companionship with their children. There has been much amusement over the old story of the child who referred to his father as, ‘the man who stays here Sundays.’”³⁰ To Lyman, fathers were handicapped by their frequent absence from home, but they did not

²⁹ Walter L. Hervey, “Training the Memory,” *The Child Welfare Manual: A Handbook of Child Nature and Child Nurture for Parents and Teachers*, Vol. 2 (New York: The University Society, 1915), 89. (article 87-90)

³⁰ Edna Lyman, *Story Telling: What to Tell and How to Tell It*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 38.

have to be. Storytelling was one way for fathers to cultivate relationships with their children, not only because such activities would take place in the evening when fathers were home, but because it was such a powerful way to bond with children. Storytelling could, if fathers would learn it, in part make up for their own absence from home. Thus, storytelling continued to be positioned as a skill that women performed routinely in part out of necessity; it could be a shared skill, writers argued, only if men would take the opportunity.

To tell a bedtime story was to seize an opportunity: children were perceived as more receptive to both affection and instruction right before going to sleep. In Jacob Abbott's *Gentle Measures*, a mother tells her daughter a didactic story at bedtime as an example of his subject, "Choosing the Right Time" for correction.³¹ Such advice proposed discipline to be an instructional, rather than a reactive process, implemented at a time when both parent and child could be thoughtful about it. Instead of harshly disciplining a child when he misbehaved, a parent should tell a story in which the child should perceive a corollary to his own experience. The child would discern right and wrong behavior for himself, which would make the lessons taught by stories more effective, and prevent any obvious exertion of authority on the part of the mother, which could make her seem adversarial. It was not until the early 1900s that writers began to fully explain how the bedtime story was effective. "The child, becoming tired of his toys or of his games, comes to his mother and begs for a story," observed Julia Darrow Cowles, "He wants to be taken into her lap, cuddled within her arms, and entertained. Oh,

³¹ Jacob Abbott, *Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young*, 22.

the wonderful, the far-reaching opportunities held by the mother in such moments as these!”³² Though the child wants to be entertained, the mother can satisfy this impulse as well as instruct him. “The child is in a quiet, receptive mood,” Cowles continued, “and the stories told him at such times will never be forgotten; their influence will follow him as long as he lives. Nothing that he can learn in school in the after years will abide and enter into the essence of his being as will the stories which his mother tells him.” The intimacy of such moments, Cowles argued, facilitates more durable instruction than at other times and settings because it is based on affection and makes use of the child’s natural impulses. What was best taught by these stories was moral: “Strength of character, purity of life, truthfulness, unselfishness, obedience, faith—all may be made beautiful and attractive by means of stories,” Cowles concluded.³³ Ideally bedtime stories prevented infractions, since stories made morality, including obedience, “beautiful and attractive.” Tales of heroism and honor, for example, were portrayed by writers as some of the best bedtime stories. Such instruction was a credit to mothers, who had to be creative and thoughtful enough to select or invent such stories. It also perceived the child as a thoughtful being, able to see the implications of such stories for his own life.

The bedtime hour was perceived as the most effective time of instruction, in part because it was an eddy in the flow of activities and pursuits of life, a time when mother and child could be secluded together. The evening was, in principle, thought to remove distractions of the day. “Darkness or twilight enhances the story interest in children, for

³² Julia Darrow Cowles, *The Art of Story-Telling* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1916), 1-2.

³³ *Ibid.*

it eliminates the distraction of sense and encourages the imagination to unfold its pinions” explained G. Stanley Hall.³⁴ Because of this, it helped eliminate the distractions of everyday life. The physician Le Grand Kerr argued, “The hour of bedtime offers a wonderful opportunity for character molding,” because this is when there is quiet from the “necessary rush of modern life.”³⁵ To Kerr, the busy quality of modern life prevented the thoughtful “molding” of character necessary for good parenting. To writers the bedtime hour was a domestic refuge where mother and child could be sheltered from the outside world, a sort of sanctuary within even the sanctuary of the home. “Nothing else so closely links mother and child in a sweet fellowship and communion of thought,” rhapsodized Julia Darrow Cowles, “Nothing else so intimately binds them together, nor so fully secures the confidence of the child. When they enter together the enchanted realm of storyland, mother and child are in a region apart, a region from which others are excluded.” The emphasis on storytelling was on segregation of mother and child from the busyness of life, as well as other people. “And so the mother,” Cowles concluded, “by means of stories, becomes the intimate companion, the loving and wise guide, the dearest confidant of her child.”³⁶ The authority the mother had was that of a guide, because the child willingly perceived her as a confidante. The language of companionship was pervasive in such a view. As in the school and kindergarten, the medium of the story

³⁴ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, Vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1905), 474.

³⁵ Le Grand Kerr, *The Care and Training of Children* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1910), 176.

³⁶ Julia Darrow Cowles, *The Art of Story-Telling*, 2.

facilitated stronger bonds between teller and listener. But uniquely, the bedtime hour was a time for mother and child to be alone, “in a region apart,” happy in isolation from the busy world, which facilitated their experience. Such gatherings reaffirmed the primacy of the mother-child bond.

At the bedtime hour, relationships could be forged that exemplified the ideals of sympathetic motherhood because, though the mother had authority, her relationship to the child was based on affection and confidence. The story hour was less performative than interactive; the story was supposed to stimulate the child’s desire to tell his mother his thoughts and feelings. “The ‘story hour’ is invaluable,” explained Julia Clark Hallam, “not only for the imparting of information, but for the mutual exchange of confidences and the establishment of sympathetic relations between mother and child... Bedtime is a good place for the story, either told or read...”³⁷ The model of storytelling put forth by Hallam and others show that not only were stories told at this time, but important personal confidences were exchanged which were encouraged by the setting and the story. Instead, she used her strong relationship with the child to sway his or her feelings, and the child’s confidence in them to influence, rather than direct, the child. “There is nothing that gives readier entrance to the innermost chambers of the heart, reveals the ideals budding therein, and gives greater opportunity for the mother to make herself in reality, instead of merely in sentiment, the child’s most confidential friend than the simple story,” proclaimed one mothering manual.³⁸ The power of storytelling lay in its ability to

³⁷ Julia Clark Hallam, *Studies in Child Development*, 154.

³⁸ “Story-Telling,” *The Mothers’ Book*, ed. Caroline Benedict Burrell (New York: The University Society, 1909), 104. (article 104-107)

give mothers an access point into the very self of their children; sympathetic parenting depended on this knowledge.

The bedtime story was particularly effective for moral instruction because it allowed mothers to cultivate proper feeling and behavior. Mary Wood-Allen, a physician who edited *American Motherhood* and wrote a regular advice column therein, regularly advised storytelling as a method of moral instruction at this hour because a mother best made her child, “feel her deep sympathy with them in all their perplexities.”³⁹

Particularly if the child had not behaved well that day, Wood-Allen frequently pointed out, it was a time to tell a thinly veiled allegory about what they had done, thereby providing situation-specific and individualized instruction. In one article, entitled, “How Two Mothers Said, ‘No,’” Wood-Allen contrasts the behavior of two mothers who refused their daughters’ requests to attend a party. One mother responds harshly and sarcastically in the negative, and her daughter grows to resent her, while her desire to go to parties increases. The other mother does not respond in any definitive way at first, but at her daughter’s request to tell a fairy story at bedtime, she relates a narrative about a fairy who stayed out past dark and was taken by the Black Elves. Her daughter, after pondering the story, comes to realize that attending a late-night party would be inappropriate. Instead of resenting her mother, she appreciates her indirect methods and tells her, “You are such a lovely mama, and you do have the beautifullest ways of saying,

³⁹ Mary Wood-Allen, *Making the Best of Our Children* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1909), 155.

‘No.’”⁴⁰ The relationship between mother and daughter only grows stronger by such a method even though it was still disciplinary. At the foundation of such an exchange was the idea that children, naturally wanting to do good, could thoughtfully be taught right feeling. “The story is helpful,” wrote Michael O’Shea, “...because *it helps the child to feel what is good*. The child is by nature prepared to feel strongly in response to stories.”⁴¹ The “sacred confidence” facilitated by the story that Wood-Allen described allowed for such improvement of feeling to take place. It was the most effective form of discipline because it could correct the child’s current behavior, and it shaped his sense of morality for the future.

As a foil for the sympathetic mother, whose actions were based on education and deep personal knowledge of their children, writers condemned the uncouth, indiscriminate, and perhaps immigrant hired nurse who used the power of storytelling for short-term, coercive discipline. Physicians, educators, and non-professional writers on childcare alike wrote as early as the 1890s that scary stories, told by nurses to frighten children into good behavior, would permanently handicap the emotional development of children, making them chronically fearful and prone to night terrors. “A nurse who tells a child a ghost-story or who makes it fear the dark is little short of a criminal, and

⁴⁰ Mary Wood-Allen, “How Two Mothers Said ‘No,’” *Making the Best of Our Children*, 183. Wood-Allen’s technique was similar to many writers on mothering and parenting, who told the reader stories as a way to explain their precepts.

⁴¹ Micahel V. O’Shea et al., “Some Practical Methods of Moral Education (With Special Emphasis on Moral Training by Story-Telling),” *The Child Welfare Manual*, 404. (article 403-6)

deserves to be punished as such,” pronounced John Price Griffith vehemently.⁴² The long-term consequences of allowing scary stories to be told could be dire: “A nurse, anxious to win her own ends at any cost, may tell stories of lurking hobgoblins and wicked fairies, and lay a spell of cowardly distress on the child in her charge,” argued Margaret Sangster.⁴³ At the first meeting of the National Congress of Mothers, the crowd applauded when a speaker criticized nursemaids who told scary stories to children.⁴⁴ To Charlotte Perkins Gilman, this tendency was an indication that a better-educated workforce for childcare was needed, such as those instructed in kindergarten principles.⁴⁵ Such strong reactions suggest that the trope of the ignorant nurse, whether there was a profusion of them in existence or not, represented both improper storytelling and improper childcare more generally. Implicitly, such an emblem justified mothers’ own careful study of storytelling. It took an educated, caring, and discriminating parent to wield such a power.

Since the school also used instructive tales to ameliorate children’s behavior, it was difficult to discern the discrepancies between the two methods. But the bedtime story helps to reveal the boundaries between the two institutions. The bedtime story was

⁴² John Price Crozer Griffith, *The Care of Baby*, third edition (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders & Co., 1903), 208.

⁴³ Margaret Sangster, *Radiant Motherhood: A Book for the Twentieth Century Mother* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1905), 106-7.

⁴⁴ Eki Hioki, “Conditions Affecting the Education of Children in Japan,” *Report of the National Congress of Mothers* (Washington, D.C.: The National Congress of Mothers, 1905), 141. (article 136-147)

⁴⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Concerning Children*, Boston: Small, Maynard & Co. (1901), 222-3.

much more intimate, not only in its setting, but in the way a mother could tailor stories to suit the need of her child. “Through the simple art of storytelling” one writer urged, “the mother possesses the key to the hidden nature of the child.”⁴⁶ Though primary school teachers were concerned with understanding their pupils as individuals, they were rarely portrayed as having access to this “hidden nature.” Progressives argued that storytelling in the home was superior because it could provide more specific attention. George and Emelyn Partridge argued, “In the home story-telling may be applied to the individual needs of the child... [it] can be made to do good service in controlling the tendencies of individuals; in helping to bring out their desirable traits, and in checking the undesirable.”⁴⁷ Thus, mothers did not simply shape behavior, as the school described it, but, through the deep personal knowledge of the child as an individual that mothers possessed, they could mold the very personality of the child. Such advice assumed that mothers were constantly thinking of their children’s characters and deciding what sort of educative stories they might need, a technique would be impractical in the school. Though the distinction seems a fine one, since the motives were essentially the same, Progressives found it was significant. Explained a National Congress of Mothers publication, “The mother feels also that in her intimate acquaintance with her child she has a key to much which the teacher cannot understand... But, on the other hand, the teacher sees a side often never revealed to the mother, and she has the advantage of the

⁴⁶ “Story Telling for Mother,” *The Storytellers’ Magazine*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (June 1913): 32. (article 31-32)

⁴⁷ Emelyn and George Partridge, *Story-Telling in School and Home: A Study in Educational Aesthetics* (New York: Sturgis & Walton Co., 1914), 83.

perpetual comparison year after year of a multitude of varying types.”⁴⁸ To Progressives, storytelling in the home and in the school represented two completely different types of knowledge: one deeply personal, the other personal yet grounded in broader empirical experience. Both had value, but such notions reinforced the idea that, though the child may spend a great deal of his time at school, the home—and mothers—provided something unique. The bedtime story served to reinforce the mother-child bond as crucial to the well-being of the child.

Family Time and “The Children’s Hour”

The image of a family gathered around the living room hearth or lamp, taking turns telling stories or reading aloud, was powerful during the Progressive Era. Such evenings, known as the “children’s hour,” were valued as a way to educate children and help them develop relationships with family members, counteracting the temptations and distractions of urban life. Such fondness for the fireside was not new. An 1856 article on storytelling described, “What a source of pleasure is found here by the children, gathered around the fireside... Aged sires and matrons still recall with delight such seasons of their long-past juvenile history.”⁴⁹ But sentiments such as this intensified dramatically during the Progressive Era, as writers portrayed such evenings as important to a child’s

⁴⁸ Emily Huntington Miller, “Mutual Obligations of Mothers and Teachers,” *Parents and Their Problems: Co-Operation in Home and School, Church and State*, 128.

⁴⁹ Reverend William M. Thayer, “Story-Telling,” *The Happy Home and Parlor Magazine* (1 July 1856), 43.

development as well as to family dynamics. Though orchestrated by mothers, the children's hour relied on both parents to educate their children. The point of such evenings was to create a warm domestic atmosphere that encouraged mutual participation of all members of the family as equally important. However, such parenting was markedly less intimate than that performed by the mother during the bedtime story. The children's hour relied on transmission of a literary heritage, rather than intimate knowledge of the child, to improve the moral and social life of the child.

Emmett Holt believed that, "American life is every year becoming more complex."⁵⁰ Writers on parenting worried that modern inventions such as film, and the wealth of social activities offered in urban areas, were lessening the importance of the home. As Stephanie Coontz has pointed out, such concerns began in the U.S. at least by 1850.⁵¹ Writers fretted that the loss of the status of the home as a center of production would fracture families socially. "The collective life was fostered and furthered in the old home by the economic interests which centered about it," pointed out psychologist Irving King.⁵² "This then is our problem," he explained,

⁵⁰ Emmet Holt, "Physical Care of Children, National Congress of Mothers Third Convention, in Ann Hulbert, *Raising America*, 34.

⁵¹ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 12. For more on nostalgia and parenting during the Progressive Era, see Laura L. Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁵² Irving King, "The Character-Forming Possibilities of Home Life," *Parents and Their Problems: Ideals of Child Training*, ed. Mary Harmon Weeks (Washington, D.C.: The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1914), 126. (article 121-134)

If the values of home life have been lost or are endangered by changed economic and social conditions, let us try to grasp the ideal more consciously and bend determined efforts toward realizing it in spite of unfavorable external circumstances... If the home which we have described as normal is of the right type *then it can and must be preserved.*⁵³

King defined the “normal” home as one at center of economic production and social life, which had been much more the case in the Early Republic than the Progressive Era, when middle-class homes, at least, did not produce any goods. To Progressive Era writers on parenting, setting aside time for the family in the evening was a way to “bend determined efforts” to preserve the dynamics of this household. Though households of the past, especially during the Early Republic, had been hierarchical, Progressives tended to focus on the loss of the home’s general importance, and the interdependence of its members not only for economic resources, but for education, religious instruction, and social activities.

The way for busy parents to preserve traditional home life was to set aside one hour of each day to spend together, generally in pursuit of literary activities. Families drew inspiration from Longfellow’s “The Children’s Hour.” The poem was popular immediately after its publication, and a children’s periodical and at least one collection of stories in the 1860s and 70s drew their names from it. The poem describes a time, “Between the dark and the daylight,” whence, “Comes a pause in the day’s occupations/ That is known as the Children’s Hour.”⁵⁴ At this time, the speaker gathers his children around him and puts them, metaphorically, “In the round-tower of my heart.”⁵⁵ During the Progressive Era, the spontaneous gathering described in the poem was reconceived as

⁵³ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁴ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Children’s Hour,” lines I, III-IV.

