

An Analysis of Dollhouse Story Themes and Related Authentic Learning Activities

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This article presents an analysis of the themes in children's literature for preschool through middle school readers involving dollhouses with dolls that come alive or act out stories imagined by their owners. Recurrent themes of imagination, science fiction changes in time and space related to the dollhouse, diversity and friendship, courage and independence, creativity, and care of belongings are found in the thirty-six books examined. Suggested authentic learning activities for relating the literature to several content areas are given. An annotated bibliography that describes story plots follows the text.

Children are fascinated with dollhouses, perhaps because each represents a miniature fantasy world with so much to think about and do: assign dolls to rooms, arrange furniture, create accessories from found items, discuss relationships between dolls, and act out dramas to satisfy the dolls' (and owners') feelings.

The variety currently available attests to the continued popularity of dollhouses. Many toy manufacturers such as Playmobil, Little Tikes, Duplo, Fisher-Price, and Mattel sell quality plastic dollhouses of different types and scales, including one in a Victorian style and a miniature dollhouse in a pocket compact. Education catalogs feature many different wooden houses with a variety of furnishings, dollar stores offer plastic kitchen, living room and bedroom sets, while hobby stores sell make-it-yourself kits, period furniture, and exciting miniature accessories.

This article focuses on past and current children's literature for preschool through middle school readers involving dollhouses in which the dolls come alive or their owners imagine lives for the doll inhabitants. Recurrent themes of imagination, changes in time and space, diversity and friendship, courage and independence, creativity, and care of

belongings are analyzed. Suggested authentic learning activities for relating the literature to several content areas are given. An annotated bibliography that describes story plots follows the text.

Method

This study is a qualitative content analysis of major themes presented in children's books about dollhouses. Books were located for inclusion in the study by conducting searches with two databases (using the keyword "dollhouse"): the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database (Children's Literature Comprehensive Database, LLC, a full text database of reviews and related information about children's books and other materials), and WorldCat (an online database from OCLC FirstSearch). *A to Zoo* (Lima & Lima, 2001) was used to locate picture books. The search engine of a popular online bookstore (Amazon) was also used to locate additional books. Books that described how to make dollhouses or their furnishings were excluded. Only books available through interlibrary loan were included.

I read all the thirty-six books (twenty-four chapter books, ten picture books, one early reader, and one short story)

and kept notes of themes and subthemes addressed by each book. Six major themes emerged, which are discussed in the following section. Although no book addressed all six themes, many books included two or more of the themes.

Dollhouse Story Themes

Imagination

Imagining and envisioning ideas in the mind's eye are crucial skills for psychological and intellectual growth. Seeing a situation from several different points of view, predicting consequences of an action, writing a story, conceiving an improvement or invention, and thinking about a future career, all require a healthy imagination. Dollhouse stories help readers develop their capacity to think creatively by modeling play between children and dolls, by describing dolls' thoughts, by highlighting magical powers, and by suggesting other extensions of reality.

There is much research, as early as 1895 (Vostrosky), to support children's use of imaginary play companions such as dolls in a dollhouse and other toys that have feelings and can speak. The typical age range for belief in imaginary play companions is between the ages of two and a half and nine (Hurlock & Burnstein, 1932; Svendsen, 1934). Studies have shown that imaginary play companions bring many benefits to children (Somers & Yawkey, 1984). Children who have imaginary play companions have a high degree of social skill development and social awareness, traits highly correlated to capacity for expressive language (Ames & Learned, 1946). These children are better able to converse with adults than children without imaginary friends (Manosevitz, Prentice, & Wilson, 1973). Another benefit is that children with imaginary play companions exhibit a high degree of writing abilities

(Schafer, 1969). Finally, these advantages come without fear of lapse into unhealthy fantasy, as children with imaginary play companions prefer to socialize and interact with other youngsters when given the option (Manosevitz, Prentice, & Wilson, 1973).

The connection between having imaginary playmates and creativity is so strong that noted creativity researcher Gary Davis states:

In your author's personal experience, the biographical fact of having an imaginary playmate as a child has been a 100 percent accurate predictor of creativeness. That is, persons who report having had an imaginary playmate (or many of them, or imaginary animals) without exception - as yet - also have demonstrated other traits of creative people... They also report a background of creative activities, such as art, theatre, creative writing, photography, unusual hobbies or collections, or inventing gadgets and games (Davis, 1983, p. 29-30).

Many stories describe how the owners use their imaginations to interact with a dollhouse. In *The Bear's House* (Sachs, 1971), Fran Ellen has reached a point at which she no longer needs to manipulate the three bear dolls or Goldilocks to enact a drama. She just imagines walking into the house and the interaction begins:

Every day I try to be with the Bears' House. Any kid who finishes first in reading or math can play with the Bears' House until the rest of the class catches up. I never finish first in reading but lots of times I do in math. That's because I take the book home the night before, and do the work at home...

...So I get myself back there, and I settle myself down in front of it, and

get my thumb in my mouth and get ready.... (p. 7).

...And I open the door, and walk in (p. 10).

In *The Dolls' House* (Godden, 1947), the dolls wish hard for what they want and the girls who own the dollhouse seem to intuitively supply it. In the following excerpt, Tottie, the wooden doll, tells the rest of the dolls, who are disappointed with the old, dirty dollhouse with which they are presented, to wish for the girls to clean it:

"Don't bleat. Wish," said Tottie hardly, and her hard voice made the word sound so hard and firm that even Mr. Plantaganet took heart and they all began to wish. "Wish that Emily and Charlotte can put our house in order and make it good again. Go on, all of you. Wish. Wish. Wish, " said Tottie (p. 39).

At that moment, among the Plantaganets appeared hands, Emily's and Charlotte's hands, lifting them onto the mantelpiece out of the way where they could see. Then those same hands began to strip the dolls' house (p. 40).

In the same book, the dolls are obliged to become what the girls desire as Tottie's role is changed to a cook when a fancier doll is given to the girls, and the little boy doll, Apple, who once was the child of the Plantaganets, is switched to become the son of the fancy doll. These changes not only cause discomfort for the dolls, but also create some conflict between the two girls who are playing together.

In other stories, imagination is used for magical acts and pretend play. In *Flora's Magic House* (Schroeder, 1969), Flora, a little girl, meets Magic Box (a character who looks like a box with arms and legs) who can produce almost anything from his carton. He creates a paper house for Flora and Humpty Dumpty that is furnished

with useful paper furniture. Then he generates ice cream, cake, and lollipops for their tea party.

My Sister Lotta and Me (Dahlbäck, 1993) describes the pretend play of two sisters who, among other activities, stretch a cord between two chairs to walk the tightrope in the imaginary circus of their antique dollhouse.

Science Fiction Changes in Time and Space

A surprising number of stories revolved around clever science fictional properties of dollhouses involving transformations of scale or views of another time. Strange connections between real houses and dollhouses can be found in several books.

In *The Dollhouse that Time Forgot* (Ford, 1998), Marshall discovers that a closet in the attic of a house identical to the dollhouse his sister owns leads somehow into that dollhouse, miniaturizing him along the way. Later in the story, he learns he must construct a dollhouse facsimile of his own home to reverse the tragedy of his sister having been turned into a doll.