⁵⁵ Ibid., line XXXVI.

a time set aside for planned family time. Though Longfellow makes no mention of storytelling or reading aloud, Progressives perceived the children's hour as the most apt time for such activities, which were educative as well as conducive to family socializing. Storytelling was often a part of other pursuits, such as home theatricals, games, and conversation, but was considered preeminent among these. Though Progressives hoped to capture some of the spontaneity of Longfellow's poem, they felt the best way to do this was to spend the after-dinner hour in family pursuits. Progressives were attracted to the spontaneous gathering described in the poem, they did not necessarily expect spontaneity in their own homes, and instead thought creating a regular time was most effective to ensuring such time was spent together. "If the family is all together for one event of the day, it is by special effort," observed a writer in *Education* magazine.⁵⁶ The reason such a regularized time was necessary was that individual family members were each engaged in their own activities outside the home.

The Romantic poem provided inspiration for a literary evening family hour. Bell Elliot Palmer wrote in *American Motherhood*, "Undoubtedly the greatest act of wisdom shown by Longfellow was his appreciation and recognition of the children's hour."⁵⁷ Palmer described it as a time for reading aloud, playing, and conversing with the children. But, though many supported the notion that such time should not be rigorously structured, the majority of writers saw a specific educative and social goal to the children's hour, that of mutual enjoyment as well as education of the young. Published

⁵⁶ Oliver Van Wagen, "Speaking in Public," *Education*, Vol. XXXI No. 10 (June 1911): 672.

⁵⁷ Bell Elliot Palmer, "Some Suggestions for the Home," *American Motherhood*, 252.

sets of stories were particularly marketed for such times, and organized around particular themes, such as myths or holidays. One of the most popular children's storybooks sets, Eva March Tappan's *The Children's Hour*, a 10-volume collection first published in 1907, was frequently lauded by writers as possessing stories suitable for the whole family.⁵⁸ Each volume had a theme, from science to myth to humorous stories. *The Children's Hour* was also the name of a slightly less ambitious book series by Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, the most popular writer on storytelling. Reviewers of such books emphasized that every member of the family, regardless of age or gender, could be entertained or learn from such stories, but the children's hour was, not surprisingly, for the benefit of the youngest family members. "With a good and varied library to choose from, and a regular book-hour for story-telling or reading aloud," observed Frances Jenkins Olcott, "parents may not only accomplish wonders in the education of their children, but they may bring about the mutual enjoyment that will as time goes on result in a deep, tender, and abiding friendship between themselves and their boys and girls." As Olcott elucidates, the purpose of the children's hour was twofold: to provide them with an education, particularly a literary one, and to cultivate an "abiding friendship" between the parents and their children. Such friendship makes the family circle more enjoyable generally; it is a time of "mutual enjoyment." The lasting result of such activities, Olcott argues, is that, "after years those children will look back with grateful memories to the social hour which gave them not only their love of books, but brought

⁵⁸ The collection was expanded to 15 volumes by 1916.

them nearer to their home.”⁵⁹ To Olcott, the children’s hour was an expression of sympathetic parenting, as well as an effective method of home education.

Writers evoked a past in which such family gatherings were regular occurrences, before distractions outside the home took people away from them. Edna Lyman lamented, “Whether it is the greater ease with which we are conveyed from spot on the earth to a far distant one, and the rate of speed which is ours to command, that has affected our mental attitude so that we feel the necessity of equal rapidity in all we do, certain it is that things which once had a place in our lives are now crowded out on the plea that there is no time for them.” One of the most regrettable losses to modernity, she argues, is “the gentle art of reading aloud.”⁶⁰ Lyman muses that both the physical and mental experience of modern people have changed, and that quieter pastimes abandoned as a result. Though Lyman is not specific about the loss of such “gentle arts,” others directly condemned the activities that distracted both parents and children from the home. “Old-fashioned home life seems almost to have passed away with other things which make memory sacred,” wrote Mabel Hill, a contributor to *Home Progress*, “We look back on the so-called ‘family circle’ . . . to find that the home in many cases is no longer a ‘circle,’ but rather a ‘tangent’!”⁶¹ Hill laments the fracturing of home life into different activities and organizations outside of the home which have replaced the household as a locus of social activity. She argues that it was, “at the fireside the poetry and story-

⁵⁹ Frances Jenkins Olcott, *The Children’s Reading* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912), 38-9.

⁶⁰ Edna Lyman, *Story-Telling: What to Tell and How to Tell It*, 31-2.

⁶¹ Mabel Hill, “Educational Recreation in the Home,” *Home Progress*, 14.

telling, the reading aloud, the merry impromptu theatricals, and the little courtesies of comradeship which must develop in such conjunctive relation," that was lost.⁶² The children's hour was a crucial time of development for the child, not only because of what they learned from such stories, but because of the "little courtesies of comradeship"—the social benefits of such a time. Family time, and all its virtues, had been weakened by urban life, and families needed to set aside particular time in order to preserve the traditional household. Such a charge was laid upon both parents for the betterment of their children, as well as the family more generally.

Fathers, who particularly suffered from the distractions of urban and professional life, were described as having a particularly worthwhile opportunity to parent their children through the children's hour. By turns sympathetic to working fathers and condemning their supposed lack of interest in their offspring, both male and female writers urged them to learn storytelling for the purpose of the children's hour.

Exemplifying attitudes on fathers and storytelling, William James Sly observed,

The instinct of story-telling is, undoubtedly, more natural with the mother... But many a father would greatly enrich his own life and his boy's childhood memory by less absorption in the evening paper, the monthly magazine, or the club in order to attend to this soul-hunger of his boy's mind. Longfellow, the great lover of children, had the father as the story-teller in mind, when he pictured "The Children's Hour."⁶³

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ William James Sly, *World Stories Retold for Modern Boys and Girls, With Practical Suggestions for Telling* (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1914), 8.

This, Sly argues, would allow fathers to, “attract their children and ennoble their life by stories” providing them with a “priceless heritage.”⁶⁴ Unlike mothers, fathers are not naturally gifted in storytelling, but they could, and should, learn, if they would abandon their preoccupation with goings-on outside the home. Though he takes great license with Longfellow’s poem, Sly holds Longfellow as an example of sympathetic fathering to which other men may aspire. Stereotypes of the absent father were common, and the potent power of storytelling was seen an antidote to the weak bonds between father and child. Walter Taylor Field, author of the popular *Fingerposts to Children’s Reading*, proposed that both parents could become too distracted to tell stories to children, but that a father, “perhaps cannot think of a story, as his literature is confined for the most part to the stock market and politics.”⁶⁵ Business was supposed to weigh heavily on a middle-class father’s mind, to the point where he neglected other duties and was remiss in developing parental skills. Yet fathers were not asked to drastically reduce their interests outside the home; storytelling was seen as an efficient way to build relationships with children. Interestingly, it was rarely noted if this shared duty would improve the bonds of husband and wife, though a drawing from one text on the children’s hour suggests there was some mutuality in the event (see figure 2). Parenting, particularly in relation to home education, was an ideal, as well as mothering, though fathers were depicted as having to overcome greater odds to participate.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Walter Taylor Field, *Fingerposts to Children’s Reading* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1911), 31.

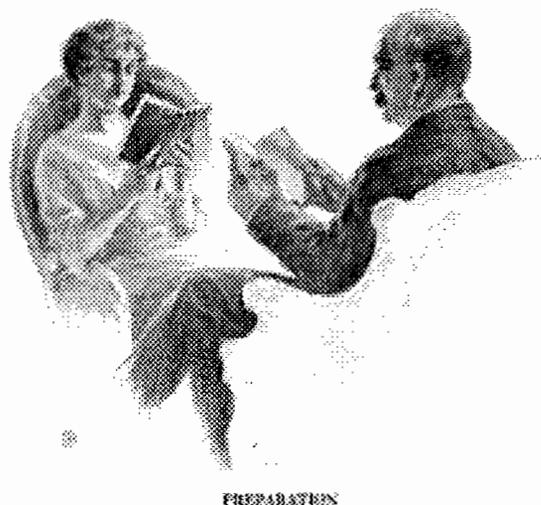


Figure 4, Preparing to tell stories for the children’s hour. An evening hour was considered an ideal time for “parenting,” rather than just “mothering” of children. Parents would have likely read some of the dozens of storytelling collections and manuals on the subject. From Robert Newton Linscott, Introduction, Robert Newton Linscott, ed., *A Guide to Good Reading* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), ix.

While many stressed a parental role, others held the ideal children’s hour as inclusive of extended family, bridging the differences between generations and including all family members in a vision of ideal child-rearing. Contrary to the increasing stratification of age during the Progressive Era, as child development was described in stages and education in grades, the children’s hour was supposed to support activities that crossed the boundaries of age.⁶⁶ Kate Upton Clark applauded a family whose children’s hour included two siblings, a cousin, parents, and grandparents. They all, “love to gather around the evening lamp for a half-hour or so before the regular evening occupations.”

⁶⁶ For more on age division, see Daniel T. Rogers, “Socializing Middle-Class Children: Institutions, Fables, and Work Values in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*, ed. N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 119-134.

begin, and enjoy a good book which one reads aloud.”⁶⁷ The image of family members taking turns reading aloud was a powerful one, suggesting mutual participation in education. Reading aloud was an acceptable substitute for storytelling in many cases because it gave each member a chance to participate in the same narrative. Children also got to practice their reading skills, both by hearing proper reading and by reading themselves. The literature itself also was something to be shared. The imagery writers used for the children’s hour consistently evoked themes of mutual literary and social enjoyment. Advertisements in mother’s magazines for the most popular children’s periodicals of the time, *St. Nicholas* and *Youth’s Companion*, depicted the whole family gathered around the evening lamp to read their publications. As Adah F. Whitcomb described it, “Reading together forms a bond of common interest,” even across generational divides.⁶⁸ Frances Olcott idealized the education extended family could bring to children: “One grandmother of to-day, the centre and life of her large household, has, by dint of her systematic reading aloud, and careful selection of books, developed the literary taste of six children of her own, and two nephews, and is now pursuing the same course with three grandchildren.”⁶⁹ Olcott continues to point out how highly educated and well-grounded the children have become. Part of the reason such home education is effective, she indicates, is that it was enjoyable, and it involved many

⁶⁷ Kate Upson Clark, *Bringing Up Boys: A Study* (Boston: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1899), 131.

⁶⁸ Adah F. Whitcomb, “The Family Reading Table,” *The Publishers’ Weekly*, Vol. XCVII No. 4 (24 January 1920): 201. (article 201)

⁶⁹ Frances Jenkins Olcott, *The Children’s Reading*, 33.

members of the family. The older generation should not be included simply because they are part of the family, but because they help transmit an important cultural heritage.

Writers on storytelling and parenting argued that without such family time, Americans would lose a cultural and particularly literary heritage. Similar to the goals of the library hour, one of the major goals of the children's hour was to transmit a literary, rather than an oral heritage. Family time should instruct children in good literature, from which they would learn proper morals and quality reading, rather, as in the bedtime story, than hear a story particularly tailored to their needs. Similar to storytelling in the library, the children's hour was often closely linked to a canon of literature. To some, the literary function of the children's hour was to monitor children's reading for moral purposes. Books that had stood the test of time were most desirable, particularly those that, unlike the public library, provided religious instruction. In homes of the past, Irving King pointed out, "the only books were the Bible, 'Paradise Lost,' 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and perhaps 'Robinson Crusoe'; and the frequent and loving reading aloud of these classics furnished the capstone to the wall of spiritual unity that surrounded the family circle."⁷⁰ To King, literature worth passing on was what had already been sanctioned by the past. Though such texts were common, they had the power to build "the wall of spiritual unity that surrounded the family circle" in each home, because they taught crucial important, durable lessons. The effect was that, "The children had not only their taste for enduring literature developed but they acquired in this way also a fund of sound moral principles

⁷⁰ Irving King, "The Character Forming Possibilities of Home Life," *Parents and Their Problems: Child Welfare in Home, School, Church and State*, Mary Harmon Weeks, ed. (Washington, D.C.: The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations, 1914), 126 (article 121-134)

which were bound to find expression in their work-a-day lives.”⁷¹ Classic literature communicated the best principles youths should learn, and such principles were important as much outside the home as in it. As one writer for *Home Progress* contended, the children’s hour was a simple way to guide children to reading the “right stories” in terms of the moral message of the material.⁷² But as King pointed out, it also provided a “spiritual unity” to the home.

Significantly, King observed that such family evenings had been disrupted in cities by the “various cheap entertainments” found there, but that the children’s hour could lure family members back to the home circle.⁷³ A wholesome, educative home life, epitomized by the children’s hour, was positioned in opposition to vapid and corrupting commercial entertainments. “What does the average American family know about sitting, ‘around the evening lamp,’ regardless of differing ages...?” queried a Mrs. James Farley Cox, “The bewildering voices of the world—so exciting, so alluring—call to the young to come where their different fancies can be gratified”⁷⁴ Though more cynical than other writers, Cox proposed the same solution: having regular family time in the evening that focused on reading aloud. Edward Bok, the editor of *The Ladies’ Home Journal*, asserted that this family time was an advertisement for the home itself, making use of the same strategy as city entertainment:

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “The Right Age for a Story,” *The Editor’s Talk to Members*, *Home Progress*, Vol. 6 (article 6-7).

⁷³ Irving King, “The Character Forming Possibilities of Home Life,” 127.

⁷⁴ Mrs. James Farley Cox, “Reading Aloud in Our Homes,” *Reading and Home Study*, ed. Duffield Osborne et. al (New York: The University Society, 1902), 157.

There is not much place for the attractions of the street or the ‘show’ where ‘the greatest things in the world’ are appetizingly brought out under the evening lamp... let the children read... The roots of home progress—that is, real progress—lie deeply embedded in the simple practice of reading out loud: making the family one; making its interests united; with full play for questionings and individual expression.⁷⁵

To Bok, the children’s hour supported “individual expression” but was primarily to “mak[e] the family one.” Children are only attracted to the city streets if their home life is uninteresting or unsatisfying. Reading aloud, he proposes, would remedy such disinterest, not only keeping children in the home physically where they could be monitored, but creating real family unity, in an intellectual sense.

As much as writers discussed the children’s hour in terms of family unity, mothers were still supposed to orchestrate such events. The advice of the children’s hour was primarily directed at women, and disseminated through mothers’ clubs. Publications that were also read by men, from YMCA periodicals to the *Atlantic Monthly*, did mention such evenings. But specific advice on how to create a successful children’s hour was overwhelmingly directed at women. Though it was rarely stated explicitly, perhaps to further the ideal of mutual participation, it was the mother’s influence that was to inaugurate the children’s hour in the home. One parenting manual proposed, “Reading aloud is a means of family enjoyment which unites the household, keeps the boys and girls home in the evening, and gives the father a chance to contribute to the household something better than coals and shoes.”⁷⁶ The mother is unmentioned, indicating she is

⁷⁵ Edward Bok, “Where the Roots of Home Progress Lie,” *Home Progress* (September 1912), 52.

⁷⁶ George Hodges, *The Happy Family* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., Publishers, 1906), 32.

the reader to whom the advice is addressed. The author, George Hodges, argues that this “means of family enjoyment” is an opportunity for all to participate, but it is clearly the mother’s responsibility to ensure this happens, particularly that the father fulfils his own role as parent. Speaking of an ideal family’s children’s hour, Kate Upton Clark observed, “It was the custom of the mother, who usually does the reading, to go beforehand through the book to be read, and carefully note for omission parts which would sound indelicate when read aloud, or which are unduly disagreeable.”⁷⁷ This suggests that mothers had the primary role in determining wholesome literature for the rest of the family, and that this was important in keeping the evening appropriate for all ages; that is, her selection and censorship helped determine the mutual enjoyment of the evening. Though this was probably not the case in all families, it is significant that Clark finds it advisable. Thus while the children’s hour was to be a family effort, women still bore much of the responsibility for facilitating such domestic harmony.

The children’s hour reinforced the centrality of the home as both an educational and moral institution, while at the same time providing attractive entertainment that would effectively prevent the child from enjoying an excess of urban delights. Thus though the children’s hour was rooted in Romantic perceptions of childhood and tinged with nostalgia, is provided what writers saw as a practical strategy against both modern life and the attractions of the city. The act of holding a children’s hour itself, as well as the classic literature it aimed to pass on to youths, were both conceived of as traditional and culturally important activities. However, traditional though they were, they also

⁷⁷ Kate Upton Clark, *Bringing Up Boys*, 132.

needed to be regularized in the home to prevent their loss. And though the children's hour was thought of as traditional, it was part of a century-long shift in methods of parenting and family structure. The children's hour epitomized sympathetic parenting, loosening the hierarchy of the family. Yet it went even further than this: though parents and older family members retained authority in terms of what stories were told or books read, the point of the children's hour was to valorize the contribution of each individual to the educational and social life of the whole family. The children's hour set an ideal for family time that met the wishes and needs of each family member, and thereby promoted the cohesion of the family as a whole. It reaffirmed the family's traditional place as the social and educative center of life.

The bedtime story was more intimate, a deeply personal exchange between mother and child. The bedtime story was supposed to provide a foundation of confidence upon which the relationship between mother and child would grow. It was also a time for mothers to provide individualized moral instruction, distinct from the more general moral instruction in the school. The bedtime story, like the children's hour, was interactive; the child participated in his own parenting by sharing confidences in the bedtime story or reading aloud during the children's hour. However, it is significant that the children's hour was less personal than the bedtime story. Though writers urged fathers to tell stories at bedtime, they also portrayed this as unlikely to occur. A more structured children's hour was more fitting. The role of fathers was to assist in providing a literary heritage and a moral framework through this structure, rather than through a deep knowledge of the child's specific needs. Such attitudes show that mothers were still to be

the closest “friend” of the child, even though other family members had a similarly sympathetic role. Storytelling in the home reaffirmed the family as central to proper child development, and the primacy of the affectionate mother within this paradigm.

CHAPTER II
STORYTELLING AND THE CHILD-CENTERED
SCHOOL CURRICULUM, 1890-1920

“A story,” advised a 1915 handbook on reading instruction, “is often the best medium of establishing a bond of sympathy between children and teacher. It is an effective instrument for creating the necessary ‘rapport;’ it is an ‘open sesame’ to the heart of children.”⁷⁸ Though comments like these were common during the Progressive Era, educators of a generation earlier would have wondered why opening the hearts of their students was so desirable; such advice sounded like it belonged to the home, not the school. In a transition from school-centered to child-centered education, primary school teaching became a maternal profession. As these positions became filled almost exclusively by women, standards of teacher-student interaction changed, and so did the school curriculum. One addition to the curriculum, considered a revolutionary pedagogical reform, was storytelling. Though storytelling served a kaleidoscope of classroom functions, it was perceived as the ideal medium for cultivating students’ affection for teacher. Storytelling helped liberalize the school’s rigid curriculum and permanently altered the student-teacher relationship, becoming a driving force in the shift from a school-centered model—in which the child was subservient to the curriculum—to a child-centered model, in which the curriculum

⁷⁸ Paul Klapper, *Teaching Children to Read* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1915), 94.

was designed around the student's needs. At the same time storytelling was defined by nurturing, child-centered imperatives, it was discussed in terms of greater school efficiency.

Teaching was increasingly the sphere of women in nineteenth century America. By 1860, women teachers were the majority in New England, the Midwest, and the urban South.⁷⁹ This trend, which had begun in the 1830s, became more pronounced after the Civil War. By 1915, women were the overwhelming majority of teachers in all states, particularly New England (91%), and held virtually all primary school positions.⁸⁰ Many women entered teaching because it was an intellectually stimulating career opportunity among the few available to females.⁸¹ Some pedagogical ideals had been maternal since the time of Catharine Beecher and Horace Mann. By the Progressive Era women made up virtually all primary school teachers, and national publications on education began to be put forth articulating pedagogy more comprehensively. The ideals of maternalism became much more firmly rooted. Jo Anne Preston has pointed out that,

Over the course of the nineteenth century... teaching became women's work not only statistically but ideologically and prescriptively as well... The best teachers

⁷⁹ Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, Table 1.1, "Percentage of Women among Teachers in the United States, 1860," *Women's Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 22.

⁸⁰ Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, Table 4.1, "Percentage of Female Teachers in the United States by Region, 1870-1915," *Women's Work?*, 90.

⁸¹ For an insightful look at diaries and personal writings of female teachers, in which they reveal many of their financial and professional ambitions, see Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (December 1993): 531-551. See also Madelyn Holmes and Beverly J. Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers: Scenes from American Educational History* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

were now not expected to manifest the manly virtues of intellectual superiority, emotional restraint, and physical dominance; instead, those recommending a shift to female educators, borrowing language from the newly emergent ideology of domesticity, argued that the most effective teacher would draw upon the female qualities of emotionality, maternal love, gentleness, and moral superiority.”⁸²

Preston points out that the most “effective” teacher was female, but female teachers were also the most efficient. In the Progressive Era, “Efficiency became more than a byword in the educational world; it became an urgent mission.”⁸³ Faced with rapidly growing schools in urban areas, the concept and implementation of efficiency became a paramount concern of schools.

For much of the nineteenth century, schools were school-centered or “scholiocentric,” a model in which discipline is corporeal and, “Teachers dominate the classroom, students are seen as recipients of the teacher’s instruction, and curriculum is categorized into courses and tracks.”⁸⁴ In child-centered education, by contrast, “the teacher becomes more of an orchestrator or artist, giving up some authority or control to gain student interest and involvement.”⁸⁵ Though female teachers had taken part in the scholiocentric model before, pedagogy during the Progressive Era aligned with trends in

⁸² Jo Anne Preston, “Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women’s Work in Nineteenth-Century New England,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (December 1993): 29-30. For more on maternalism in teaching, see Joel Perimann and Robert A. Margo, *Women’s Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 29.

⁸³ Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 76.

⁸⁴ Ann Lieberman, “The Changing Context of Education,” *The Changing Contexts of Teaching*, ed. Ann Lieberman, Ninety-First Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education, 1992), 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

parenting and psychology that argued adults should be responsive to children's emotional needs, and that women were especially equipped to do so.⁸⁶ Storytelling became an important component of child-centered education because it was perceived as a teaching method children naturally enjoyed and instinctively responded to. It would help redefine the teacher-student relationship as affectionate, influencing the child to want to behave well, rather than disciplining him.

Storytelling is valuable in showing how maternalist ideals of teaching changed the day-to-day curriculum and experience of the primary school classroom. Historians of Progressive Era education have traditionally focused on broad trends such as pedagogy or school modernization. Most historians accept that the "feminization" of teaching occurred as more women entered the field, but there have been few studies of how this directly impacted the curriculum or students' experience. Lawrence Cremin and David Tyack, as well as many others,⁸⁷ tend to neglect the contributions of women in their large-scale histories, particularly the pedagogically revolutionary kindergarten movement, where both child-centered education and storytelling largely originated in the

⁸⁶ See, for example, the work of G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey. These trends were pervasive by the early 1900s.

⁸⁷ See Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Joseph M. Cronin, *The Control of Urban Schools: Perspective of the Power of Educational Reformers* (New York: The Free Press, 1973); Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1975); William J. Reese, *Power and Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); William A. Bullough, *Cities and Schools in the Gilded Age: The Evolution of an Urban Institution* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975); Wayne J. Urban and Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr. *American Education: A History* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

United States.⁸⁸ Though these historians explain the philosophies of child-centered education, they spend little time tracing its effect on the classroom environment and on the teacher-student relationship. Barbara Finkelstein's *Governing the Young: Teacher Behavior in Primary Schools in Nineteenth-century United States* (1989) makes motions toward a new type of educational history. However, Finkelstein presents rather simplistic teacher categories of "overseer, drillmaster" and "interpreter" of knowledge that do not have a significant consideration of gender.⁸⁹ Her observations that, "the typical urban teacher" in the second half of the nineteenth century, "substituted social and psychological pressures for physical coercion," contains only a nod to the idea that this tactic was due to the feminization of teaching.⁹⁰

Lastly, histories of education during the Progressive Era tend to emphasize the restrictive elements of the classroom rather than the creative elements. David Tyack

⁸⁸ Though Cremin and Tyack have both published prolifically, an informative sampling would be Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage, 1954), and *American education, the Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Tyack (with Larry Cuban), *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), and *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1974). Tyack has published, along with Myra H. Strober, an article on gender and teaching, "Why do Women Teach and Men Manage? A Report on Research on Schools," *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring, 1980)- 494-503. Though the article is helpful in explaining how education so rapidly became a female-dominated profession, and does allude to maternalism in the primary school, it does not assess the curricular or classroom ramifications of this.

⁸⁹ Barbara Finkelstein *Governing the Young: Teacher Behavior in Primary Schools in Nineteenth-century United States* (New York: Falmer Press Ltd., 1989), 95.

⁹⁰ Barbara Finkelstein, *Governing the Young*, 105. Finkelstein also uses masculine pronouns to discuss primary teachers, a choice that seems somewhat odd considering the concentration of women in such positions.

points out that nineteenth-century schools, “‘imposed’ a curriculum and an urban discipline” on students.⁹¹ David Macleod, in his generally excellent *The Age of the Child*, portrays the education system of the Progressive Era as dominated by standardized testing, and in which, “the ability to read silently and answer short questions became the pupil’s core skill.”⁹² Though there were rigid elements of the curriculum, storytelling shows that there were other aspects that were creative and highly enjoyable for students.

Storytelling in the Kindergarten 1890-1910

“In the Kindergarten,” proclaimed an educational reformer in 1890, “the child is the centre of all that is done. His individuality, his personal possibilities are sought out, respected, fostered... The traditional school, on the other hand, sacrifices all things, even the child, to the subject of instruction.”⁹³ The kindergarten movement is easily the first nationwide pedagogical trend to redefine the relationship of teacher to student. The primary school, argued kindergarten teachers, mindlessly forced the child into the mold of the “three R’s” rather than molding education around the child. Kindergarten teachers, known then as “kindergarteners,” advocated a nurturing model of education, often discussed in terms of love and affection. The movement’s German founder, Friedrich Froebel, was one of the first to propose child-centered pedagogy grounded in an observation of children’s needs and inclinations. He also argued that women were the

⁹¹ David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 72.

⁹² David I. Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers), 83.

⁹³ W. N. Hailmann, “The Kindergarten—What is it?” *The Kindergarten for Parents and Teachers*, Vol. 11 No. 10 (February 1890): 301.

natural teachers of young children, having greater wells of love on which to draw to nourish the tender plants of childhood.⁹⁴

For the kindergarten movement, storytelling was a keystone of the loving, child-centered classroom. “Ear and heart open to the genuine story-teller,” wrote Froebel, “as blossoms open to the sun of spring and to the vernal rain.”⁹⁵ To Froebel, the power of the storyteller was a mild and coaxing one, to which children responded naturally. The story was not simply a teaching device, but part of the relationship between student and teacher—the child and the “child-gardener.” In *The Story Hour* (1890), American kindergarteners Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Smith promised the storyteller almost mythical power over children, to be, “like a queen on her throne surrounded by her loyal subjects; or like an unworthy sun with a group of flowers turning their faces towards you.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ See his *Mother Play and Nursery Songs* (1861), which glorified motherhood.

⁹⁵ Friedrich Froebel, *The Education of Man*, trans. W.N. Hailmann (New York, NY: D. Appelton and Company, [1826] 1907), 307.

⁹⁶ Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Smith, *The Story Hour: A Book for the Home and the Kindergarten* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., [1890] 1907), 8. Wiggin was already a well-known author by this time, though she had not yet published *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903).



Figure 5, Friedrich Froebel, the German founder of the kindergarten movement. Though he epitomized many of the nurturing qualities he advocated for teachers, he argued the women were uniquely suited to kindergarten work, particularly storytelling. From *Kindergarten Gems, A Collection of Stories and Rhymes for Little Folks*, edited by Agnes Taylor Ketchum and Ida M. Jorgense (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Co., 1890), 220.

Echoing Froebel, they emphasize the female power associated with the nurturing qualities of the story. Though the storyteller has the commanding power of a queen, she is also “unworthy” of this power. Wiggin and Smith suggest that adults, though they have authority, are humbled by earning the affection of children. Their dual metaphor suggests that the power relationship between the teller and the children fulfills Froebel’s well-known call to “come, let us live with our children.”

Storytelling was as integral to kindergarten curricula as it was to its philosophy. Reading instruction was not a part of traditional kindergartens, and thus the story was the child’s only contact with narrative. In 1895 kindergartener Cornelia F. Crary observed,

“That the story has a place and power in the kindergarten is . . . universally conceded...”⁹⁷ Kindergarten curricula of the 1880s, 90s ,and early 1900s shows that storytelling was the central component of the “morning talks,” the half-hour gatherings of the kindergarten teacher and students to begin the day with stories, songs, and activities. The stories introduced themes that linked the class’s other activities; for example, if the subject of the week was “grain,” stories were told that were half lesson, half story, such as “There Was a Field that Waiting Lay,” “The Miller,” or “Bread Making.” A fairy tale related to the theme but not a school lesson would be included, such as “Charlotte and the Ten Dwarves,” a story about a farm girl. Interspersed with these tales were lessons on grain (with visual examples), and finger-plays, songs, and games about farming.⁹⁸ Students might dramatize a story, or make pictures or paper cutouts related to the story’s events. Thus the story was both the focus of the morning talk and the sinews that connected the classroom’s other lessons and activities. Kindergarteners argued that the primary school presented information in an overly strict and “illogical” manner, with each subject partitioned off from the others.⁹⁹ They emphasized storytelling as part of a curriculum in which knowledge was interrelated.

As in the home, a good story in the kindergarten was judged in part by the worthiness of its subject and the child’s response to the tale. Reminded one writer in the

⁹⁷ Cornelia F. Crary, “The Story-Teller’s Power,” *Everyday Practice Department, Kindergarten Magazine*, Vol. 7 No. 9 (May 1895): 693.

⁹⁸ Anna W. Devereaux, “September: Fourth Week,” *Outline of a Year’s Work in the Kindergarten*, Boston: J.L. Hammett Co (1902), 32-33.

⁹⁹ Jessie E. Beers, “The Kindergarten and the Primary School,” in “Graduates’ Symposium,” *The Kindergarten for Teachers and Parents*, Vol. II No. 3 (July 1889): 114.

Kindergarten-Primary Magazine, “the primary purpose of the story... is to give joy to the child.”¹⁰⁰ There were pedagogical concerns as well, but only insofar as they met the needs of the child. “Whatever the kind of story,” wrote Emilie Poulsson, “its spirit and influence have been the paramount considerations.”¹⁰¹ Its “influence,” she indicated later, is love. Its “spirit” was less an academic subject than it was a portrayal of life that would stimulate the child’s imagination and thoughtfulness. Poulsson, who published prolifically on kindergartens and parenting in the 1890s and early 1900s,¹⁰² made the stories in her *Morning Talks and Stories for the Kindergarten*, “concerning those objects, activities, festivals, etc., which belong in the child’s world, those with which he is in actual contact or has some relation...”¹⁰³ Teachers sought to meet students halfway between their experience and the day’s lesson. Though kindergarteners certainly wanted children to learn from the stories they told—particularly an appreciation for nature, handicrafts, and the family—but they believed education was worthless without enjoyment. “If the children do not like the story,” wrote Poulsson in 1891, “it is not for them. Without enjoyment, they will not be receptive, and the story will have been told in

¹⁰⁰ “Story Work in New York City Kindergartens,” *The Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*, Vol. XXIII, No. 8 (April 1910): 242.

¹⁰¹ Emilie Poulsson, *In the Child’s World: Morning Talks and Stories for Kindergartens, Primary Schools, and Homes* (Springfield, MA: Milton Bradley Co., [1893] 1904), xiv.

¹⁰² Her *Finger Plays for Nursery and Kindergarten* (1893) remains in print.

¹⁰³ Emilie Poulsson, *In the Child’s World*, xiv.

vain.”¹⁰⁴ The philosophy of kindergarten portrayed this not as a compromise, but a more effective learning and relational experience.

Though kindergarteners were extensively trained, those who wrote about storytelling emphasized the teacher’s feelings as the best guide for teaching. Anna Buckland wrote of storytelling that, “The very love for little children, and the sympathy with them, which lie at the heart of the Kindergarten system, will teach its teachers how to put before the minds of children bright pictures from the grand world of the ideal.”¹⁰⁵ Experience with children would in fact “teach” the teacher what was best.¹⁰⁶ Writers on the kindergarten emphasized storytelling as a learning opportunity for teachers as much as children. “The story-teller, as she looks into the sweet, upturned faces of little children, becomes conscious of the divine privilege in that she has been permitted to enter into the realm of childhood and, through the influence of the story, to catch even a glimpse into the heart of the child,” wrote Elizabeth Thompson Dillingham and Adelle Powers Emerson.¹⁰⁷ Much more exuberant and spiritual in their child-centered philosophies than the primary school would ever be, kindergarteners argued that the

¹⁰⁴ Emilie Poulsson, “The Story in the Kindergarten,” Part I, *The Kindergarten for Teacher and Parents*, Vol. III No. 6 (February 1891): 310.

¹⁰⁵ Anna Buckland, “The Use of Stories in the Kindergarten,” *Essays on the Kindergarten, Being a Selection of Lectures Read before the London Froebel Society* (Syracuse, NY: C.W. Bardeen, 1892), 34.