In *The Dollhouse Murders* (Wright, 1983), Amy discovers that the dolls in the replica dollhouse in the attic are being moved by a ghost to reenact the circumstances of the night her great-grandparents died. Similarly, Miranda, in *Time Windows* (Reiss, 1991), can watch scenes from her new home's past by gazing outward through the facsimile dollhouse's windows. She finds that events from the past seem to be influencing the present.

Readers are treated to the imaginative idea of shrinking houses and people with a fantastic machine in *Mindy's Mysterious Miniature* (Curry, 1970). In *Among the Dolls* (Sleater, 1975), the dolls have a secret miniature dollhouse in their own hidden attic, which they use to manipulate the girl and her human family.

When a doll removes the tiny girl from this replica of the human's home, the real girl is transformed to doll-size and trapped in the dollhouse, where its inhabitants seek revenge for the way she treated them.

Several ghosts haunt a dollhouse that moves on its own and has dolls that speak telepathically in *Sweet Miss Honeywell's Revenge* (Reiss, 2004). At the story's climax, several ghosts appear at Zibby's Mom's wedding and attempt to control Zibby to ruin the occasion. She and her newfound friends must outsmart and out-power them to save their new blended family from disaster.

In *Margo's House* (Griffin, 1996), Margo discovers that someone has papered the brother's room in her newly made dollhouse while she slept. The next night, she tries hard to stay awake to see who has done this, but finds herself astral-projected into the body of the sister doll. She and the brother doll embark on adventures through the house and must outsmart the monstrous housecat that tries to chew on them. At the story's end, she learns that her father, who had been incapacitated in the hospital with a severe heart attack, had inhabited the brother doll to be with her.

Similarly, Peggy, Marg's older cousin, is drawn into the antique cardboard dollhouse, *Castle Tourmandyne* (Hughes, 1995), as she sleeps. Because of the jealousy between the two girls, the dollhouse has gathered negative power and enacts the stories that unsuspecting Marg has made up for the castle. As Peggy's nightmares intensify, Marg begins to sympathize and finally makes a dollhouse character of herself to rescue her cousin from the evil murder plot occurring in the dollhouse.

Diversity and Friendship

The diversity and interdependence of our human world is paralleled in the world of dollhouses. Several stories depict a

diverse group of dolls of different origins and classes who must learn to get along with each other. In *Through the Dolls' House Door* (Gardham, 1987), A plastic Trojan soldier, a carved wooden Dutch doll, a princess rag doll who has lost her hair and pretty net dress, an imaginary doll named Sigger, and a ceramic sugar bowl cat, are packed away and forgotten inside the attic of an old doll's house. They entertain and encourage each other as they pass the time in darkness before another generation of children plays with them again.

Similarly, two widely different families of dolls, an antique porcelain family, and a modern plastic family, learn from each other in *The Doll People* (Martin & Godwin, 2000). In another book, *The Doll's House* (Godden, 1947), a common, wooden, one-farthing (quarter-penny) doll and a haughty, expensive porcelain doll vie for ownership of a dollhouse.

Along similar lines, Sarah, a human girl in *Satchelmouse and the Doll's House* (Barber, 1987), is magically transformed into a servant girl of the dollhouse when she had expected to be changed into a privileged child. She learns class differences firsthand through the experience.

Class differences are addressed in the *Rackety-Packety House* (Burnett, 1907) as a formerly grand dollhouse and its occupants become ragged through use and are pushed away to become a slum house when a new "Tidy Castle" is given to the girl. The Rackety-Packety House-dwellers, however, spend their time laughing and dancing around, taking pleasure in watching the haughty inhabitants of the luxurious house. At the end of the story, the lowly Rackety-Packety House inhabitants are exalted when a Princess recognizes their value.

In *Among the Dolls* (Sleator, 1975), the main character does not recognize the rights and hardships of her dolls until she is

transformed to doll size and learns firsthand what it is like live in their world. When she searches for a place to sleep, she finds very little comfortable furniture:

Vicky thought of the hard beds and then remembered, feeling a chill, that she had never provided any place at all for the aunt to sleep...

..."Well, she began haltingly, "I just always thought that, you know, that it didn't really matter to you, that you couldn't tell the difference, since you were only dolls and --"

... There was a sharp gasp around her...

..."Only dolls," repeated the aunt, with icy significance. "Well, my child, you shall soon see what 'only' dolls can do" (p. 41-42.)

Gender issues are directly addressed in *Toby's Doll's House* (Scamell, 1998). Toby, an almost-four-year-old boy, wants a dollhouse for his birthday, but everyone in his family insists that he *really* wants a fort, farmyard, or parking garage. Toby appreciates his family's gifts, but persists in wanting a dollhouse and eventually makes one himself from cardboard boxes. Although the majority of dollhouse stories feature girl owners and female main characters, this story helps young children see that dollhouses are appropriate for girls *and* boys.

Most of the dollhouse stories feature girls as interacting with dollhouses and as main characters. Some of the older stories role-model females learning etiquette, reverencing royalty, practicing traditional skills such as cleaning and sewing, and deferring to or depending upon males. These gender role issues should be discussed with readers.

A recent story that features a boy as the main character is the high-interest story, *The Dollhouse that Time Forgot* (Ford, 1998). Although Marshall's sister owns the

dollhouse in this story, Marshall is the main character who, with the help of his best buddy Simon, investigates the mystery surrounding the dollhouse. While the story appeals to both male and female readers, the hero is definitely male. A twelve-year-old boy and his sister share the stage in *The Picolinis* (Graham, 1988), a fast-moving story about a magical dollhouse, inhabited by the ghosts of circus performers, that holds the secret to buried treasure. The siblings both beg their parents for the dollhouse at auction and investigate its mysteries together.

Respect for others is also addressed by dollhouse stories. In the picture book *The Doll House* (Karas, 1993), Alex learns to respect the privacy of the dolls that have moved into her dollhouse. When Alex fails to stop her cousin Martin from abusing the dolls during his visit, the dolls move out. In *The Dollhouse Murders* (Wright, 1983), Amy learns to value the privacy of her Aunt Clare who initially refuses to discuss the deaths of the grandparents who raised her. Additionally, Amy's family learns to appreciate her need to have some time to herself, away from the older-sister duties of caring for Louann who is mentally retarded.

In *Sweet Miss Honeywell's Revenge* (Reiss, 2004), Zibby acknowledges that her behavior had deteriorated because of her reactions to the changes in her life, making her an easy target for control by the vengeful ghost.

Charlotte cleared her throat. "You were sort of having a tantrum, Zib," she said quietly. "You were kicking the wall..."

And Zibby recalled how she had been feeling on her birthday. Sad and bereft because Amy had just moved. Angry because Nell wanted to look at dollhouses instead of taking her to Sportsmart as promised. Anxious about the upcoming wedding and

prospect of having Laura-Jane for a stepsister. Maybe she had been a little weak that day, Zibby admitted to herself. And a little unmannerly (p 216).