¹⁰⁶ This is part of a central Froebelian philosophy, that observation of children should dictate pedagogical methods. It was one of the reasons Froebel’s teachings were so attractive to psychologists like Hall and Dewey, and it led many in the early 1900s to perceive Froebel as a vanguard in psychology (see, for example, the 1912 *Froebel as a Pioneer in Modern Psychology*, by E.R. Murray).

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Thompson Dillingham and Adelle Powers Emerson, “Tell it Again” *Stories* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1911), v.

ability to form a relationship with the child was not only a component of sound pedagogy, but an honor. In the kindergarten, the story was a mutual learning experience for teacher and student.

Those who enthused about storytelling privileged its child-centered nature, but did not discount the empowerment of the teacher. Cornelia F. Crary dismissed any concerns potential storytellers may have about inadequacy. Portraying a teacher's possible objection, she wrote, "'Oh!' you exclaim, 'I cannot do that. I haven't the story-making or story-telling faculty.' But I answer that you do not know your power till you have tested it."¹⁰⁸ It is clear from her admonition that storytelling caused some teachers anxiety. But Crary, like many others, urged her audience to "be yourself," in order to make the story effective. Though its advocates called storytelling an "art," they urged that it could be acquired. Anna Buckland observed that, "If a Kindergarten teacher believes she has no gift for telling stories, let her try what she can do without a gift, and the probability is, that she will find herself more richly endowed than she thought she was."¹⁰⁹ Writers on storytelling for primary schools would later argue for the sufficiency of anyone to tell stories with practice, but kindergarteners argued the power to tell stories was innate, and only refined with practice.

As it empowered teachers, this pedagogy accomplished its goal of engaging students. Writers on storytelling in the kindergarten often reported on the enthusiastic reaction of their youthful audience. Kindergarten teachers explained how children would

¹⁰⁸ Cornelia F. Crary, "The Story-Teller's Power," 693.

¹⁰⁹ Anna Buckland, "The Use of Stories in the Kindergarten," 35.

ask for stories repeatedly, even for ones they had heard before. And kindergarteners evaluated their success on how happy and interested the child was, by the “gleam” in children’s eyes and how well they were paying attention. Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Smith spoke of stories romantically as, “speak[ing] to the newly awakened soul...”¹¹⁰ Storytelling was an innovation, an “awakening” for children and a new way of “speaking” for teachers, one that put them in a nurturing relationship with the child.

Storytelling in the Primary School 1900-1920

During the 1890s and the early 1900s, many kindergarten advocates convinced local school districts to absorb private kindergartens or found kindergartens of their own. Though some kindergarteners feared this would lead to a loss of autonomy and a weakening of Froebelian principles, most were enthusiastic at the chance to expand the reach of the kindergarten and heighten its public significance. Historians of kindergarten today disagree over whether the absorption of kindergarten into the public school system in the early 1900s was a victory for the movement. Michael Shapiro points out that through incorporation the kindergarten sacrificed its independence and philosophical underpinnings, becoming essentially a preparatory measure for the primary grades.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora Smith, *The Story Hour*, 19.

¹¹¹ See Michael Shapiro, *Child’s Garden: The Kindergarten Movement from Froebel to Dewey* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), particularly the chapters “Kindergartens Enter the Public Schools,” and “Progressivism and the Kindergarten.”

Barbara Beatty argues that abandoning many Froebelian principles was a needed modernization of the movement.¹¹²

Though both arguments are persuasive, they focus on what kindergarten lost, rather than what the primary school gained. Many of the principles of storytelling adopted by the primary school were proposed by Froebelian kindergarten teachers. Primary school teachers embraced this model, including the language of educational reform, but coupled, as the library would be, were concerned about making instruction efficient. To teachers, storytelling, and the teacher-student relationship it helped build, was valuable less because it created an environment of joy and love and more because it made instruction more subtle and effective.

Kindergarten advocates had criticized the rigidity and illogic of the primary school's curriculum and teaching method since the late 1850s, and by the late 1890s and early 1900s, most educational reformers agreed. An 1895 report by the National Education Association (N.E.A.), criticized the emphasis on the "three R's" of primary education in the past and presented a reformed vision that included "cultivating the imagination" and "exciting the emotions," among other similar concepts.¹¹³ A 1913 report by the U.S. Commissioner of Education's office praised the extensive spread of

¹¹² See Barbara Beatty, *Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1995), and Beatty, "The Letter Killeth,': Americanization and Multicultural Education in Kindergartens in the United States, 1856-1920," in *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea*, edited by Roberta Wollons, New Haven: Yale University Press (2000), 42-58.

¹¹³ Edward G. Ward, "A Few Changes in Elementary School Instruction," *National Education Association Journal of Proceedings and Addresses, Session of the Year 1894* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1895), 716.

both the kindergarten and kindergarten teaching methods. It noted, in particular, the increase in, “a study of the kindergarten on the part of primary teachers and supervisors.”¹¹⁴ “Primary teachers,” the author, Nina Vandewalker, said, “undertake the study of the kindergarten because they recognize that the knowledge contributes to their success.”¹¹⁵ This response was largely due to pedagogical reforms coming from within the educational system, which was increasingly responsive to developments in child psychology, and a public desire for more child-centered education.¹¹⁶ Primary teachers now valued forming bonds with their students, and thought storytelling was one of the best ways to do this. Storyteller and teacher Julia Darrow Cowles effused, “There is nothing better worth winning than the love of a child, and there is no surer way of reaching a child’s heart than through the story.”¹¹⁷ Her comment shows a new educational goal, and a new method of attaining it.

Storytelling appears to have been eagerly adopted by primary school teachers. Primary teachers, usually by personal desire, attended local lectures on storytelling or took summer classes at institutes like the Pestalozzi-Froebel Summer School in Chicago.

¹¹⁴ Nina C. Vandewalker, “Five Years of Kindergarten Progress,” Chapter VII, *Report of the Commissioner of Education, June 30, 1913* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 147.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Storytelling was urged on mothers in a variety of magazines, such as *Home Progress* and *American Motherhood*, beginning in the early 1900s. Jacob Abbott, in *Gentle Measures in the Management of the Young* (1871), appears to be one of the earliest to recommend storytelling in the home; storytelling helped parents, “establish as close a connection as possible of affection and sympathy” with their children (22).

¹¹⁷ Julia Darrow Cowles, *The Art of Story-Telling* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1914), 101.

The author of an 1894 paper on, “Enriching the Course in the Elementary Schools” of Cleveland, Ohio, noted that first-grade teachers in four of the schools had “story tellers’ clubs” “to gain greater power by practice in telling original stories to their pupils.”¹¹⁸

With ample opportunity for new teachers to take storytelling classes in normal schools, it is unsurprising that a 1905 survey of ten schools showed that eight of them included storytelling in the first grade, six in the second, and four in the third, with limited use thereafter.¹¹⁹ Teachers rapidly adopted it in their classrooms, and educational associations praised it. A 1906 report by the National Society for the Scientific Study of Education remarked that, “Until recently, story telling has been no part of the primary curriculum.”¹²⁰ But it was, the report observed, “fast becoming the ‘head-stone of the corner’ in our estimate of its importance.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ellen G. Beverley, “Enriching the Course in the Elementary Schools—First to Fourth Grades,” *National Education Association Journal of Proceedings and Addresses, Session of the Year 1894* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1895), 422.

¹¹⁹ Bruce Ryburn Payne, Table XV, “Showing the Topics in Language and their Distribution by Grades in the Public Elementary Schools of Ten Cities of the United States,” *Public Elementary School Curricula: A Comparative Study of Representative Cities of the United States, England, Germany and France* (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company 1905), 48.

¹²⁰ George P. Brown, “Story Telling,” in “On the Teaching of English in Elementary and High Schools,” *The Fifth Yearbook of the National Society for the Scientific Study of Education—Part I: On the Teaching of English in Elementary and High Schools*, ed. Manfred J. Holmes (The National Society for the Scientific Study of Education 1906), 27.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* The allusion is biblical; “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22, recurring in Matthew, Acts, Kings, and Peter). It does not appear to have special significance in relation to storytelling, other than to emphasize its importance.

By 1914 storytelling was, “the most popular and successful method in education.”¹²² Lauded in publications ranging from parenting magazines to government education bulletins, the revival of storytelling in education was accomplished. Most who wrote on the subject agreed with professional storyteller Richard Wyche that, “kindergartners have been pioneers in story telling, leaders and inspirers of other, and today as a class are doing more story telling than other educators.”¹²³ But Wyche observed that primary school teachers, able to use a wider range of stories for older children, could also use stories to more purpose.¹²⁴ They would also have different motives.

Primary school teachers now wanted to establish maternal relationships with students. Sara Cone Bryant, the first non-kindergartner to publish a book on storytelling, particularly supported an ideal of nurturing teacher-student relations. Of the storytelling teacher, she wrote, “[The students] remember her with affection, and best of all remember the dreams that came into being under her spell... no pretender can dislodge her from her throne in the hearts she has won.”¹²⁵ The “throne” of affection she described echoes that indicated by Kate Douglas Wiggin fifteen years earlier; one is able to see the primary teacher like a queen or matriarch, her power that of subtle influence and emotion, her power unshakeable.

¹²² William James Sly, *World Stories Retold, with Practical Suggestions for Telling* (Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1914), 13.

¹²³ Richard Thomas Wyche, *Some Great Stories and How to Tell Them* (New York: Newson & Co., 1910), 73.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Katherine Dunlap Cather, *Educating by Story-Telling* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1918), 199.

Concerned with portraying themselves as professionals, teachers, like librarians and many other professionals during the Progressive Era, couched depicted their behavior in language of effectiveness and efficiency.¹²⁶ Storytelling was lauded because it was a useful tool, not because forming bonds with children was valuable in of itself. Explicitly contrasting the school with the home, Julia Darrow Cowles argued,

Every lover of children knows that a good story, well told, is a source of the purest joy; but while this of itself is sufficient reason for story-telling in the home and in the nursery, it is not sufficient reason for general story-telling in the school. Happiness is a powerful ally of successful work, but it never should be substituted for the work itself...¹²⁷

Storytelling for the sake of a relationship was acceptable for parents, but it must serve a greater end in the primary school. In a work on storytelling, Edward Porter St. John pointed out that, “The pupil approaches with pleasant anticipation the teacher who thus gives his lessons a touch of life in the concrete and of human interest, and the simple establishment of such a sympathetic and friendly relationship is a long step toward success in teaching.”¹²⁸ To St. John, a teacher could make the student learn more effectively if they had a “friendly relationship” with the teacher.

The friendly relationships fostered by the child-centered model of education was not only beneficial to the students, but to the teacher as well. It was especially valuable because it was supposed to make corporeal discipline, perceived as a masculine practice, obsolete, and replace it with gentleness. This shift was again described in terms of

¹²⁶ See Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹²⁷ Julia Darrow Cowles, *The Art of Story-Telling*, 16.

¹²⁸ Edward Porter St. John, *Stories and Story-Telling in Moral and Religious Education* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1910), 79.

efficiency, not domesticity. Primary teachers appreciated the “easier discipline” and “more orderly pupils” that storytelling brought.¹²⁹ Storytelling did more for students, “than two weeks of talking and scolding on the part of the teacher could have done.”¹³⁰ As a method of calming unruly students and diverting them, storytelling made discipline less confrontational. By including storytelling in the curriculum, articulated another teacher, “Discipline is made easy by bringing pupils and teacher in closer relation to each other.”¹³¹ Reformers argued that children behaved better and needed fewer disciplinary measures under a teacher they liked. Teachers, instead of exerting themselves in physical discipline, should exert themselves to make students like them.

The power of storytelling was all the greater because it could subtly teach the child good behavior. To professional storyteller Marie Shedlock, the most important aspect of storytelling was its, “*apparent* simplicity, which is really the *art of concealing* art.”¹³² To her, storytelling was an art not only in the purest sense, but because it masked its nature. Listeners were beguiled by a tale’s simplicity, while learning from it. William Byron Forbush observed, “It is not only more encouraging, but it is much more effective to be able, through a story, to persuade a child that such and such things *have been done*

¹²⁹ Helen A. Hadley, “Story Telling,” *Primary Education*, Vol. XXII, No. 7 (September 1914): 415.

¹³⁰ Allen Cross and Nellie Margaret Statler, *Story-Telling for Upper Grade Teachers* (Chicago: Row, Peterson and Co., 1918), 62.

¹³¹ M. Adelaide Holton, “Story-Telling,” *The Teachers’ Institute*, Vol. XVIII, No. 8 (April 1896): 188.

¹³² Marie Shedlock, *The Art of the Story-Teller* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1917), 23. Shedlock also reminds the reader that the use of “suggestion” in education is a Froebelian principle (62). All italics in quotations are original unless otherwise noted.

rather than through command to tell him that such and such things *should be done*.”¹³³ Storytelling manuals epitomized this philosophy. Elizabeth McCracken’s 1916 *How to Teach Children through Stories* outlined 24 virtues of the “good child,” with 24 chapters devoted to how stories could cultivate each characteristic.¹³⁴ The qualities included citizenship, obedience, self-control, patriotism, and “love of books.” In an educational climate in which it was increasingly important to instruct students in such abstract values—to teach behavior as well as knowledge—storytelling was the answer. William James Sly’s “Ethical Index” at the back of *World Stories Retold* (1914) was not atypical.¹³⁵ With many teachers laboring under an extensive curriculum, storytelling was a magical tool of efficiency that could entertain and teach students facts as well as shape their characters, all in a gentle and unobtrusive way.

In this pedagogical method, teachers “molded” children as well as taught. Katherine Dunlap Cather believed that, “[The child’s] interest must be aroused before we can hope to mold his taste as we would have it molded.”¹³⁶ Storytelling, to her and others, was the ideal way to pique a child’s interest in a subject and thereby gain the power to be his intellectual guide. It was both the medium of the story and the teacher-student relationship that allowed such impressions to be made. Julia Darrow Cowles

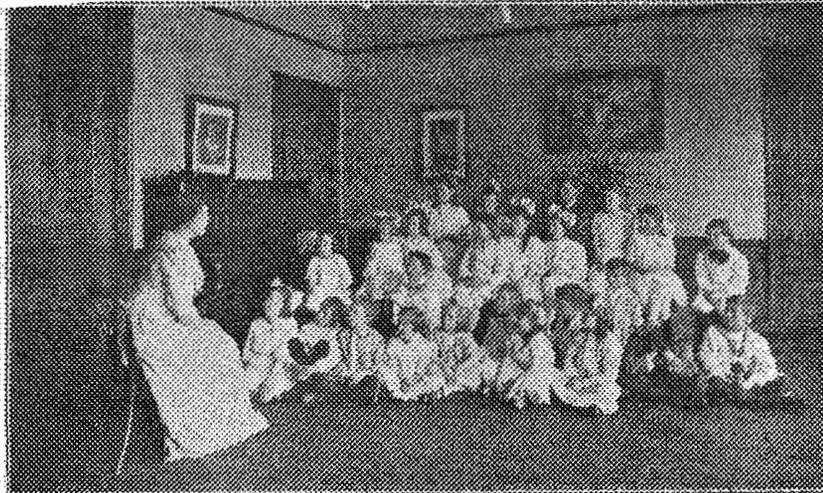
¹³³ William Byron Forbush, *A Manual of Stories* (Philadelphia: American Institute of Child Life, 1915), 11.

¹³⁴ See also a somewhat similar volume, F.J. Gould’s *Conduct Stories: A Volume of Stories for the Moral Instruction of Children* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Limited, 1910). The book was widely published in the U.S.

¹³⁵ William James Sly, *World Stories Retold*, 291-294.

¹³⁶ Katherine Dunlap Cather, *Educating by Story-Telling*, 97.

reminded her readers of, “the well-recognized fact that through story-telling the teacher may come into so close and happy relationship with her pupils that they will respond to her suggestions and be molded by her influence to a degree not easily attainable by any other means.”¹³⁷ Though the children did have to respond to the story, the teacher was something of an artist, developing the unformed personalities of children. She was characterized by a feminine, indirect authority, forged by affection, which allowed her “suggestions” to be more powerful than any other form of instruction. The primary school teacher had begun to shape morality, an activity that had previously been considered largely the work of the mother at home.



STORY HOUR AT BANCROFT SCHOOL.

Figure 6, "Story Hour at Bancroft School." Though this photo may have been staged, it is important to note the depiction of rapt attention on the part of the students. From Emelyn Newcomb Partridge and George Everett Partridge, *Story-Telling in School and Home: A Study in Educational Aesthetics*, (New York: Sturgis & Walton , 1912).

¹³⁷ Julia Darrow Cowles, *The Art of Story-Telling*, 17.

The subtle power of storytelling extended to academic subjects. Storytelling, “not only arouses deep strata of the child’s nature, but plays upon all the desires and all the functions which it is the business of the school to educate,” observed Emelyn and George Partridge.¹³⁸ The Partridges thought storytelling stimulated the imagination, increased the vocabulary, “impart[ed] information,” and more.¹³⁹ Particularly stories of nature and good conduct were valuable, but storytelling could teach science and math, too.¹⁴⁰ Several texts advised using Eva March Tappan’s *The Children’s Hour* (1916) book series as a fund of tales. Tappan, a school teacher, included among the many volumes of myths, fables, and classics an entire volume of science tales (*Wonders of Science*) that taught children about everything from planets to mammoths. Refuting the notion that storytelling was mere entertainment, reformers like William Forbush asserted, “no child listens to a story passively.”¹⁴¹

Because of the personal interaction it entailed, storytelling was seen as teaching more permanently; students may forget other lessons, but they would not forget stories they had heard. Sara Cone Bryant reminded educators, “When you make a story your own and tell it, the listener gets the story, *plus your appreciation of it.*”¹⁴² The connection between teller and audience powerfully telegraphed thoughts and feelings. Katherine Cather argued that because the “personality of the speaker make [the story]

¹³⁸ Emelyn Newcomb Partridge and George Everett Partridge, *Story-Telling in School and Home: A Study in Educational Aesthetics* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1912), 81.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ The “story problem” was particularly popular with teachers during this period.

¹⁴¹ William Byron Forbush, *A Manual of Stories*, 11.

¹⁴² Sara Cone Bryant, *How to Tell Stories*, xvi.

alive and vital... the tales heard during childhood become fixed and lasting possessions. They stay with the hearer through the years... their ideals become his ideals.”¹⁴³ What writers on storytelling often described as the teller’s “personality” was crucial to the efficacy of the learning experience. The impression they made on the child was more durable because it was more personal.

Those who wrote about storytelling were particularly confident because child psychology supported their positions. G. Stanley Hall argued children have an innate need for stories, whereas John Dewey portrayed them as one of the most effective pedagogical tools.¹⁴⁴ Both men emphasized women as the best teachers of young children. Such notions gave scientific clout to maternalist imperatives. Particularly Emelyn and George Partridge (George Partridge was a psychologist) perceived storytelling as a method for the “scientific educator” who grounded her teachings in the psychological needs of the child.¹⁴⁵ The growing influence of psychology on storytelling can be traced through the works of Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, a children’s author whose work on storytelling spans three decades. Her first book, *For the Children’s Hour*, written with Clara Lewis, was a collection of stories for the kindergarten that indicated storytelling was important, “in the training of the imagination” and sense of humor.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Katherine Dunlap Cather, *Educating by Story-Telling*, 7.

¹⁴⁴ G. Stanley Hall, *Youth: Its Education, Regimen, and Hygiene* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., [1906], 1911), 258; John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1900] (1990), 57.

¹⁴⁵ Emelyn and George Partridge, *Story-Telling in School and Home*, iii.

¹⁴⁶ Carolyn S. Bailey and Clara M. Lewis, *For the Children’s Hour*, (Springfield, MA: Milton Bradley Co., [1906] 1915), 7.

The authors briefly allude to the importance of storytelling for child's development, "mentally and morally."¹⁴⁷ By 1916 however, Bailey was using the vocabulary of psychology to make arguments for storytelling's utility. In *For the Storyteller: What to Tell and How to Tell It*, storytelling is, "a matter of psychology," a method of appealing to children's instincts in order to teach them more effectively.¹⁴⁸ The incorporation of psychology into arguments for storytelling hints at a subtle symbiotic relationship between expertise and artistry that influenced the child-centered curriculum and bolstered maternalist ideology.

In many ways, storytelling, despite the rapid professionalization of teaching, was remarkably unprofessional.¹⁴⁹ Those who wrote on storytelling for the primary school portrayed it as a creative art which drew on the teller's "self" to help express the fundamental truths of the story. Several of the writers were professional storytellers and thus had a stake in portraying storytelling this way, but the argument was not an attempt at exclusivity; rather, it made artistry available to everyone. Echoing much of what kindergarteners had advised, primary teacher Susan Kane argued in 1914, "If the story is known perfectly, and it is loved, and there is a desire to tell it, one does not have to be a

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁸ Bailey, *For the Storyteller*, vi.

¹⁴⁹ For more on professionalization during the Progressive Era, see Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc (1976). For a brief summary of difficulties teachers had in professionalizing a feminine occupation, see Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 195-197.

professional story-teller to do it well.”¹⁵⁰ Writers on storytelling de-emphasized its performative aspects in order to construct it as a creative experience for teachers and students.

Though depictions such as this made storytelling appear to be a simple, easily learned ability, in fact it probably served to heighten the perception of the primary teacher as uniquely skilled. On the nature of child-centered education, Ann Lieberman has persuasively argued,

Child-centered schools make heavy demands on teachers’ time, judgments, knowledge, and skill in conducting classrooms... While teacher-centered classrooms and schools trust the system as the ultimate arbiter, child-centered classrooms trust the teacher as the final authority... part of the changing context is a growing move to professionalize teaching further by making demands on teachers to know more, to be heavily engaged in the curriculum making... and to be more involved in reshaping the school to focus on students.¹⁵¹

Though she perhaps underestimates the authority of school administrators, Lieberman makes a cogent point about the power of the teacher in the child-centered classroom. The child-centered classroom was also gave authority to the teacher to innovate with the curriculum. It is undeniable that female teachers were paid less and rarely scaled to administrative positions. But primary school teaching was not constructed as unskilled. Storytelling in the primary school was a training and ability that increased a teacher’s social worth, and would have contributed to her attractiveness as a job candidate.

Maternalism limited the career ambitions of female teachers and made former personal

¹⁵⁰ Susan M. Kane, “Points in Story-Telling,” *Primary Education*, Vol. XXII, No. 10 (December 1914): 599. This article was reprinted a year later in the *Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*.

¹⁵¹ Ann Lieberman, “The Changing Context of Education,” 8.

aspects of their lives—emotion and morality—public and professional standards they had to fulfill. But pedagogical innovations such as storytelling gave them a particular authority—the ability to form close bonds with students, which would make the latter learn much more effectively. In maternalist pedagogy, it was both more efficient to have a female teacher. By joining maternalist rhetoric with that of efficiency, primary teachers were able to speak to the needs of educational reform prescribed by experts, and to portray what they themselves saw as needed reform. This allowed them to shape a place for themselves in education.

Though the primary school made storytelling more efficient than the kindergarten, its philosophy more than its practical aspects were altered. It was a pedagogical tool, but its success was child-dependent. Allen Cross and Nellie Statler proposed, “Story-telling is a failure if the teller receives no response from the children.”¹⁵² Herman Horne advised: “Take the point of view of the children as you tell a story,” and encouraged teachers to study the stories children told to each other.¹⁵³ Teachers strove to make stories, while still educational, relatable to children’s experiences. In Geneseo, Illinois, storytelling was related to the “life of farm and village” that the children experienced.¹⁵⁴ William Byron Forbush argued that “story-tastes are defined by experience,” and urged

¹⁵² Allen Cross and Nellie Margaret Statler, *Story-Telling for Upper Grade Teachers*, 107.

¹⁵³ Herman Harrell Horne, *Story-Telling, Questioning, and Studying: Three School Arts* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1917), 41.

¹⁵⁴ A.E. Winship, “While Looking About,” *American Primary Teacher*, Vol. XXIX, No. 7 (March 1911): 254.

teachers to choose narratives that took place in environments similar to their own.¹⁵⁵

The classroom had likely become more pleasant for both teacher and student. “The school is joining hands with the children for fuller recognition of the story and storytelling” Angela Keyes proclaimed at the opening of her 1911 storytelling manual.¹⁵⁶ Her imagery evoked a new relationship between school and child, in which they are “joining hands” in order to bring storytelling to the curriculum.

The School and Storytelling in the 1920s

In the 1920s, the authority of the storyteller as well as storytelling’s manifold attractions were tempered by a return to a more conservative curriculum. Though Lawrence Cremin has argued that the 1920s were the heyday of child-centered education, in the realm of storytelling, at least, it was less so than the 1910s.¹⁵⁷ The philosophy of storytelling had again changed. Storytelling was now subservient to literature and English studies, rather than a multipurpose educational tool that built teacher-student bonds. Now teachers proclaimed, “the story *method* in teaching is having its grand renaissance [sic]” (italics mine).¹⁵⁸ Storytelling was a method of teaching literature and language skills. This was not absent from storytelling before; indeed, teaching children

¹⁵⁵ Richard Byron Forbush, *A Manual of Stories*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Angela Keyes, *Stories and Story-Telling* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1911), 1.

¹⁵⁷ See Lawrence Cremin, “Scientists, Sentimentalists, and Radicals,” chapter six, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 179-239.

¹⁵⁸ Charles Madison Curry and Erle Elsworth Clippinger, *Children’s Literature: A Textbook of Sources for Teachers and Teacher-Training Classes* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1920), 11.

to love good books was touted as one of its most useful aspects. But now it became storytelling's primary function. Its nature was less examined and less lauded, as publication on storytelling declined throughout the 1920s (see figure 1). Storytelling had become fully established in schools, and the fervor of the revival had dimmed.

Probably influenced by collegiate interest in literary criticism, primary teachers wanted to teach "literature" instead of "stories." Displaying a shift in attitude toward storytelling, Laura Kready argued in a 1919 article in *Primary Education* that literature used to be taught, "with stories and poems; a few stories, chosen in some hit or miss fashion, mainly for the children's entertainment, to relieve the monotony of the school routine... To-day all that has changed. Literature is recognized as an art."¹⁵⁹ She continued, pointing out that, "Teachers' colleges to-day... [are] offering courses to kindergarten and primary teachers, not only in stories and storytelling, but in literature as a subject."¹⁶⁰ Her dismissive attitude toward storytelling was new. Stories continued to be told, but it was literature that was art, not storytelling. Instead of acknowledging storytelling as a developed intellectual study, Kready portrays it as performed in a "hit or miss fashion." Kready, who had published a book of literary criticism of fairy tales, was desirous of making this argument. But she was not alone. In a 1922 paper presented to the N.E.A. entitled, "Story Telling: Its Relation to Literary Appreciation," Edith C. Parker stated firmly, "story telling has for its primary object the presentation of the great

¹⁵⁹ Laura F. Kready, "Literature in the Primary School," *Primary Education*, Vol. XXVII, No. 7 (September 1919): 417.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

literature of the world.”¹⁶¹ The point of children’s reaction is that, “the emotional response [produced by the story] will be sufficiently strong to carry many of them out to find that book and read that story for themselves... The only way a person may know the genuine from the counterfeit in literature is through experience; through intimate, sympathetic intercourse with the best literature, and story telling is an opening wedge to that end.”¹⁶² Though Parker’s language is replete with emotional imperatives, they denote emotion toward books, not the teacher, a relationship which the library was using storytelling to promote. Most of the books published on storytelling in the 1920s, or in which storytelling was mentioned, were on teaching literature, or else collections of classic literary tales. Storytelling was still child-centered, in that it was considered one of the most natural ways to teach young children, but it now tended toward more intellectual discourse.

At the same time, teachers were increasingly shifting the experience of storytelling onto students, with positive results. In the 1910s, such a tactic had been touted as a way to stimulate children’s imaginations and improve their creativity. In the 1920s it acquired many purposes, usually to shape student’s characters as well as their knowledge. A junior high English textbook advised its readers, “The ability to tell a

¹⁶¹ Edith C. Parker, “Story Telling: Its Relation to Literary Appreciation,” *Addresses and Proceedings of the National Education Association*, Vol. 60, Washington, D.C.: The National Education Association, 1922): 1016.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

good story... is worth cultivating. People who can do so make delightful companions.”¹⁶³

One textbook articulated a mixture of reasons for encouraging children to tell stories:

To train pupils in the art of creating stories, is to perform a doubly valuable service. It is at once to promote all of the purposes of language training, and to give an uplift to the recreation of the school and the community. More than this, it is a means of discovering and developing the latent literary talent in the pupils.¹⁶⁴

Though “language training” is crucial, the pleasure and child-centeredness of storytelling has not been forgotten in this incarnation. Though its emphasis on teacher-student relationships was lost, storytelling, in chameleon form, continued to serve multiple purposes, both educational and social. It continued to make the curriculum innovative and more engaging for the child.

¹⁶³ Thomas M. Briggs, Isabel McKinney, and Florence Skeffington, *Junior High School English, Book II, For the Eighth Grade* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1921), 10. A 1924 book on this subject was published for home use, Enos B. Comstock’s *When Mother Lets us Tell Stories*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

CHAPTER IV
THE LIBRARY STORY HOUR, 1900-1920: A BUSINESS
MODEL

“Story-telling in the library is what the kindergarten is in the school,” a librarian wrote in 1910, “the utilization to good purpose of the first intellectual appetites of the child.”¹⁶⁵ But though librarians, like kindergarten teachers, perceived young children as particularly malleable, librarians used storytelling in a way distinct from the home and school. Whereas kindergarteners and teachers used storytelling to speak to the child, librarians used storytelling as a way of speaking to professionals and a public that included, but was not limited to, children. By expanding services, the library hoped to attract more “customers” and thereby increase its budgets and social standing. Popular consumption, rather than exclusiveness, was now what contributed to the library’s prestige. Children were crucial to this model, since they could be persuaded to become life-long customers of the library. Storytelling was a way to draw children to the library and convince them to read quality literature, cementing a relationship between the library as an institution and the child as an individual. Because of their pragmatic approach to their jobs and their precarious professional status, librarians rejected many of the maternalist and child-centered imperatives of the home and school, instead wielding storytelling as a tool for the betterment of the library, and the public.

As the modern library and librarians shaped their place in society from 1876-1920, expanding geographically and in terms of the public it served, they sought ways to

¹⁶⁵ Untitled, *The Library Journal*, Vol. 35 No. 4 (April 1910): 145.

bolster the library's public standing and attract new customers. 1876 saw the formation of the American Library Association (ALA), the publication of its *Library Journal*, a government-issued report on libraries, and the first published suggestion that schools and libraries work cooperatively.¹⁶⁶ Thus, many librarians rightly perceived it as the beginning of a new era for the library, in which it would become a popular and thus prestigious institution. Until this time, libraries typically had closed stacks and were reluctant to open their doors to women and children, or forbade them outright. But "libraries shifted from treasure houses to public amenities," during the Progressive Era.¹⁶⁷ They rapidly expanded their services to meet the perceived needs of a newly-defined public, one that included children, women, immigrants, and professionals.¹⁶⁸ They sought to portray themselves as educators offering an essential public service, and as professionals who used taxpayer dollars efficiently.

Librarians chose a different model of storytelling because their institution, by the early 1900s, had come to be modeled after a business. The library saw this model as a way to use their scant budgets to their, and the public's, best advantage. As Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont has observed, "Librarians at the turn of the century generally accepted

¹⁶⁶ Josephine Adams Rathbone, "Co-Operation Between Libraries and Schools: An Historical Sketch," *The Relationship Between the Library and the Public Schools*, Arthur Bostwick, ed. (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1914), 11. The formation of the ALA, as well as the commencement of numerous national publications such as *The Library Journal* and *Public Libraries*, created national forums for librarians to share ideas.

¹⁶⁷ David I. MacLeod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 129.

¹⁶⁸ Other innovations in library service include special sections for parenting, teaching, medicine, law, agricultural, and engineering texts, reading clubs for older youths, public lectures, and traveling exhibits.

the businessman's outlook and, consciously or unconsciously, molded public library service in accordance with the canons of a profit-making service."¹⁶⁹ In keeping with this model, "A common sign of the library's marginal status," Du Mont argues, "was the strong need librarians felt to 'sell' their services to the public," and, "to *create* a demand for the services they offered."¹⁷⁰ Librarians developed methods of "advertising," of which the children's story hour was one of the most powerful, to make the public aware of its new accessibility, and to encourage the people to use its services. Increased use of their services would result in greater value placed on libraries. Library administrators and members of the ALA wanted libraries to expand to become crucial centers of education in American life. However, librarians were hampered from achieving professional status by their lack of erudite knowledge and the many aspects of their work that approached secretarial labor: shelving and cataloging books, checking out volumes, shushing talkative patrons. Furthermore, librarianship had been increasingly feminized since mid-century: women made up two-thirds of the library workforce in 1878, and, by 1910, 78.5% of library workers were female.¹⁷¹ The density of women in a profession made outsiders leery of perceiving them as truly skilled professional, since women were perceived as having different and distinctly less professional skills than men. However, at their conferences and in their professional journals and books on librarianship, male and female librarians perceived and portrayed themselves as professionals as well as

¹⁶⁹ Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1977), 66.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 138, 93.