A variety of human families are depicted in dollhouse stories. Fran Ellen's family (*The Bear's House*, Sachs, 1971) is on welfare, her father has deserted them, and her mother is bedridden with severe depression. Nell's African-American extended family (*Raven in a Dove House*, Pinkney, 1998) includes her father, the aunt who raised him, the aunt's brother, and Nell's fourteen-year-old cousin Foley. Amy's family (*The Dollhouse Murders*, Wright, 1983) involves a sister who requires special care and a father and aunt who were raised by their grandparents after the untimely deaths of their parents.

In *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower* (Godden, 1960), Nona, a motherless, dark-haired and tan-skinned eight-year-old who was raised in India by a nurse, joins her aunt's family in England. Her jealous younger cousin Belinda makes things difficult for poor Nona, until Belinda experiences loneliness herself.

Courage and Independence

Many characters of dollhouse stories learn bravery and self-reliance as the story unfolds. In *Miss Hickory* (Bailey, 1977, first published 1942), an obstinate doll made of an apple branch with a hickory-nut head, is evicted from her comfortable corn-cob house under the lilac bush by a chipmunk. She spends many weeks in despair under a rose trellis, surrendering her will to go on. However, her friend Crow urges her to take his advice and take up residence in an abandoned birds' nest:

"Dear lady!" Crow croaked, ignoring her bedraggled state. He understood that she had suffered a great loss. He

was a busybody and had heard about Chipmunk.

"Don't try to explain, Miss Hickory," he said hoarsely. "We all have our troubles. I told you that something would turn up. It has."

"What?" She stood up and leaned against the trellis.

"First of all," he told her, "you must realize that a change, travel, a new scene, are good for all of us. Especially you, Miss Hickory, need a change..."

She held out her arms, no longer proud (p. 25).

However, Miss Hickory must encounter new animal friends and experiences before she becomes an open-minded, independent person who discovers her true calling as an apple scion.

Mindy is a girl who is miniaturized along with a neighbor when the dollhouse they are examining suddenly grows to life-size and then shrinks with them in it (*Mindy's Mysterious Miniature*, Curry, 1970). She is faced with convincing the elderly group of tiny people in the dollhouse village they join that they should attempt escape. They learn courage and respect for youth when Mindy devises a clever plan to trick their captor into enlarging them to life size again.

Similarly, the family of the girl doll Annabelle (*The Doll People*, Martin & Godwin, 2000), learns to take risks and become less fearful of trying new things as they observe her youthful courage in going beyond the dollhouse to search for the missing Auntie Sarah. After Annabelle locates and facilitates the rescue of Auntie Sarah with the help of a girl from another dollhouse family, she reflects upon a conversation with her uncle:

Annabelle knew, though. She knew what her uncle was trying to say. He had been afraid. Truly afraid. But he

had thought Annabelle and Tiffany were brave enough and adventurous enough to do the job. He just hadn't known quite how to ask them to do it. And perhaps he hadn't wanted Annabelle to know how afraid he really was (p. 249).

Small Cry, a weepy doll in the story *Through the Dolls' House Door* (Gardam, 1987), is left outside the doll's house as it rests in the shed, waiting for someone to finally rediscover it. She longs to hear the stories the Trojan soldier and other dolls are telling inside the dollhouse attic, but is afraid to risk moving from her hold on the chimney:

"If you could ease and heave yourself about a bit," vibrated the Cat to Cry, "just try. If you could loosen yourself from the chimney, you're quite near the secret hinge of the roof. You could just possibly wiggle your head through beside the hinge if you were brave."

..."Oh I couldn't," said Cry. "Cowardice is my burden."

"Fling it off then," said the Cat....

..."Poor Cry," said Sigger. "It takes courage to push your head into the dark with other people."

Cry suddenly took a gulp and shoved...

..."Oh well done, well done," everybody shouted (p. 90-91).

Independence is also a valuable lesson for Amy's family members in *The Dollhouse Murders* (Wright, 1983). Amy's mother babies her younger sister who has a brain-function impairment, but finds that Louann can learn to do many things for herself when the young girl spends a week at the home of another more-independent child with special needs.

Creativity

Several books emphasize creativity of the story characters, modeling this trait

for the reader. Megan, in *Megan Gets a Dollhouse* (McArthur, 1988), wants a dollhouse like her cousin Sharon has. But after consulting with her parents, she realizes that she will get the dollhouse more quickly if she makes it herself. She creates her dollhouse out of a large cardboard box and furnishes it with items made from cloth, blocks, bottle caps, and buttons, feeling very satisfied because she made it herself. This story echoes the resourcefulness of Toby (*Toby's Doll's House*, Scamell, 1998), who also used cardboard boxes to make his dollhouse. In addition, Toby creatively cut people for his dollhouse from magazine pictures.

The creative skill of *flexibility*, putting an object to a new use, is evident in many dollhouse books. In various stories, a yellow hair ribbon is transformed into a doll's dress, a sewing kit is turned into a dollhouse for the dolls, a marble became a ball, and a tiddlywinks chip became a purple plate.

In *Lucie Babbidge's House* (Cassidy, 1989), badgered but resourceful Lucie collects discarded items for use in her secret dollhouse:

Nothing was left now of the candy except the cellophane wrapper, crackling like a fire as it undid its crumples on the ground. But it was the wrapper, not the candy, that Lucie had wanted all along - the cellophane wrapper, smooth and clear and seaweed green (p. 134)...

... [At the dollhouse.] The ball is tonight, and I've made costumes for you both!"...

"Well, Mumma is going to be the mermaid queen who lives in the exact middle of the ocean..."

...She brought out the two green cloaks and, with the real Lucie's help, fastened them around her parents' necks (p. 135).

A picture book that takes the reader on a guided tour of Look Alike Land showing dollhouse-like dioramas made of everyday objects is *Look-Alikes* (Steiner, 1998). In the store scene, lamps have peppermint candy and pencil-sharpener bodies with toothpaste-tube caps for shades. Two upright vacuum cleaners are for sale: one made of a disposable razor with paint-tube bag and another with a bulldog binder clip base and toenail clipper shaft/bag. A chessboard provides a checkered tile floor. The creative thinking skill of flexibility is a subskill of analogy, thought by some investigators (e.g., Gordon, *Synecitics*, 1961) to be the most important component of creative thought.

Care of Belongings

Another theme permeates several of the dollhouse stories: appreciating and taking care of things, particularly dolls and dollhouses. At the end of *Through the Doll's House Door* (Gardam, 1987), Claire and Mary decide to restore the old dollhouse:

"Tomorrow we'll wash them all," said Mary, "and we'll make Cry a new dress. And we'll take the dolls' house to London and we'll turn it into a glorious mansion."

In the *Tale of Two Bad Mice* (Potter, 1904), the mice repent breaking the plaster food and making such a mess in the dollhouse. Hunka Munca mouse returns every morning before the dolls are awake to sweep and clean the dollhouse as compensation.

In *The Dolls' House* (Godden, 1948), the girls clean the antique dollhouse they inherit, spend their money on new furnishings, and loan their favorite doll to a doll show in order to earn money to redecorate the house. With the same loving care, Nona, in *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower* (Godden, 1960), helps build a house for two Japanese dolls, meticulously sewing

outfits and accessories for them, and planning for the purchase of special furnishings and a tea set. She researches Japanese culture by reading many books, ensuring that everything is authentically made, including a miniature Japanese garden for the dolls.