¹⁷¹ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 173.

reformers. They possessed unique knowledge of literature appropriate for public reading, and how to organize such material efficiently for consumption. By bringing good literature to the masses, they were reforming society intellectually and morally.

Storytelling was both a part of librarians' advertising campaign for their services and a part of their mission to improve society by convincing people to read high quality literature. Children were seen as desirable consumers of the library's books, even more so than adults, because they were more easily influenced and could be convinced to patronize the library for the rest of their lives. The relationship between librarian and child could be warm, but was fundamentally hierarchical and authoritative, because librarians sought to deter children from unruliness, and create a relationship between the child and the library as an institution rather than a relationship between librarians and children. Children's librarians rejected the maternalist overtones of storytelling just as they rejected maternalism generally, because they perceived it limited the public role of the library as well as the status of librarians. Instead, they argued the story was a strategy for the benefit of the library as well as society. Yet in some ways the library's business model was not such a radically different strategy than that of other feminized professional model; its "advertising" good books rather than telling children what to read mirrored the emphasis on indirect instruction and suasion in the maternalistic home and school.

Library histories have tended to discuss the impact of the feminization of librarianship only inasmuch as it hindered librarians' efforts to professionalize, or to what extent such determined efforts at professionalization created hostility to the public. Others largely ignore these issues: histories published by the ALA, such as *A Century of*

Service and *A History of the American Library Service, 1876-1972* portray Progressive-Era librarians' work as fundamentally altruistic.¹⁷² Others accounts, such as Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont's *Reform and Reaction*, argue the library's mission was one of social control, and maternalism largely an agent of this. The work of Dee Garrison explains the "child-saving" rhetoric of early children's librarians and the library's adoption of the business model, but not the transition from one to the other, or the conflict between the two.¹⁷³ Garrison categorizes storytelling by librarians as an adoption of, "the child-saving methodology popularized by kindergarteners and social workers."¹⁷⁴ Instead, storytelling foregrounds tensions between the maternalist implications of working with children and the librarians' desire to present themselves as efficient professionals.

While primary teachers used maternalism to argue for their expertise, librarians saw it as a hindrance to their professionalism. Garrison's portrayals of children's librarianship have consistently interpreted the profession as firmly maternal in orientation, a weakness, she argues, that limited professionalization. In her book *Apostles of Culture*, Garrison describes how, "sentimentality overruled any attempt at a realistic

¹⁷² Sidney L. Jackson, Eleanor B. Herling, and E. J. Josey, eds., *A Century of Service: Librarianship in the United States and Canada* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976); Dennis Thomison, *A History of the American Library Association, 1876-1972* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978).

¹⁷³ See Dee Garrison, "Women in Librarianship," in *A Century of Service: Librarianship in the United States and Canada*, 146-168, ed. Sidney L. Jackson, Eleanor B. Herling, and E.J. Josey, (Chicago: The America Library Association, 1976), and *Apostles of Change*.

¹⁷⁴ Dee Garrison, "Women in Librarianship," *A Century of Service*, 152. This is somewhat ironic, since kindergartners were taught to avoid teaching children to read; their activities were not literacy-based until the early 1900s. Kindergarteners were, however, trained generally in work with children, and in storytelling.

assessment of the work being accomplished in the children's department... Here, as in no other area, library women were free to express, unchallenged, their self-image."¹⁷⁵

Though this may have been largely true in the 1890s, the case was almost the opposite in the early 1900s and 1910s. Children's librarians eschewed sentimentality and deliberately portrayed themselves as efficient and orderly public servants. Garrison portrays librarians' maternalism as crucial to their "self-image," barely restrained, apparently, by male coworkers and finally unleashed in the realm of the children's library. As their discussions of storytelling show, children's librarians, by contrast, worked hard to construct an identity free of maternalism, particularly the sentimental maternalism of kindergarten teachers and others who tended to romanticize children. Since storytelling typically had strong maternal motivations and overtones in other settings with children, it shows how librarians rejected maternalism in favor of efficiency.

When children's library sections began to be widespread in the 1890s, they were conceived of as extensions of the domestic, not public, sphere. Virtually all children's librarians were women. Kindergarteners, who conceived of their work as an extension of the domestic sphere, were some of the first children's librarians, as there were few women who were trained in child education. The maternal ideology of kindergarteners initially provided a model for other women hired and trained as children's librarians. Though libraries rarely credited kindergarteners for the idea of the library story hour, it is probably no coincidence that libraries began telling stories at the same time kindergartens and their philosophy was becoming well-known. Kindergarteners told stories and gave

¹⁷⁵ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 180.

lectures on storytelling at libraries in the 1890s and, in some places, into the early 1900s.¹⁷⁶ The ideal children's librarian of the 1890s mirrored the ideal kindergartener. Minerva Sanders, who opened the first children's section in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 1877, was called "Mother Sanders."¹⁷⁷ She created a friendly atmosphere in the children's room by introducing child-sized furniture, colorful pictures, and open rather than restricted stacks. Children's librarians at first followed her legacy. An article in an 1898 edition of *Public Libraries* portrayed the ideal children's librarian as having, "a sympathetic nature, a winning personality, a proper amount of personal dignity, a love for children..."¹⁷⁸ This version of the children's librarian used her maternal qualities to influence youths. As one children's librarian wrote in 1898, "The children's librarian stands very close to the mother and the teacher in the power she can wield over the lives of the little ones."¹⁷⁹ Whenever possible, the author proposed, libraries should have, "a live, warm-hearted, sympathetic and childloving woman as the medium between the library and the child"¹⁸⁰ The love of the (female) children's librarian was to create a

¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, by the 1890s, kindergarten principles were being discussed in mainstream publications such as the *Ladies' Home Journal*, as well as education forums such as National Education Association publications, and kindergartens were beginning to become public, rather than private, institutions.

¹⁷⁷ R.R. Bowker, "Hans Christian Anderson Statuette for Children's Rooms," *Library Journal*, Vol. 46 (October 1, 1921): 800.

¹⁷⁸ L.E. Stearns, Synopsis paper presented by Mr. Crunden at the American Library Association conference, July 5-9, 1898, Lakewood, NY, *Public Libraries*, Vol. 3, No. 8 (October 1898): 304.

¹⁷⁹ "The Children's Room and the Children's Librarian," synopsis of paper presented by Miss Eastman at the Ohio Library Association conference, October 12-13, 1898, *Public Libraries*, Vol. 3 No. 10 (December 1898): 418.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 420. (article 418-420)

personal relationship with the child to mediate between the child and the impersonal institution of the library.

By the early 1900s, storytelling was seen as crucial to the job of the children's librarian. Storytelling began at the Pratt Institute Free Library of Baltimore in 1879, and at the Carnegie library of Pittsburgh shortly thereafter. The practice spread slowly until the early 1900s, when children's sections had become regular components of libraries. Library science colleges, an effort at professionalizing librarianship and recruiting more highly trained workers, spread rapidly after the first such institute was founded by John Dewey at Columbia in 1887; such institutes came to define the skills of a well-trained librarian. The curriculum was highly technical, and, though it always remained so, coursework expanded as the library similarly expanded its services.¹⁸¹ By the early 1900s students could specialize in a type of librarianship, such as children's work. In 1901 the Carnegie library of Pittsburgh established a library school exclusively for the training of children's librarians; at least by 1916, two of the nine instructors taught only storytelling.¹⁸² First-year library students there spent 66 hours studying storytelling, and had regular exams on the subject.¹⁸³ A typical course on storytelling at a library science school covered children's literature, folk and fairy tales, preparing story programs, and learning which stories were best for which ages of children. Similar to storytelling

¹⁸¹ For more on library science colleges, see Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*.

¹⁸² "Carnegie Library School," in "Library Schools and Short Courses," *The American Library Annual* (New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1917), 294.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 295, and "Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh Training School for Children's Librarians," *Library Schools and Training Classes*, *The Library Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (January 1908): 27. (article 27)

courses in normal schools, students practiced storytelling with the instructor and attended lectures by professional storytellers outside of class. Storytelling was seen as an important professional skill for children's librarians, one that merited significant study.

Librarians were not unfamiliar with storytelling's maternalist overtones and aesthetic philosophy. Guest lecturers at library science colleges included Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen, Edna Lyman, and Sara Cone Bryant, all prominent writers on storytelling who argued storytelling was an art, one that women were inherently well-equipped to perform. Libraries also sponsored public storytelling lectures, which were probably attended by mothers, teachers, and settlement workers who perceived storytelling as nurturing. Thus, even into the 1910s, there was a confluence of ideas with those who wrote about storytelling from a more aesthetic and maternalist perspective; librarians were familiar with the praise storytelling received for fostering affectionate relationships with children. However, librarians deliberately chose a different tactic for their institution. As one librarian explained, "Story-telling is one method of inspiring reading of the right sort—a means to an end."¹⁸⁴ In the library, storytelling was a strategy for attracting children to the library, not an expression of care for them.

The Business of the Library

¹⁸⁴ Alice G. Higgins, quoted in "Bay Path Library Club," Library Clubs, *The Library Journal*, Vol. 35 No.7 (July 1910): 333. (article 333)

By 1910, no one would have disputed the librarian who claimed, “The ‘Story hour’ has made for itself an indisputable place in library work.”¹⁸⁵ Such an assertive statement could only be said in 1910, after the library story hour, and the identity of children’s librarians, had been debated during the early 1900s. In the process of abandoning the maternalism of the 1890s, children librarians sought to portray themselves as efficient professionals. Hewing to a business model, success was based on how avidly the library’s products—books—were consumed. However, the motivation to attract the public was not simply to bolster the library’s stranding; it was also to spread the library’s educational benefits. Librarians believed if more people read quality literature, society would be better educated and have a better sense of morality. Discussion of librarians at conferences and publications combined the language of business as well as reform. Storytelling particularly highlights the tension between the library’s desire for prestige and its educative goals, because it was targeted at its most lucrative, as well as its most easily influenced customers, children.

The tensions between the library’s goals for its own prestige and its educative mission were particularly brought to the fore in the divergent approaches to storytelling’s artistry. Beginning in the early 1900s, large libraries frequently hired professional storytellers to tell stories to adults and children, and give lectures on storytelling methods. Some professional storytellers, such as Marie Shedlock, perhaps the most well-known

¹⁸⁵ M.R.H., “Irish Stories for the Story-Hour,” *Library Journal*, Vol. 35 No. 5 (May 1910): 207. (article 207)

storyteller in the United States, first told stories as guests at libraries.¹⁸⁶ Such figures brought prestige to the library and attracted significant crowds. Professional storytellers, like many of the teachers and psychologists who wrote on storytelling, portrayed themselves as practicing an ancient oral art. “Story-telling is almost the oldest art in the world—the first conscious form of literary communication,” Shedlock proclaimed, going on to compare storytellers to troubadour and minstrels.¹⁸⁷ But this philosophy did not percolate to the weekly or semi-weekly story hours presented by the children’s librarian or assistants, who had a more practical view of the subject than the artists they hosted. If the story hour was considered an art at all, it was in the service of promoting literature. Storytelling, pointed out librarian Annie Carroll Moore in 1909, was “considered as an art” because it was, “...the finest medium of expression we have for revealing what there is in books for children.”¹⁸⁸ Whereas most writers on storytelling generally argued they preserved an oral art from dying as a result of the printing press, librarians used storytelling to preserve interest in literary traditions. “Its function,” argued Frances Jenkins Olcott, “is to place within the reach of all the best thought of the world as

¹⁸⁶ Shedlock, originally from England, began her U.S. career in 1903, when she was jointly invited by a kindergarten college as well as a library science college to speak at the Pratt Free Institute Library in Baltimore. A close friend of the author and kindergartener Kate Douglas Wiggin, Shedlock was also on good terms with conservative librarians. She was reportedly beloved by children, and often appeared in the costume of a fairy godmother.

¹⁸⁷ Shedlock, *The Art of the Story-Teller* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1917), xiii.

¹⁸⁸ Annie Carroll Moore, “Story-Telling in the New York Public Library,” *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, Vol. 3 No. 5 (October 1909): 410.

*conserved in the printed page.*¹⁸⁹ Not only did librarians use storytelling for a different purpose than other institutions, but they conceived of storytelling's nature as fundamentally different from most other writers on the subject. While guest professional storytellers provided the library with a way to reach out to the public, librarians did not share their philosophy of storytelling. To librarians, storytelling was a tool, not a traditional art form.

Why children's librarians abandoned maternalism while teachers and other female professionals adopted it is not entirely clear. Dee Garrison, the primary historian on women and librarianship, simplifies the transition to the point of obscuring any meaningful analysis. She concludes that in the 1890s and early 1900s, "much of the work with children [in the library] was overly sentimental and excessively controlling."¹⁹⁰ Criticizing maternalism in the library, Garrison is approving that, "By World War I library service to children had boiled down to more normal and modern proportions."¹⁹¹ Garrison perceives maternalism as abnormal; thus, librarians' abandonment of it was merely a matter of coming to their senses. The fact that some, though less than 25%, of librarians were male must also have been a factor. Children's librarians did not consider themselves apart from other librarians, and the absence of maternalist rhetoric in other library work helped them set their own standards. Trying to

¹⁸⁹ Frances Jenkins Olcott, "Story Telling—A Public Library Method," *Proceedings of the Child Conference for Research and Welfare* (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co., 1909), 225. Also reprinted *The Pedagogical Seminary*, Vol. 16 (1909): 545-547. Italics the author's.

¹⁹⁰ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 215.

¹⁹¹ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 216.

provide a warm, welcoming environment for each patron was impractical, and children's librarians rarely portrayed themselves as able to know the needs and taste of each of their child patrons. Large crowds of children at large libraries was usual. Running the library as a business was seen as the most efficient way of bringing literary resources to the most people. Furthermore, institutional prestige was increasingly based on "efficiency" during the Progressive Era.¹⁹² The shift is thus probably a result of both internal and external trends.

Unlike the authority of women in the home and primary school, which rested on intimate knowledge of and sympathy for children, Librarians portrayed their authority as based on common sense and rigorous discipline. Discipline through love and kindness, argued children's librarians, would lead to anarchy: "In all work with children," Caroline Hewins warned in 1900, "there is danger that well-meaning benevolence will let it degenerate into license." She described a friend, a children's librarian, who was directed by the women of the local library association that, "the children should be governed by kindness alone." The result, Hewins continued, "was that they laughed her to scorn, sang songs and smoked cigarettes in the library, broke windows and furniture, and gave false names."¹⁹³ Librarians had a duty to protect public property, and such an image would have been appalling. Children's librarians portrayed themselves as disciplinarians were able to manage such unruly children. Children learned to, "treat city property

¹⁹² For more on efficiency during the Progressive Era, see Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

¹⁹³ Caroline M. Hewins, "Work with Children: What Libraries Have Done and Are Doing," *Library Journal*, Vol. 25 No. 8, Montreal Conference (August 1900): 120.

carefully.”¹⁹⁴ “The public library is one of the few remaining places where children have to observe law and order,” wrote Grace Blanchard in 1905, “...every visit to a library is a lesson in propriety and refinement.”¹⁹⁵ Unlike kindergarten and primary school teachers, librarians perceived children as unruly and ill-mannered, in need of discipline that presumably the home and school were not providing. The relationship children’s librarians forged with children was portrayed as authoritarian out of necessity.

Children’s librarians now contrasted their approach to that of kindergarten teachers, portraying their nurturing principles as flimsy and impractical. Arguing the children’s library was not part of the domestic sphere, Caroline Burnite cautioned, “There is danger in all specialized work with little children. The children’s library is but a part of the main library, not a kindergarten, and should represent an atmosphere not heretofore in the child’s experience.” The danger lay in the potential for affectionate feelings on the side of the librarian, which would be impractical. Though children’s librarians should have a, “natural love of child nature,” they should not become attached to children individually. “If she is not guarded,” Burnite continued, “she will find demands for special attention and affection which will not only make serious inroads upon her time, but spoil the child’s own independence of action.”¹⁹⁶ Burnite’s words imply that the library does not have time to form such relationships with children, that this should not be

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Grace Blanchard, “The Child and the Public Library,” from an address before the Social Education Congress, Boston, Dec. 1, 1906, *Public Libraries*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (March 1907): 91.

¹⁹⁶ Caroline Burnite, “The Youngest Children and Their Books,” paper presented at the Niagra Library Conference, *Library Journal*, Vol. 28 No. 5 (June 1903): 218.

a duty of librarianship. She also argues that being affectionate with the children would in fact make them dependent. Librarians mocked the kindergarten's sympathetic approach to literacy, arguing that such notions were based on overly romantic views of the nature of children. In 1917 Harriot E. Hassley wrote in "Common Sense and the Story Hour,"

We have heard to a wearisome extent of the "sweet little story for the dear little children." We do not wish to repeat the experience of the enthusiastic young kindergartner who took a position in a children's library and solicitously said to the wrong boy: "Well, my dear, can I find you a nice book?"—only to have the small boy square his shoulders and rise to every possible inch of insulted dignity as he answered, "I ain't your dear, and I'll find my own books."¹⁹⁷

Children's librarians portrayed themselves as more realistic and better equipped to handle the child masses than sentimental kindergarten teachers. Rejecting their past associations with kindergartners, librarians now conceived of themselves as highly trained and somewhat impersonal public servants, bringing children order and enlightenment rather than love.

Librarians saw children as customers to be wooed. Before companies began to market goods to children (rather than parents) in the 1910s, the library understood the power of appealing to children.¹⁹⁸ "We are as eager to please our small customer as the merchants are," wrote Harriet Hassley.¹⁹⁹ Libraries advertised their services in special feature sections of local newspapers, particularly story hours, a new technique for attracting patrons. Posters at the library informed children and their parents of when story hours would occur. Children's librarians also visited schools and told brief stories to

¹⁹⁷ Harriot E. Hassley, "Common Sense and the Story Hour," *Papers and Proceedings of the General Meeting of the American Library Association*, Vol. 27 (1905), 76.

¹⁹⁸ David I. MacLeod, *The Age of the Child*, 22.

¹⁹⁹ Harriot E. Hassley, "Common Sense and the Story Hour," 78.

interest children in attending a story session at the library itself. The point, as Francis Parker observed, was that “If [children] are properly taught to study nature and use books there will be a great demand for good reading. The library will grow in direct proportion to this demand, and it will soon be tremendous.”²⁰⁰ Advertisement would result in increased demand for the library’s books by children, a significant portion of the population, which would lead to the growth of the library itself, both physically and in its public role.

Once children came to the library, the story hour itself would serve as advertisement for the library’s books. “The children’s story hour is a good advertisement as well as a splendid activity,” Bessie Silverthorn advised other children’s librarians, “Remember that your aim is to create the ‘library habit’ in the rising generation. At the same time you are probably reaching mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, cousins, and aunts.”²⁰¹ Children would develop a “literary habit” and become lifelong customers, and their patronage would influence their family members. The power of the story hour lay in its ability to make children desire the good literature the library would provide. Arthur Bostwick, president of the American Library Association from 1908-1909, argued that the story was a subtle technique to increase demand. “The object of the story in a library is, of course, to stimulate interest in books,” he proposed, “but it may do this in various ways without advertising any particular book or seeming to force it upon the reader.” As

²⁰⁰ Summary, speech by Col. Francis W. Parker, meeting of the Chicago ALA, “Library Meetings,” *Public Libraries*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (February 1901), 101.

²⁰¹ Bessie B. Silverthorn, “Library Advertising,” *Bulletin of the Vermont Library Commission*, Vol. VI No. 1 (June 1910): 5.

in the school and home, the subtlety of the story was one of its greatest assets. “A good story acts by creating a desire, and when this effect has once been produced nothing more is necessary but a supply of books that will satisfy the desire,” Bostwick explained.²⁰² The story hour created demand for the library’s services. Because the story was used for this specific purpose, other concerns, particularly the emotional experience of the teller, were necessarily small. “Leaving aside the story-teller’s own satisfaction and the value of a good story for a good story’s sake,” proposed Harriet Hassley, “let me enter my plea for the story-hour for the library’s sake, because it is the only means by which we can get the children honestly to want the books ‘we want them to want.’”²⁰³ The power of the story to create and shape desires was its most important quality, and other concerns, such as the teller’s own satisfaction with the story, were secondary.

The story hour functioned as an advertisement due to the content of the story as well as the steps the librarians took after the story hour to help children make connections between the oral and written forms of stories. Stories in the home and school were often based on folktales or Native American or Greco-Roman myths, or sometimes stories written by contemporary authors. Librarians almost exclusively told stories based on classic literature, either by author or by theme. For example, Shakespeare “cycles,” series of story hours based on Shakespeare’s plays, were popular, as were cycles based on Homer or epic poetry. Librarians put books related to the story hour on a special shelf to purposefully channel the child’s affinity for the story to the book. “Make the story hour

²⁰² Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library*, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1910), 88.

²⁰³ Harriet E. Hassler, “Common Sense and the Story Hour,” 78.

count for something,” advised Faith Smith, “...Let it stimulate in them a desire to read more on that subject. And then strike while the iron is hot, and have the books ready for them.”²⁰⁴ Conversely, sometimes lists of books with themes similar to those in the story hour were passed out, so that children could learn to find them. After creating demand, librarians made sure to amply supply it.

Enthusiasm for storytelling was not universal among librarians, and the early 1900s in particular were a time of intense debate over its adoption. Some of the concern stemmed from storytelling’s maternal overtones. Though rarely explicitly, librarians who criticized storytelling portrayed one of its drawbacks as its maternal overtones. John Cotton Dana, president of the ALA from 1895-96 and a prominent member through the 1910s, pointed out that storytelling was practiced “chiefly by women,” but should be left to “schoolmen;” he suggests that librarians are fond of storytelling because they wish to personally influence children.²⁰⁵ For Dana, one of storytelling’s weaknesses is its femininity, both in the sense of who practices it and what they hope to accomplish. Displaying a similar attitude, Sophy Powell, one of Dana’s disciples, thought storytelling was too heavily evaluated on the basis of the storyteller’s “personality,” rather than on whether the teller based their stories off the best classics of translation of classics.²⁰⁶ As Dee Garrison observes, the emphasis on personality as a prerequisite for a

²⁰⁴ Faith E. Smith, “Library Work for Children,” *Public Libraries*, Vol. 12 No. 3 (March 1907): 81.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 153 and 154.

²⁰⁶ Sophy Powell, *The Children’s Library, A Dynamic Factor in Education* (White Plains, New York: The H.W. Wilson Co., 1917), 274.

career was common in women's, not men's, professions.²⁰⁷ Objections like those of Powell criticized the intimacy of storytelling that other institutions embraced; in other settings, storytelling was supposed to help forge relationships between the teller and the listener. Though children's librarians were not supposed to be unfriendly to children, their authority was also not facilitated by affectionate relationships with their child patrons. Librarians such as Dana and Powell expressed hostility to storytelling because of its personal nature, which perhaps was an indicator of the maternal overtones storytelling had in other institutions and reform movements.

Aside from storytelling's maternal connotations, many questioned its effectiveness in drawing children to the library in relation to the amount of time it took librarians to prepare, advertise, and perform such an event. There was so much enthusiasm over storytelling between 1900 and 1920 that its detractors were frequently reminding other librarians of the fundamental goal of the children's library: efficiently encouraging children to enjoy good books and providing that literature for them. A paper presented at the 1908 Indiana Library Association conference spoke favorably of storytelling, but the discussion that followed expressed mixed opinions.²⁰⁸ One attendee argued storytelling should create a "love for literature," and particularly supported the telling of "fairy stories."²⁰⁹ Another audience member responded, clearly reacting to the

²⁰⁷ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 190.

²⁰⁸ Ella F. Corwin, Report of the Indiana Library Association Conference, *Public Libraries*, Vol. 13, No. 10 (December 1908): 417.

²⁰⁹ Report of the Indiana Library Association Conference, *Public Libraries*, Vol. 13, No. 10 (December 1908), 417. "Fairy stories" appear to have been distinguished from "fairy

growing importance placed on storytelling in the library community: “The story hour is not all of the work with children and there are libraries where it is not necessary.”²¹⁰

Such tense, if not heated, discussions questioned the effectiveness and economy of storytelling in relation to its ability to encourage children to read good literature.

Observed Alice Blanchard in 1910,

If story telling can be an effective tool, enabling us to reach with books more children at less expense than any other method at our command, then it has a legitimate place in library work. If it cannot do this we should let it alone... Unless the Story Hour advertises the best books, and results in an increased use of them, the library is wasting time and money in its story telling.²¹¹

Such concerns speak to the rejection of maternalism, an ideology that resisted discussing services for children in terms of finances.²¹² But these considerations were important to the library in a practical sense because it had limited funding and wanted to maximize the number of people who used its services. John Cotton Dana, for example, argued storytelling was both a waste of library finances and an ineffective way to reach child patrons. “The occasional story-telling which the one library of a town can furnish is so slight a factor in the educational work of that town or city as to make the library’s pride

tales” during the Progressive Era. Fairy stories were stories that were specifically about fairies.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Alice A. Blanchard, “Story Telling as a Library Tool,” *Proceedings of the Child Conference for Research and Welfare*, 1909, (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co., 1910), 39-40.

²¹² Pricing the Priceless Child.

over its work seem very ludicrous,” he commented.²¹³ Aside from arguments about efficiency, some librarians were against the extension of services in principle. One librarian complained as late as 1916 that others had the tendency, “to overemphasize the Kindergarten side, the Story hour, etc., to overdo Publicity, all to the detriment of the fundamental purpose of the library—which is to furnish good reading to all who want it. Books should come first, last and all time.”²¹⁴ Despite general enthusiasm for the library to extend services to the public, some still saw this as outside the library’s proscribed realm. Such concerns highlight debates about the library’s role in society, as well as their concerns for efficiency and effectiveness of the services the library provided.

Though such concerns were common in the early 1900s, the assiduous numerical data librarians collected about storytelling justified the use of storytelling for the majority of librarians. Most libraries meticulously kept track of story hour attendance. From October 1, 1908, to May 1, 1909, New York City’s main library totaled 526 story hours—and these were only the story hours for children, since the library offered opportunities for adults as well.²¹⁵ Soaring attendance rates confirmed that storytelling brought children through the library doors. 300 children arrived at the first story hour of the Toldeo, Ohio library, and thereafter the librarians recorded attendance and repeat

²¹³ John Cotton Dana, “Story-Telling in Libraries,” originally published in *Public Libraries* Vol. 13, No. 9 (November 1908): 349-351, in *Libraries: Addresses and Essays* (White Plains, New York: The H.W. Wilson Co, 1916), 154

²¹⁴ Gratia Countryman, quoted in A.M., “A Country Visitor in Minnesota,” *Public Libraries*, Vol. 21 No. 9 (November 1916): 415.

²¹⁵ Annie Carroll Moore, “Story-Telling in the New York Public Library,” 412.

attendance rates in the dozens and hundreds.²¹⁶ In Cleveland in 1914, 102,741 children attended story hours throughout the year; even taking into account children who attended more than one story hour, this is an impressive figure.²¹⁷ In the South, the few libraries for African-Americans also attracted numerous children to story hour.²¹⁸ Librarians typically recorded between 30 and 100 children at attendance at story hours, depending in part on the size of the town.

Librarians monitored how frequently books on subjects related to story hours were checked out. After a series on the Iliad and the Odyssey in one library, “Stories from Greek mythology and Homer, were placed on special ‘story hour’ shelves, and, as a result of the interest aroused by the story telling, were circulated 2051 times,” observed one librarian with satisfaction.²¹⁹ Proclaimed another, “If you wish to see the practical results of story telling, compare the records from year to year as found on the dating slips of Story Hour books. These mute figures are a strong argument.”²²⁰ Such data was published regularly in professional periodicals, particularly in the early 1900s, when some questioned storytelling’s usefulness. In the library, quantifiable data had authority

²¹⁶ Wendell F. Johnson, “The Story Hour as an Activity of the Public Library,” *The American City*, Vol. 23, No.4 (October 1920): 379.

²¹⁷ Leonard P. Ayres and Adele McKinnie, *The Public Library and the Public Schools*, Cleveland Education Survey (Cleveland: The Survey Committee of the Cleveland Foundation, 1916), 43.

²¹⁸ Clara O. Jackson, “Service to Urban Children,” *A Century of Service: Librarianship in the United States and Canada*, ed. Sidney L. Jackson, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976), 25.

²¹⁹ Library Economy and History, *The Library Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 9 (September 1901): 708.

²²⁰ Helen U. Price, “The Story Hour in Libraries,” *Public Libraries*, Vol. 12 No. 9 (November 1907): 348.

because it showed in an objective way how the masses of children responded to hearing a story. Arguments for effectiveness of stories in the home and school rested on the children's visible reaction to the story (shining eyes, smiling, or reporting what lesson they had learned from it), but the model of librarianship demanded numerical data. With such statistics, librarians in favor of storytelling were making an argument that storytelling produced clear results.

Though librarians criticized maternalism, they also realized that accessing the power of the maternal teacher over her student would be beneficial. Librarians also courted teachers because they sought a professional alliance with them. Advisory texts for children's librarians suggested different ways of attracting teachers to the library, from creating separate teacher reading rooms and periodical sections, to keeping up on each local teacher's curricula and supplying the needed books.²²¹ Henry Elmendorf advised children's librarians to appeal to a teacher's desire to form friendly relationships with her students: "Every teacher wants her pupils to love to come to school, and knows that it is far easier to teach happier, interested children... The library will add interest. It will help to make the school-room a place of joy and happiness."²²² It was not as significant to children's librarians to make their own realms those of "joy and happiness." Sophy Powell advised children's librarians to court teachers in order to influence children's reading habits, since, "Outside of the home she (the teacher) holds perhaps the

²²¹ See for example Josephine Adams Rathbone, "Co-Operation Between Libraries and Schools: An Historical Sketch," in *The Relationship Between the Library and the Public Schools*, 14.

²²² Henry L. Elmendorf, "Public Library Books in Public Schools," *The Relationship Between the Library and the Public School*, 185.

highest place in their affections. What she advises has great weight with them.”²²³

Librarians acknowledged that primary teachers cultivated their students’ affections, but did not argue that librarians should do the same; rather, they should access the power of this bond through the teacher.

The results were mixed. Annie Carroll Moore commented drily in 1914: “Co-operation between school and library... had been more marked by effort on the librarian’s side than on that of the teacher, whose reluctance to recognize the librarian as a fellow educator... has been noticeable.”²²⁴ Despite the effort it entailed, most children’s librarians eagerly sought out teachers as both a method of reaching children and a means to increase the library’s standing as an educative body. Despite the librarians’ multi-pronged efforts to court teachers, story hours may have been most attractive. Whereas librarians were frustrated in attracting other educators to their services generally, teachers came to story hours unasked. Just beginning to incorporate storytelling into their classrooms, primary school teachers brought their classes to the story hour or attended themselves to learn about storytelling method. A few librarians published significant books on storytelling method that influenced and were recommended by primary teachers, or gave lectures on storytelling that teachers attended.²²⁵ Teachers let librarians visit their classrooms to promote the library’s

²²³ Sophy Powell, *The Children’s Library*, 70.

²²⁴ Annie Carroll-Moore, “Library Visits to Public School,” in *The Relationship Between the Library and the Public School* (White Plains, New York: 1914), 201.

²²⁵ Most notably were Edna Lyman’s *Story Telling: What to Tell and How to Tell It* (New York: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910); hers was one of the first non-kindergarten texts of storytelling method.

services, and librarians often used storytelling during these brief sessions to interest children in the library.²²⁶ Edna Lyman organized an open house for a Michigan library in celebration of a new children's room being opened. No books were circulated, but many children, parents, and teachers came for the two hours of storytelling.²²⁷ Though the school and library were often connected in a practical sense, because librarians managed school libraries, there appears to be relatively few forums in which they shared professional or pedagogical knowledge. Storytelling helped librarians forge a professional relationship with teachers. Though the primary school absorbed much of its storytelling principles from the kindergarten, it mirrored many of the library's concerns for efficiency and effectiveness. Through storytelling, librarians effectively reached adults who were important in the child's life.

Though they effectively modeled the library, including children's services, after a business, to librarians this did not conflict with the ultimate goal of libraries: to reform society through good reading. Librarians shared with many reformers—including maternalists, scientists, and politicians—the belief that children's services were one of the most effective ways to reform society. The ultimate benefit to storytelling's success was that it made children either read more or better quality literature. Good literature was usually described as classic works, though contemporary authors who wrote morally wholesome stories were also considered appropriate. Hearing and then reading classic

²²⁶ Leonard P. Ayres and Adele McKinnie, *The Public Library and the Public Schools*, 44.