Jane and Lila's father appreciates the quality of the antique dollhouse furniture his children ask him to repair for the dollhouse.

...when they show Daddy the box, Lila can see that he is interested by the prospect of mending these fragile, broken pieces. "Very nice workmanship," he murmurs, holding up a rocking chair that has lost its rocker. "You don't find things like this today" (McDonough, 2000, p. 42).

The girls then sew a tiny patchwork quilt for the dollhouse as a present for the owner. Their mother shows them how to make it and carefully irons the seams flat.

Older cousin Peggy must help twelve-year-old Marg assemble the antique cardboard *Castle Tourmandyne* (Hughes, 1995) because it is museum-quality. The story describes how they carefully cut and glue the pieces.

In *The Countess's Calamity* (Gardner, 2003), the puppet master lovingly repairs the countess doll after her many mishaps.

The puppet master made her a beautiful little heart with beads on it. He put it carefully in her chest, surrounded it with soft cotton stuffing and sewed her up again. After each repair, he left her to recover on a small bed, wrapped in a warm blanket (p. 110).

Having discussed the themes of dollhouse stories, let's now turn our attention to how dollhouses and dollhouse stores might be used to teach a variety of curriculum concepts in mathematics, social studies, science, and language arts.

Authentic Curriculum Connections to Dollhouse Books

Mathematics

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, in *Professional Standards for Teaching Mathematics* (1991), suggest that teachers take care to select mathematical tasks that engage students' interests and provide opportunity for application of mathematical concepts. Dollhouses provide the opportunity for a variety of interesting and useful mathematics applications related to real-world activities.

First graders making dollhouse furniture practiced important mathematics skills (Duncan, 1976, p. 39-40). "The construction [of furniture] ties in math skills and stresses the importance of making exact measurements. If legs aren't the same length, chairs fall over; if tabletops aren't even, dishes go tumbling off... ..One boy made a rocking chair with rockers twice the thickness they should have been. He looked at it and said, 'No real rocking chair looks like that.' I asked, 'Would you like to take it apart and cut the rockers down to a smaller size?' 'Yes,' he said, 'I think I would.' And he did."

Students can explore the effects of using different scales on house size and furnishings, or sort differently proportioned items according to the scales they represent (Rule and Barrera, 1999). These are everyday skills adults use when purchasing furniture for a home.

Farlie (1977, p. 72) describes how students reacted to the mathematics involved in creating a room of a colonial home. "Even children who were usually not interested in math enjoyed working with numbers as part of the project. The students used a scale of one inch to one foot to calculate the measurements for the constructed items. They measured their own desks, chairs, and tables and used the ratio, which often

involved fractions, to find out the correct size of the furnishings. The children also found a practical use for their knowledge of geometry, using compasses, protractors and rulers to determine angles and construct squares and rectangles."

Students practice measurement and spatial skills when they produce a blueprint or draw floor plans for a dollhouse featured in a story. Godden, in *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower* (1960) describes how Nona's cousin Tom made the Japanese dollhouse. An appendix provides plans, drawings, and directions for construction of a duplicate dollhouse.

Students make connections to the real world when they complete a real estate description of the dollhouse, including such measurements as area, height, width, depth, and lot size, and practice technology skills while creating a brochure for the house. They might also determine the cost per square unit to build an addition to the house, or costs of remodeling/ redecorating with tile flooring or wallpaper. Computing the appraisal and taxes, role-playing obtaining a mortgage, or determining a budget (groceries, utilities, clothing, entertainment, extra furnishings) for the household are additional possibilities. All of these applications provide vocabulary (e. g., deed, title, lien, plat, covenant) and knowledge that will assist students in future homeownership.

Social Studies

Two of the thematic strands of the social studies standards (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994) can be addressed easily with dollhouses. The *Culture* standard states that students should study culture and cultural diversity. Building a period dollhouse for historic figures, or making a miniature home constructed and furnished like those of people of another culture, then re-enacting authentic scenes

can bring social studies to life. Many different careers, such as historian, museum curator, architect, and home decorator, use skills practiced here.

Farlie (1977), an author of a book on dollhouse crafts, collaborated with her son's sixth grade teacher and class to make a room from a home in Colonial America. "Following my visit, the children made a trip to the library to research how the colonists lived, what kinds of furnishings they had and how their life differed from ours... They finally settled on chairs, a table, a settle, a side table, a fireside stool, a spinning wheel, rugs, food, candlesticks, a picture and frame and a bed warmer. Individual children or small groups chose an item and were responsible for its design, construction, and completion" (p. 72).

Investigating the types of dolls and dollhouses used by children of other cultures (as was modeled in *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower*) can also be absorbing. Many world cultures have dollhouses, villages, or other miniatures for children's play. For example, Native American Hopi children made plan-view dollhouses with rock walls and used sheep bones for dolls. Miniature scenes (kitchens and other rooms, Day of the Dead vignettes) are part of Mexican cultural heritage (Linse, 1980).

Students may want to focus on their own culture and identify cultural influences on themselves by making a miniature "dream bedroom" that may include posters of current music idols or movie stars and fad furnishings. Alternatively, students may set up a "dollhouse village", naming streets and devising laws for the citizens.

The *Time, Continuity, and Change* standard addresses the ways human beings view themselves in and over time. Knowing how to read and reconstruct the past allows students to develop a historical perspective. In the book *The Picolinis* (Graham, 1988), the main characters, ten-year-old Jessica and

her twelve-year-old brother Peter, attempted to unravel the mystery of Grandpa Pico's treasure by visiting the Historical Society, by going to a museum and by consulting old journals, letters, and maps. The antique dollhouse in this book captures Victorian circus life. Students may want to choose a person in history, perhaps a family member or well-known person, and then research and plan a dollhouse, using primary documents as professional historians do.

Another story that addresses history is *Time Windows* (1991). The main character, Miranda, interviews the town historian, uses library books and primary documents to research the history of the house, and visits a museum to learn of the house's underground railroad connections. The dollhouse in the story allows Miranda to see different rooms as they looked during different time periods.

Students might create a timeline of rooms, perhaps kitchens, in cardboard boxes and depicting different time periods. Floor covering, wall decoration, furniture and appliances could be researched and reproduced in each room. Dollhouse rooms showing different hiding places used during Underground Railroad times would also be fascinating.

Sunal and Warash (1984) describe how miniatures can be used to help students understand mapping concepts. Young children need to understand concepts such as boundaries, exterior, interior, point of reference, direction, and area, all which could be applied to a dollhouse. A map or floor plan of a dollhouse can help students make a concrete connection between three-dimensional spaces and maps.

Science

Duncan (1976, p. 39) describes how first grade students learned about electricity in wiring their classroom dollhouse. "Preparation for electrifying the dollhouse

begins long before it arrives in the classroom. The class conducts experiments using the principles of electricity, and wires, batteries and bulbs are placed on a "learning table" for the children to investigate... [W]hen the time comes for the dollhouse to be wired, the students are asked to demonstrate how much they remember. Each child draws a sketch of how the dollhouse should be wired, and those who recall the most become the engineers... The wiring runs from three six-volt batteries at the back of the house to the lights and around to switches (tacks holding wire to a piece of foil against wood) at the side of the house and circles back to the batteries. A press on one tack lights the house, another rings the doorbell, a third turns on a light inside the television."

Yager (2000) identifies six domains of science education. Domain III, Imaging and Creating, is especially applicable to dollhouse work. This domain includes visualizing and producing mental images, as occurs when children pretend or imagine the way they want to decorate a dollhouse. Producing alternate or unusual uses for objects, such as creating dollhouse furnishings from recycled junk items, is another component of this domain. Students could practice skills from this domain as they "invent" new ways to make dollhouses from different materials or construction techniques. Additionally, an investigation of how science and technology have advanced over the ages, concepts covered in Domain VI, Viewing Science and Its History as Human Endeavors, could be integrated with the kitchen project described above related to social studies.

Language Arts

Farlie (1977, p. 72) tells how language arts were incorporated into the colonial dollhouse room project. "Besides doing independent reading to prepare for the

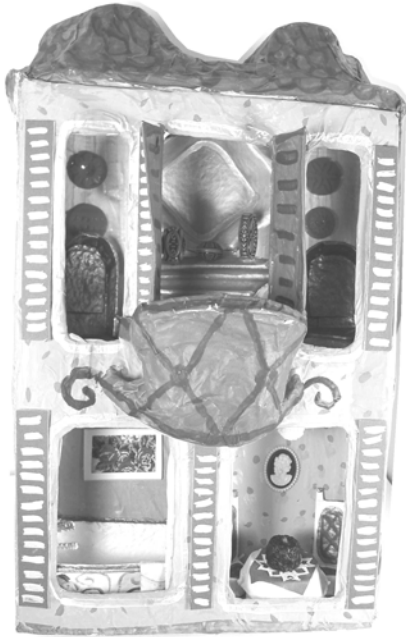
project, the children expanded their vocabularies and improved their spelling. For example, Fee [the teacher] included such words as antique, authentic, bed warmer, bicentennial, settle, trammel, and crane in weekly spelling lists. The children looked up unfamiliar words in the dictionary or one of the resources from the library to find definitions and learn how the items were used. For example, they discovered that a settle was one of the earliest sofas and that it had "wings" (sides) to keep draughts away... The children also used sequencing and direction-following skills... All of the writing assignments during the project were an outgrowth of the children's experiences with the era of the miniature room."

In the *Standards for the English Language Arts* (National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, 1996), the third standard states that a wide range of strategies should be applied by students to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

One strategy is to make a dollhouse for a story character (Figures 1-4). Brodie (1995) gives many suggestions of stories about "Teeny tiny wee small folks" for which students might make and decorate teeny rooms. Alternatively, students may examine illustrations and investigate descriptions of the dwelling of a story character, infer favorite colors or preferences from story cues, and use their imaginations to produce a home for the book character. The character might be chosen from any book, not necessarily a dollhouse story or story about a tiny character.

Figures 1 and 2 show the Old Lady's house from *The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant*. Cutting open a cereal box produced the hinged front, while the balcony and roof pieces were cut from a fast food restaurant cardboard drink-holder. These were covered with glued-down magazine

Figure 1. The front of the Old Lady's house



page pieces to hide seams, coated with gesso, and then painted with acrylic paints. Furnishings were made from cardboard egg-carton pieces, cut bits of mat board, and beads or other trinkets.

Figure 2. Inside of the Old Lady's House



Figure 3 shows the rabbit hole of *The Runaway Bunny* (Brown, 1942). It was made with a half-gallon ice cream carton. Squirrel Nutkin's house, created for the squirrel from the Beatrix Potter's story, *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, (Figure 4) was made from a cracker box and covered with sycamore bark pieces. As is modeled in several of the dollhouse storybooks, students could produce a small diary for the story characters and store it on a shelf in one of the rooms like Auntie Sarah did in *The Doll People* (Martin & Godwin, 2000). A tiny scrapbook of major events in a character's life would be equally engaging.

Figure 3. Rabbit hole of the Runaway Bunny



Figure 4. Squirrel Nutkin's home made from a cracker box.



Children in Mrs. Koster's first grade (Duncan, 1976, p. 40) wrote stories about the dollhouse for which they had made furniture. "The stories are read aloud, and the class votes on the three most interesting... The first graders' dolls lead traumatic lives. According to one account, 'Mother was giving the baby a bath in the sink. The baby slipped out of her hands and broke his arm and leg. Mother felt terrible.' Another story starts out, 'It was night. A ghost came in the dollhouse. The dolls were scared. The dolls ran out of the dollhouse. It was funny. The ghost was really the doll babies. The dolls were surprised.'"

Conclusion

Six themes have been identified in dollhouse stories: imagination, science fictional changes in space and time, diversity and friendship, courage and independence, creativity, and care of belongings. These themes provide important social-emotional and intellectual skills for success in today's diverse, challenging world and point to the value of this genre of imaginative stories.

As can be seen from the suggested activities, there are many ways to connect these stories to real life and practice the skills of professionals in different fields through student-constructed dollhouses. Unfortunately, much of today's classroom learning focuses on fact rather than imagination. Adults asked to tell their most memorable school assignments usually recall longer-term projects where they created something of personal interest that touched their imaginations. The authentic learning activities described here have been successfully used in the author's classroom and will be engaging for other students.

Although a few of the books described here are no longer in print, interlibrary loan agreements and Internet

sites that locate and sell used books can make these books accessible to most classrooms.

Annotated Bibliography

Bailey, C. S. (1977, first published in 1946). *Miss Hickory*. Ill. R. Gannett. New York: Puffin Books. 123 pp. Chapter book. A Newbery Award Book.

A country doll made of an apple branch and hickory nut head lives in a cornucopia house under a lilac bush. When the girl who owns her moves to Boston for the winter, and a chipmunk takes over her home, Miss Hickory, with the help of a kind Crow, must find a new place to live for the winter. She has many happy adventures with forest animals although her doubtful hard-headishness impedes her growth. She finally loses her nut head to a starving Squirrel. Miss Hickory climbs the apple tree and thrusts her neck into a hole, grafting tightly to become a flowering scion. The story addresses the loss of rich experiences by adhering to old ideas and being inflexible in thought.

Barber, A. (1987). *Satchelmouse and the doll's house*. Ill. C. Muñoz. New York: Barron's. 24 pp. Picture book.

Sarah's classroom has a big doll's house with fancy furnishings. When Sarah wishes to be a little girl in the house, Satchelmouse plays his magic horn and sends her into the house as a servant girl. Sarah protests that she meant to be the owner's daughter, but she is quickly put to work making a bed, cleaning carpets, and washing dishes. After her experiences, she carefully dresses the servant doll in the other doll's clothes and places her in bed for a well-deserved rest. This book explores life seen from another person's perspective.

Burnett, F. H. (1907). *Racketty-Packetty house*. In G. Avery (ed.) *Victorian doll stories* (pp. 116-141), New York: Schocken Books. Short Story.