²²⁷ News from the Field, *Public Libraries*, Vol. 12 No. 4 (April 1907): 164. (article 161-166)

literature would make dime novels, the sworn enemy of the library, lose their allure.

“Once the boy has heard [good stories] told, he will learn to like them, and will lose interest in the Nick Carter Type,” predicted Wendell Johnson.²²⁸ In this way, the story hour was initiated a clear series of cause and effect. The Wisconsin Library Commission told librarians,

No other part of your library work is more productive of returns than your work for the children. No other investment will so extend your service to the home and into the years to come. For many children only the public library can introduce them to the best of literature, only books and the love of good reading, early instilled and long fostered, can counteract some of the weakening influences of the times.²²⁹

The library’s motives were to increase use of its own services, but this was not wholly self-serving. Librarians thought society would improve if more people read literature that presented such ideals as courage, heroism, and moral uprightness, which they saw as particularly present in the classics. Children’s reading was particularly important to shape; though librarians perceived children as unruly and uncouth, they also acknowledged they were *tabula rasae* as far as reading tastes were concerned. “If we are to cultivate a taste for good reading among the masses of the people,” argued George Peckham, “the work must be begun before the children have formed a habit of reading poor and vicious books.”²³⁰ Though librarians wanted to boost the prestige and

²²⁸ Wendell Johnson, “The Story Hour,” 380. Nick Carter had been a popular dime-novel detective hero since the 1880s.

²²⁹ Wisconsin Library Commission, *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*, Vol. 21, quoted in “What is a Children’s Librarian?” *Illinois Libraries*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (January 1922), 37.

²³⁰ George W. Peckham, “The Public Library and the Public School,” *The Relationship Between the Library and the Public School*, 89-90. For more on the library’s logic of

popularity of their institution, they saw this as ultimately beneficial to the rest of the society. Children were perceived as particularly worthy of extra services. Children's librarians portrayed themselves as not only efficient professionals, but as reformers.

At the same time, librarians shared many techniques of reaching children as the school and the home. Storytelling was, ultimately, a tool of persuasion. "A desire for good literature is created in children through the library story hour and the circulation of good children's books," explained B. Willard Lewis.²³¹ What was important was this desire, the correct impulse toward good reading. "We aim to produce an unforced, natural love for the best in literature, to lift the children's eyes from books written down to them, to the world of history and art and active life as presented in good literature, and to lead them gradually to pursue the subjects further," proposed Frances Jenkins Olcott.²³² Though librarians taught children in an indirect manner, their motivations were different—they wanted to keep customers attracted to their services. The business model—based on enticing demand and satisfying it—was remarkably like the home's emphasis on suasion and the creation of correct feelings and interests, which would lead to correct action. Storytelling's subtlety was exactly what made it so effective in both models. Thus, though librarians eschewed maternalist rhetoric and strategies for forging

social reform, see Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction: The Big City Public Library in American Life*, Chapter 3, "The Library and Social Reform," 31-49.

²³¹ B. Willard P. Lewis, "The Library and the Community," *Michigan Library Bulletin*, Vol. 7 No. 4 (September-October 1916): 146.

²³² Frances Jenkins Olcott, "Story Telling, Lectures, and Other Adjuncts of the Children's Room," *Library Journal*, Vol. 25 No. 8, Montreal Conference (August 1900): 70.

relationships with children, their model of educating children they still relied on shaping the child's behavior.

Story-telling, along with reading clubs for older children, was one of the first services provided by the library, for either children or adults, aside from the provision of books. It thus helped set the stage for the expansion of similar services. By the 1910s, lectures and public courses were offered frequently, and stereopticon shows and educational films had made their debut, particularly for children. At one library conference in 1908, a speaker, "told of one librarian who started a chair-caning class to interest restless boys, another had a museum of flowers and insects, still another conducted a branch of the flower mission. Such efforts were quite as legitimate as story-telling—anything which helps 'to make the library the center of broader and more abundant life.'"²³³ The library, styling itself as the "peoples' university," expanded its services throughout the 1910s and 20s. Storytelling, one of the first such services to be added to the library, heralded a change in the relationship of the library to American citizens—its customers as well as the public it served and reformed. Though they modeled their institution as a business, librarians did not perceive this conflicted with the educative services they offered. They saw their growing prestige as only a justification of the quality and value of services they provided.

Ultimately, the library used storytelling as a way to garner prestige as well as reform society. Instead of forging relationships with the child patrons, storytelling in the library helped children to form a consumerist as well as educative relationship with the

²³³ League of Library Commissions, Midwinter Meetings, *The Library Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 2 (February 1908): 61.

library. William Byron Forbush, president of the National Storytellers' League during the 1910s, observed that, "the librarian tells [stories] in order to bring children and good books together."²³⁴ Though librarians eschewed affectionate relationships with their child patrons, they sought to facilitate friendly relationships between children and books. In most other settings, such as professional storytelling, and storytelling in the home and school, forming a relationship with the teller was significant to the experience of the story and the child's absorption of the story's pedagogical value. Librarians believed that the nature of their work prevented them from forming such relationships. "The children's librarian will not have the close relations with the boys and girls that their school-teachers have," concluded Clara Hunt.²³⁵ Because they saw sometimes hundreds of children each day, and perceived many of these children as needing discipline more than love, librarians perceived forming affectionate relationships with children as impractical. They also viewed the maternalism of the home and school as incompatible with the business model of the library, and librarians' ability to portray themselves as efficiency-minded professionals. Children's librarians often preferred to make personal and professional connections with other adults—especially teachers—who had influence over the child, rather than becoming close to the children themselves. Despite their markedly different

²³⁴ William Byron Forbush, *A Manual of Stories* (Philadelphia: American Institute of Child Life, 1915), 154.

²³⁵ Clara Hunt, "Maintaining Order in the Children's Room," paper read before Long Island Literary Club, Feb. 19, 1903, *Library Journal*, Vol. 28 No. 3 (April 1903), 165. Reprinted in Alice I. Hazeltine, ed., *Library Work With Children* (White Plains, New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1917), 229-235.

strategy than other reformers who worked with children, librarians used similar strategies of suasion.

The way librarians approached storytelling is understandable because of their anxieties over professionalization. Whereas kindergarten teachers, for example, saw their activities in reaction to normative education, librarians sought association with it. Seeking professional status since the formation of the ALA in 1876, librarians were hindered by the feminization of their profession and by their dependence on small budgets. Though teaching also became a feminized profession during this time, compulsory education made their services essential. The fate of libraries, by contrast, relied more heavily on popular and political support; thus, courting such support was integral to their work. Whereas historian Dee Garrison's *Apostles of Culture* argues that librarians used the rhetoric of domesticity to do so, librarians' attitudes toward storytelling show that they often resented or refuted such language. At the same time, they vocally sought the same authority as teachers. Of children's librarianship, Clara Hunt wrote, "head librarians should reckon this to be a profession within our professions, just as the kindergarten is a specialist within the teaching body, demanding a higher type of training than is the rule, and *paying the price to get it.*"²³⁶ But unlike kindergarteners or teachers, librarians used the rhetoric of business to describe their work. Children's librarianship, a feminized profession, distanced itself from the maternalist rhetoric that the kindergarten and home embraced.

²³⁶ Clara W. Hunt, "Maintaining Order in the Children's Room," 167.

Librarians used storytelling to benefit their institution. It was an effective “advertisement” for the library, and it successfully introduced children to good literature. Yet storytelling was also yoked to maternalism and romantic perceptions of childhood, particularly because of its association with kindergarten methods. Wishing to portray themselves as efficient and objective public servants, librarians distanced themselves from such rhetoric; they perceived a business model as more conducive to the work they had to perform. They thought it was more important to foster a positive and lifelong relationship between child and library, not child and librarian. In facilitating such a relationship, librarians were also giving children a favorable perception of good literature. Rosemary Ruhig DuMont has depicted the “unknowing children” who came to the library and were “manipulated” into reading certain books.²³⁷ But storytelling in the library, as it was in the school and home, tapped what Progressives saw as the natural inclinations of children. The library did make use of these inclinations, but so did the school and home. Storytelling’s power, to both children and librarians, was that it could be used and interpreted in diverse ways.

²³⁷ Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont, *Reform and Reaction*, 95.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Storytelling's malleability made it a powerful force in the instruction of children. During the Progressive Era, storytelling highlighted the child-centered nature of institutions and the home. But it also underscored the different approaches of each institution. Storytelling was supposed to forge a connection between the teller and the listener, which made it attractive to the home as a way to promote mother-child relationships and family cohesion. The school similarly wanted to use storytelling to create a warmer and more nurturing relationship between the teacher and student, but, as a public institution, was attracted to storytelling because it instructed students efficiently and effectively. These latter traits were most appealing to the library, because it needed to meet the needs of a large public and secure its own public standing. In the library, the story worked to facilitate a strong relationship, but it was between the child and the institution, not individual librarians. In a more child-centered society, the adult communicated with the child in part on the child's own terms, using a language that was easy for him to understand. Storytelling was one such "language." It was hardly a dichotomy of active teller and passive listener, but had the goal of making the child think, feel, and imagine as much as he was capable of. For each setting, the relationship of adult and child was reinterpreted.

Storytelling highlighted strategies for both educating and forming relationships with children in three settings considered significant to their development: the home,

school, and library. Storytelling revealed the struggles that members of each underwent to define what kind of adult-child relationship best served both parties. In the home, the bedtime story spoke to the ideals of sympathetic mothering, in which mother and child would form a relationship based on the mutual exchange of confidences. But storytelling, as well as reading aloud, also facilitated bonding among the entire family, showing that Progressives did not simply believe the mother-child bond important, but emphasized a vision of the participatory, egalitarian family in which each member, regardless of age and authority, played an important role. The children's hour affirmed the social and educative centrality of the household at a time when it seemed threatened by urban delights and distractions. In the primary school, storytelling was a component of a new nurturing, child-centered curriculum. It was thus valued for its ability to forge a strong relationship between the teacher and students. However, storytelling was attractive because it also made discipline and instruction easier and more efficient. Its goal was a nurturing one, but it was also adopted because it met the needs of a public institution. Librarians also felt storytelling was suited to their needs, but these needs were not so much that of instruction as suasion. Librarians, while rejecting storytelling's maternal overtones as inefficient and professionally limiting, perceived the same power in the story's subtlety as did the home and school. However, the library used it to introduce children to a literary heritage that librarians thought essential to the development of moral and educated citizens. The ultimate purpose of the story in the library was to forge a lifelong relationship between the child and an institution, which would perpetuate the beneficial effects of the library on the individual, as well as bolster

the prestige of the library as a crucial part of a well-functioning society. There were continuity among all three realms in their use of storytelling: an appreciation of its subtlety for instruction and suasion, and a recognition of its ability to foster positive relationships. But the home, the school, and the library were also able to imprint storytelling with their own designs.

Storytelling appealed to women in careers outside the home because it was a new professional skill, as well as a strategy to be more efficient and effective at their jobs. As increasing numbers of women entered the workforce, they helped to define the skills for their professions. Though women had been teachers and librarians in great numbers even before the Progressive Era, the changing roles of these institutions, and particularly the emphasis on child-centeredness, caused a redefinition of women's roles. Nationwide compulsory attendance brought increasing demand for inexpensive teachers, and, particularly in the primary school, women filled these roles. The emphasis on child-centeredness in the school carried with it overtones of maternalism; writers on pedagogy argued, as kindergarten teachers had, that the classroom should be a nurturing place. On the other hand, an institutional emphasis on efficiency made the story attractive because it subtly and effectively taught the child both subject material and good behavior. For teachers, storytelling was a professional skill that made their jobs easier. Pedagogically *au courant*, storytelling was also an admirable skill that took time and education to master. It allowed teachers to cultivate affection with their students and gain respect from parents and professionals.

Children's librarians distrusted the maternal overtones the story had acquired in the home. More than three-fourths of the library workforce was female; virtually all children's librarians were women. The library as an institution struggled to find its place in the public realm, and both male and female librarians sought professional status. Children's librarians perceived the best way to do this as to identify themselves as efficient public servants with literary expertise; maternalism would hinder their ability to manage large crowds and earn the respect of sometimes unruly patrons. Librarians sought popular support to justify their status. Storytelling was a way for librarians to draw children, the library's "customers" to their products—books. Because children enjoyed the stories so much, they would seek more like them in print form. Children would be lifelong supporters of the library as they came to adulthood, perpetuating the public perception of the library as a font of knowledge, a crucial fixture of public life. Such public enthusiasm would cement librarians' own professional image. To librarians, the story could be freed of its maternal overtones and could provide them with a means to further their own definition of professionalism.

In the 1920s, storytelling faded slightly from the public prominence it had commanded in the early 1900s and 1910s. Less than half a dozen books were published on the subject in the 1920s, and discussions of storytelling declined in parenting and educational magazines, as well as library journals. Many of those who had written storytelling manuals in the 1900s and 1910s continued to write; Carolyn Sherwin Bailey published a collection of storytelling methodology as late as 1934. By the late 1910s, several of the writers on storytelling, who had already been writing stories for telling

aloud, had expanded their interests into writing children's literature, quite successfully.²³⁸ It appears that some of the major professional storytellers, such as Marie Shedlock, passed away in the mid-1930s. The National Storytellers' League remained an important cultural force throughout the 1920s, visiting schools and holding popular storytelling festivals. Storytelling also became a feature of children's camp programs and other summer activities.²³⁹ Though discussions of storytelling were petering out, it remained a popular force for edification and entertainment through the 1920s.

In the 1920s, professional discussion of storytelling faded from prominence because the valence of these discussions weakened. The primary school, as Lawrence

²³⁸ Kate Douglas Wiggin, who died in 1923, was one of the most popular and highly esteemed children's writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly for *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903). Carolyn Sherwin Bailey wrote several children's histories as well as books on citizenship, for example: *Boys and Girls of Colonial Days* (Chicago: A. Flanagan Co., 1917); *What to Do for Uncle Sam: A First Book of Citizenship* (Chicago: A. Flanagan Co., 1918); *Boys and Girls of Pioneer Days*, from Washington to Lincoln (Chicago: A. Flanagan Co., 1924). She also authored published numerous books for stories for telling and reading aloud, as well as books on educational methods, and on handcrafts and activities for children to perform in the home. She is best remembered now for her Newbery Medal award-winner *Miss Hickory* (1946). Sara Cone Bryant, one of the other most prominent writers on storytelling, followed a similar path: the rather xenophobic *I Am an America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), *The Magic Flute* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1926), *Brother Rabbit and Other Stories for Little Ones* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1926) as well as numerous story collection. Unfortunately, she is perhaps best remembered today for the objectionable portrayal of African Americans in her *Epaminondas and His Auntie* (1938). Bryant's *How to Tell Stories to Children* was translated into French. Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen became known for her children's book *East o' the Sun and West o' the Moon* (Chicago: Row, Petersen, & Co., 1912), a collection of Norwegian tales. Marie Shedlock published a stories adapted from Buddhist teachings, *Eastern Stories and Legends* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1920). Other writers on storytelling, such as Edward Porter St. John, became authorities on parenting and education.

²³⁹ See Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

Cremin has noted, had firmly grounded itself in child-centeredness, and women's status as professionals, or, at the least, "paraprofessionals," was concrete.²⁴⁰ Yet though the schoolroom was firmly child-centric, much of the passion for the story's nurturance faded, while concerns for efficiency remained. Perhaps because of the increasing influence of university standards on public schools, storytelling became less artistic and more intellectual, a component of literary instruction rather than a valid technique on its own. Kindergartens were primarily public by the 1920s, and its maternalism as well as idealism largely diluted. The story hour continued to be a fixture of the library, but the debates surrounding its acceptance, which had aroused passions, were over. Librarians did not fully achieve professional status, but they had carved out a niche in American public life. Their offerings, such as lectures, educational films, and exhibits, continued to expand, both for children and adults, as the library continued to construct an identity of public receptivity and educational expertise. Storytelling remained significant in the home, but reading aloud appears to have gradually gained the upper hand, perhaps due in part to the continued proliferation of collections of stories for reading aloud. Storytelling remained in all three realms, successfully institutionalized in teacher training and library science colleges, and, at least in the form of reading aloud, in a canon of virtues for the home. Storytelling retained its old forms, but it was ghost-like, no longer with an enthusiastic bevy of writers behind it, no longer an important attribute of maternalism or professional status.

²⁴⁰ See Lawrence Cremin, "Scientists, Sentimentalists, and Radicals," chapter six, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 179-239.

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