Cynthia loves the dollhouse her grandmother gives her and plays with the dolls until their elegant costumes and home are dingy, threadbare, and ragged because Cynthia has never learned to take proper care of her things. Even so, she renames the grand titled doll as humorous names and continues enjoying their escapades. Then, on her eighth birthday, she is given Tidy Castle, a fantastic building with expensive furnishings and beautiful dolls. She rejects the earlier dollhouse, naming it the Racketty-Packetty House. The Racketty-Packetty dolls don't mind living behind the door until the nurse

suggests that their home be burned. Compounding their plight is the fact that one of them has fallen in love with the kind Lady Patsy doll from the Castle and she returns the admiration. Luckily, a Princess visits, recognizes the Rackety-Packety House as being very similar to one her Grandmamma the Queen had owned, and values it immensely. Cynthia makes a present of it to her and the Princess restores them and the house to their former glory. Care of belongings, enjoyment of simple things in life, and the shallowness of conceited people are addressed in this story, although the fascination with royalty and finery dates the story.

Cassedy, S. (1989). *Lucie Babbidge's house*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell. 243 pp. Chapter book.

Eleven-year-old Lucie Babbidge lives in a residential school for orphans. She is picked on by classmates and made an example of by her insensitive teacher, Miss Pimm, but never defends herself or responds, leading others to think she is incapable. Lucie's refuge is a secret, abandoned dollhouse in the cellar that she visits daily, acting out a different life for the Lucie doll, creatively constructing extra dolls and furnishings with found items, and composing clever, humorous dialog for the doll family. When her dollhouse is discovered and the other girls take the dolls, Lucie falls ill for weeks. She recovers her belongings, but bids them goodbye during a final private playtime, emerging as a stronger, self-assured child. Another interesting aspect of the story is the mysterious set of letters that keep arriving for Lucie from a girl in England.

Curry, J. L. (1970). *Mindy's mysterious miniature*. Ill. C. Robinson. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 157 pp. Chapter book.

A young girl shows the perfectly detailed dollhouse purchased at an auction to an elderly neighbor who recognizes it as her childhood home that disappeared years ago. Suddenly, the dollhouse expands to life-size and they enter it. Then it shrinks and they are whisked away to join a village of miniaturized buildings on display as a tourist attraction. The two inhabitants find that there are several other timorous "shrunken" people who have been hiding from the demented inventor and his machine for decades. They devise a clever plan to trick the Professor into enlarging them while trapping him inside a bank vault. The folly of selfishness and greed, overcoming fears and risk-taking, resourcefulness, and respect for the contributions of a child are taught in this story; however, the stereotypical portrayal of the "Professor" as a bumbling, evil scientist is dated.

Dahlbäck, H. (1993). *My sister Lotta and me*. Ill. C. Ramel. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 26pp. Picture book.

A girl describes her play with her sister, her best friend. The illustrations feature scenes from an antique dollhouse with superimposed cartoon drawings of the girls playing.

Estern, A. G. (1988). *The Picolinis*. Ill. K. Coville. New York: Bantam Skylark. 133 pp. Chapter book.

Ten-year-old Jessica and her 12-year-old brother Peter convince their parents to purchase an antique dollhouse at an auction that contains a doll family of circus performers - the Picolinis. The aging former owner, Clara, is moving to a lovely retirement home that unfortunately has financial problems. The Picolinis were modeled after the Pico family of circus performers and come to life as everyone else sleeps. The house holds the secret of where Grandpa Pico's gold is buried but the great-grandson of the circus magician wants the dollhouse and treasure too. The children must solve the mystery and find the treasure to help dear Clara's new home. Explanation of historic research terms and modeling of primary document use occur as the mystery is unraveled.

Ford, M. (1998). *The dollhouse that time forgot: Book #11 in the Eerie Indiana series*. New York: Avon Books. 131 pp. Chapter book.

After Marshall's mom and sister buy an old dollhouse at a yard sale, he finds a real-looking doll at an antique store for his sister's birthday. Strangely, his sister makes a new friend who resembles the now-missing doll. Marshall and his buddy unravel the mystery by following the girl, discovering that her house is identical to the dollhouse, and locating a secret door in the attic that leads somehow into the dollhouse. They learn the girl died in a tragic accident years ago in the Amazon, but her anthropologist father found a way to preserve her spirit in the doll's body. Now she would like to return to the spirit world, but needs to locate a tiny locket in the dollhouse that was used to imprison her spirit. Marshall must help her, and also rescue his sister who has been transformed into a doll and sold at the antique store. The story is fast-paced and creative, but with far-fetched and stereotyped portrayals.

Gardam, J. (1987). *Through the dolls' house door*. New York: Yearling Books. 121 pp. Chapter book.

Claire gets her head stuck in the dollhouse door and the dolls have a fit over the human intrusion. When Claire and her best friend Mary grow up, the dolls are packed away in the dollhouse and

forgotten in an old shed. The strange set of dolls pass the long, lonely years by telling stories of their heritage. Then Mary and Claire remember them, locate them, and decide to restore the dolls and their house. Friendship, courage, and respect for heritage and diversity are explored.

Gardner, S. (2003). *The countess's calamity*. Ill. Author. New York: Bloomsbury Children's Books. 127 pp. Chapter book.

A mouse family helps five dolls, a sailor, a countess, a Chinese cloth doll, a gentleman doll, and a boy doll, abandoned in a fancy box in a public park. However, the haughty, stubborn countess who believes she is better than others causes trouble until the park groundskeeper catches her and wires her to his cart as a warning to children who leave their toys unattended. Although berated by the countess as worthless, the Chinese doll rescues her and is caught herself in the process, only to find that the groundskeeper values her highly. In the end the park puppet maker repairs the broken countess, giving her a heart and she makes amends for her poor behavior.

Griffin, P. R. (1996). *Margo's house*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books. 122 pp. Chapter book.

Margo's dad, who is out of work, makes her a beautiful dollhouse with accompanying brother and sister dolls. Before he can make the parent dolls, he has a heart attack and lies critical condition in the hospital. At night, Margo finds herself inhabiting the body of the sister doll, helping the brother doll put up wallpaper in the dollhouse. But she thinks her dad's soul might be wandering to his workroom while he is incapacitated, and she and the brother doll undertake the dangerous journey past the monstrous cat to find him. This story of an African-American extended family describes how they deal with the threat of a loved one's loss.

Godden, R. (1947). *The doll's house*. Ill. T. Tudor. New York: Viking. 136 pp. Chapter book.

A plain, antique doll wistfully describes a former dollhouse to her new family of homeless dolls. Their wish is granted when the girls who own the dolls inherit the dollhouse, but an expensive, proud doll arrives with the house. Conceit, jealousy, friendship, hope, positive attitude, self-sacrifice, and concern for the feelings of others are examined as the girls seek to repair and furnish the house while the dolls try to resolve house-ownership issues. Stereotyped gender roles.

Godden, R. (1960). *Miss Happiness and Miss Flower*. New York: HarperCollins. 119 pp. Chapter book.

Eight-year-old, motherless Nona, who was raised in India by a nurse whose health has failed, has been sent to England to live with her cousins. Most of her new family members are kind, but Belinda is jealous. When the two girls are given two Japanese dolls, Nona sets about building a special Japanese dollhouse, making friends along the way. Everything is improving until Belinda demands her doll at the dollhouse opening party. Understanding customs of other cultures, managing jealousy, and careful completion of a large project are addressed in this story.

Hoffman, E. S. (2001). *Miss Renée's mice*. Ill. D. Peterson. Rockport, ME: Down East Books. 31 pp. Picture book.

Miss Renée makes beautiful furniture and accessories for the many dollhouses in her Maine seaside home. One night, when the barn is blown down by a storm, the mice come in to inhabit her dollhouses. They enjoy all the furnishings and food, having loud parties at night. Miss Renée makes them a ship and they sail away leaving her in peace but lonely. When they arrive back from a trip around the world with exotic wood and cloth, she is overjoyed. Excellent full-color illustrations.

Hughes, M. (1995). *Castle Tourmandyne*. Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. 136 pp. Chapter book.

On Marg's twelfth birthday, cousin Peggy (age 14) comes to stay for the summer. Peggy is cool, slim, beautiful, and rich, with stylish clothes, a sharp contrast to plump Marg who lives in a cramped but happy home. Marg receives an antique cardboard cut-out dollhouse for her birthday that Mom asks Peggy to help her assemble. The dollhouse girl looks just like Peggy and somehow, during her sleep, she is drawn into a horrific story that Marg has made up for the dollhouse. Marg finally begins to understand that Peggy's real life, with her parents always traveling, is less than ideal and feels sympathy for her cousin. As Peggy's nightmares worsen, she creates a Marg doll for the dollhouse to rescue her.

Jacobs, F. G. (1958). *The doll house mystery*. Ill. C. Gruen. New York: Coward-McCann, Inc. 96 pp. Chapter book.

Mystery surrounds a large Victorian dollhouse inherited from Great Aunt Eugenia: Who is moving the dolls around at night? Why is a strange black cat crying outside? What is the meaning of the card that says, "This is the House of Shadow"? Nine-

year-old Priscilla and her twelve-year-old brother solve the mystery with the help of their five-year-old brother and Siamese cat. Readers learn about Victorian architecture and practice using clues to solve mysteries in this book.

Karas, J. (1993). *The doll house*. Ill. J. Riches. New York: Tambourine Books. 24 pp. Picture book.

A little girl, Alex, watches as a bear, two woman-dolls and a red velvet pony move into her vacant dollhouse. The dolls draw the curtains and put up a "No Trespassers Allowed" sign. Alex learns to respect their privacy and, after returning a doll's shoe found under her bed, receives a thank-you note. Gradually, she begins to interact with them, but when her cousin Martin comes to play and abuses the dolls' furnishings, the dolls move away, leaving a "For Sale" sign and a goodbye gift. For days, Alex mourns the loss of the dolls and watches the house for some action. Finally, a "Sold" sign appears. This story provides the opportunity for a discussion of privacy rights, consideration and care of belongings, and ways to approach a guest who is abusing his/her privileges.

Keene, C. (2004). *The dollhouse mystery: The Nancy Drew notebooks, #58*. Ill. J. N. Jones. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks. 68 pp. Chapter book.

Eight-year old Nancy Drew walks wealthy Mrs. Rutledge's dog three days a week during Spring Break. Mrs. Rutledge has twin granddaughters and a beautiful antique dollhouse with which Nancy longs to play. She admires the dollhouse when returning the dog, but the grandchildren discover some of the expensive furnishings are missing and Nancy is accused of stealing them. Nancy sets about finding the real thief with the help of her two girlfriends, finally discovering the furniture under the dog's bed. But who hid them there and why?

Martin, A. M., & Godwin, L. (2000). *The doll people*. Ill. B. Selznick. New York: Hyperion Books for Children. 256 pp. Chapter book.

Annabelle, a child-doll of a hundred-year-old porcelain doll family solves the mystery of Auntie Sarah Doll's forty-five year disappearance after finding her aunt's tiny hand-written diary about her adventures in the human's house. Annabelle's persistence and friendships with the child-doll of a new plastic dollhouse family encourage her doll-parents and Uncle Doll to overcome their fears of venturing out of the dollhouse and of breaking the Doll Code of Honor. Courage, adjustment to change, independence, loyalty, and friendship are treated in this story.

Martin, A. M. & Godwin, L. (2003). *The meanest doll in the world*. Ill. B. Selznick. NY: Hyperion Books for Children. 260 pp. Chapter book.

More adventures of Annabelle Doll and Tiffany Funcraft who travel to school in a backpack and then mistakenly go to another child's home where they meet dolls terrorized by the meanest doll in the world, Mimi. Mimi seems unafraid of the consequences of breaking the doll code of honor by being seen in action by humans. While Annabelle and Tiffany attempt to protect their friends from Mimi's reign of terror, they speculate as to whether there really is such a thing as "permanent doll state." Mimi's unbelievably bold actions eventually provide an answer.

McArthur, N. (1988). *Megan gets a dollhouse*. Ill. M. Lloyd. New York: Scholastic. 30 pp. Early reader.

Megan wants a dollhouse like the beautiful one her cousin owns. When her dad describes all the time-consuming steps necessary for him to make her one, she decides to make one herself from a cardboard box. She paints it, adds gift-wrap wallpaper, and makes furnishings from discarded bottle caps, fabric scraps, and blocks. She enjoys letting her cat sleep inside it, and takes pride in surprising her cousin with her homemade dollhouse. This book celebrates independence and creativity.

McDonough, Y. Z. (2000). *The dollhouse magic*. Ill. D. Palmisciano. New York: Henry Holt and Company. 83 pp. Chapter book.

The story takes place during the 1930's Depression. Two girls, Lila and Jane, whose father lost his banking job, stop by the front window of a wealthy elderly lady's home to see her dollhouse. She invites them to visit and treats them to cookies, asking them to return with their family on Christmas for a party. The girls enjoy the elaborate furnishings and miniatures of the dollhouse. The lady dies on Christmas, but wills the dollhouse to the children. Later another girl moves into the old lady's house and becomes friends with the two girls.

Pinkney, A. D. (1998). *Raven in a dove house*. San Diego: Gulliver Books. 208 pp. Chapter book.

Twelve-year-old Nell spends each August with Aunt Ursa and her fourteen-year old cousin Foley in an economically devastated small town. Nells's mother died when she was an infant and her father, a lawyer in New York City, has a girlfriend who takes his attention. Aunt Ursa has been unsuccessful in keeping Foley's father and Nell's father in the small town, and now Foley longs for his

chance to break away. His cool friend Slade has gotten twin Raven guns for them as their tickets out. Nell faces a crisis when Foley asks to her to keep his secret and hide his gun in her dollhouse. When Slade is shot and Foley runs away, Nell wonders if anything will ever be right again like it was with the perfect family in her dollhouse, Dove Haven. The text provides excellent insight into the joys, hopes and fears of a close-knit African-American family. Although the dollhouse plays a minor role in this book, the story supplies the opportunity to discuss difficult choices, trust, integrity, and the importance of family.

Potter, B. (1985, originally published in 1904). *The tale of two bad mice*. In B. Potter, *Favorite tales of Beatrix Potter*, pp. 33-41. New York: Longmeadow Press. Picture Book.

When the dolls are out for a buggy ride, two mice enter the dollhouse. They become frustrated when they try to cut and eat the painted plaster food, so they smash it to bits, cause other mischief, and steal doll clothes and furnishings. Later, they bring a coin they have found to pay for the damages, and sweep the dollhouse early every morning. The book allows the chance to discuss anger, ownership, and reparation of wrongs.

Reiss, K. (1991). *Time windows*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 260 pp. Chapter book.

Miranda moves with her family from New York City to a small, quiet town for her father's recuperation. The antique house they buy has a replica dollhouse in the attic that Miranda learns can show scenes of the house's past when she gazes outward through its windows. Unfortunately, many scenes replay the same themes of unhappy women who take out their frustrations on their children. When a child's remains are found in an Underground Railway hiding place in the attic, Miranda must try to think of a way to time travel, prevent the tragedy, and stop the cycle of anger the house seems to perpetuate.

Reiss, K. (2004). *Sweet Miss Honeywell's revenge: A ghost story*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 435 pp. Chapter book.

When Zibby, who has just turned twelve, gets the antique dollhouse she has just purchased home, bad things start happening. The dollhouse is haunted and keeps reappearing after she moves it and even burns it. She and her friends play with the dolls carelessly and what they act out happens: her cousin bumps her head in the bathtub and her mother burns her arm. When they act out happy scenes in the dollhouse, they also come true, but with a malevolent

twist. Zibby's divorced mother is about to marry, making a bended family with a new stepsister and brother. Although Zibby dislikes the arrangement, she soon joins forces with her stepsister, cousin, new neighborhood African-American girlfriends and the previous owner of the dollhouse to uncover the mysteries and defeat the evil spirit haunting the structure. This book weaves together the past and present with spooky happenings and plenty of middle school drama. The story addresses the pain of divorce for children and adjustments needed during remarriage.

Rendal, J. (1990). *A child of their own*. New York: Viking. 107 pp. Chapter book.

A mass-produced brother and sister doll long to join the Darlings, a family of expensive antique dolls in the adjoining display. Amanda-Miranda doll is overjoyed when they are sold to an American lady together with the Darlings, but Emma Darling is jealous. Amanda Miranda does everything she can to fit in and be helpful, but leaves the baby doll momentarily and Emma is furious. Revely, thinking that he and his sister will be expelled, attempts dangerous tricks on the roof and falls, breaking to pieces. He is repaired, and he and his sister are accepted into the family. They long for a child to play with them so that they can truly enjoy their doll lives.

Sachs, M. (1971). *The bears' house*. Ill. L. Glanzman. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 81 pp. Chapter book.

A ten-year-old girl named Fran Ellen is picked on at school because she sucks her thumb and smells bad. Her father has deserted her family; her mother is incapacitated in a deep depression, and she must help conceal the fact that no adult is caring for her two sisters, brother, and the baby because they fear they will be split apart into foster homes. Fran fantasizes about being popular and loved when she mentally plays in the three bears' dollhouse, a toy in the back of the classroom that her retiring teacher has promised to the "most improved" student at the end of the year. But Fran is having difficulty sneaking away during recess to feed the baby who has developed a terrible rash and fever, and the teacher insists that she speak to Fran's parents. This story shows the often hidden reasons why some children struggle at school and the hardships they bear for the sake of family.

Scamell, R. (1998). *Toby's doll's house*. Ill. A. Reynolds. London: Levinson Books. 24 pp. Picture book.

Toby wants a dollhouse for his birthday, but his granddad, auntie, and dad think that a fort, barnyard, or car park are more acceptable. Toby has already made some matchbox furniture and cut people from magazines. When he receives the other gifts, he uses the boxes and wrapping paper to make a dollhouse himself. His birthday party turns out to be a happy occasion as everyone enjoys cake and the toys he or she gave Toby. This colorful book provides the opportunity for discussion of gender stereotypes.

Schroeder, B. (1986). *Flora's magic house*. Ill. B. Schroeder. New York: North-South Books. First published in 1969 in Switzerland under the title *Lupinchen*. 28 pp. Picture book.

Robert the Bird brings two new friends, Humpty Dumpty and Magic Box, for Flora, a girl who lives alone in a garden. Magic Box makes a lovely paper house for them, but it soon is blown into the sky with them aboard during a fierce storm. Humpty Dumpty adds wings to convert it into an airplane. However, when the wind stops, they crash into the sea and sink. A floating umbrella provides their only refuge until Robert the Bird finds them and brings them home on his back. This book may provide a springboard for fantasy and creativity in making things from paper.

Sleator, W. (1975). *Among the dolls*. Ill. T. S. Hyman. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 70 pp. Chapter Book.

Vicky longs for a ten-speed bicycle for her birthday, but receives an antique dollhouse instead. In her disappointment, she makes the doll family squabble and fight. At the same time, conflict and injury occur in her own family and she performs poorly at school. One day, she finds herself a prisoner of the dolls in the dollhouse, suddenly transformed to their scale. As she learns how thoughtlessly she manipulated them, she finds out they have a dollhouse replica of her family's home and are taking revenge. Their play with that dollhouse becomes reality for her family. Vicky must escape and save her family from the misfortunes that have befallen them.

Steiner, J. (1998). *Look-alikes*. Ill. T. Lindley. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. 30 pp. Picture book.

Take a tour of the magical Look Alike Land where every scene is made with common items that look like architectural elements and furnishings.

Scenes of a train, station, streets, stores, zoo, amusement park, hotel, circus, and harbor are narrated with rhyme. Highly creative examples of flexibility and unique observation-skill activities will occupy readers.

Tudor, T. (1997). *The dolls' Christmas*. Ill. author. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. 21 pp. Picture book.

The two girls who own antique dolls in a large dollhouse plan an elaborate Christmas party attended by other dolls and their owners.

Turner, Ann. (1997). *Finding Walter*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Company. 161 pp. Chapter book.

Two sisters whose family has moved to live with Grandmother until Father's heart recovers find a dollhouse in the attic. But the baby boy doll is missing and the doll family cannot be happy until he is found. The two girls learn to get along with each other as they help the doll family find their missing Walter. The dolls telepathically tell the girls to buy a dog, which they ride outside to find Walter in an animal burrow. When a grass fire threatens the dolls, they leap into the burrow. Eventually the girls find the fire-damaged dolls and have them repaired.

Turner, Ann. (2000). *Secrets from the dollhouse*. Ill. Raúl Colón. New York: Harper Collins. 29 pp. Picture book.

Dollhouse dolls tell of their adventures going outside to see the stars, being forced to play war, and dealing with mice and a cat. When the baby doll is missing, the girl doll bravely calls for her outside. Surprisingly, the cat they feared brings her home and the family is together again.

Wright, B. R. (1983). *The dollhouse murders*. New York: Holiday House. 149 pp. Chapter book.

A twelve-year-old girl struggles with the mixed feelings she has about daily babysitting her younger sister who has brain damage and who interferes with the girl's social life. She spends a week with her aunt who is preparing to sell the deserted family home where the grandparents who raised the aunt and the girl's father were murdered thirty years earlier. A haunted dollhouse in the attic holds the secret to the shooter and unites the aunt, girl, her sister and her friends at her thirteenth birthday party. Acceptance of others with disabilities; independence and personal growth; resolution of resentment, fear, and guilt; and friendship and family ties are discussed through the story.

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