



A Comparative Study of Symbolic Reading: Salt Peddler and Shinbone

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This article investigates the interplay of cultural knowledge, symbolic language, and interpretive reading comprehension, focusing on the role of culture in symbolic understanding of text. Eight graduate students from two different cultural communities read and discussed a Korean folktale. Data were collected in the form of initial written responses and discussion transcripts. Thematic interpretative qualitative analyses are reported on initial reading stances, symbolic understandings, and efforts to identify the moral of the tale. Overall the analyses show that Korean readers focused mostly on discerning the morality being communicated symbolically through the story, whereas the American readers focused on individual values and freedoms to make sense of the story. Our findings indicate that there will be diversity in symbolic reading comprehension both across cultural groups and within cultural groups. We propose that when readers from several cultures come together in classrooms to talk about symbolic texts it is important for them to reflect on how they use their own cultural reference points to form similar and dissimilar understandings and interpretations. Heightening this awareness of diversity within cultural knowledge provides exciting and beneficial experiences for readers in today's multicultural classrooms. (Reading Comprehension, Symbolic Reading, Multicultural, Literacy Research, Cross-Cultural Study)

Once upon a time a salt peddler stopped to rest at the foot of a mountain pass. A nearby bone on the ground caught his eye. He picked it up and muttered to himself, "This looks like my shinbone." He put it back on the ground. Then, he put his A-frame carrier on his back and left. After a while, he noticed that the bone was following him. He did not like this and tried to be rid of the bone. This went on for several days. One afternoon when they came near a village the salt peddler made a promise to the shinbone that was actually a lie that allowed him to escape the bone. Several years later when the salt peddler happened to pass by the same village, he was reminded of the bone. He went to the spot where he

had last seen it. There was no trace of it only his rotten A-frame carrier. What he did find was a small tavern that had not been there before. Since it was already late afternoon, he went to the tavern to stay the night. The old landlady served him a meal and some wine. After he finished his meal, she asked him to tell some interesting stories. He told her the story of the shinbone that had followed him. She listened to his story. When he finished his story, she suddenly shouted, "I'm that bone!" Then, she killed and ate him (Summary of *The Salt Peddler and The Shinbone* in Crowder Han, 1991. See Appendix for full text.).

How does a reader make sense of folktale such as this one? How does he or she make sense of a

shinbone that follows a man and an old woman who kills and eats a man? When we, an intercultural group of two Koreans and one U.S. citizen, read *The Salt Peddler And The Shinbone* (see [Appendix](#) for full text) folktale we had a lengthy discussion during which we considered different symbolic interpretations. We were intrigued with the differences in our thinking—not differences that neatly drew lines between nationalities or ethnicities but differences among the three of us as individual thinkers. We thought it would be interesting to pursue the possibility of heterogeneity of thought within two groups of readers. How would Korean readers versus American readers symbolically construct meaning for a folktale that was for Koreans culturally congruent and for Americans culturally unfamiliar? The purpose of our study was to investigate the thinking of two groups of adult readers about a Korean folktale in order to learn about the interplay of cultural knowledge and symbolic reading comprehension on individual readers within a cultural group. To do so, we invited a group of four adult readers from the United States to read and discuss the story and four Korean adults (living in the United States) to do the same. Before conducting our empirical inquiry we consulted the literature to see what other relevant research had already been conducted. To situate our work we begin with what others have studied and learned that seems pertinent.

Literature Review

How does a reader comprehend text in which the symbolism of words, expressions, or actions seems unfamiliar or bizarre? Research has demonstrated in a variety of ways the role a reader's prior knowledge of the world plays in the process of constructing meaning from written text (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). In particular, the reader's knowledge of culture and language play an important part in symbolically making sense of multicultural literature (Davis, 1988).

Symbol(ism) can be defined as "any mode of expression which, instead of referring to something directly, refers to it indirectly through the medium of something else" (Chadwick, 1971, p. 1). However, literary symbol(ism) here is defined not as "static entities given in the text, but as images selected by the reader as representing extended and nonliteral meanings" (Davis, 1998, p. 147). Symbolic meaning can be conveyed by an object, a gesture, an incident, a person, a plot, a color, a sound, a number, a context, a pattern or sequence of action in a given text—everything is suggestive of meaning for the reader. However, the significance of symbols in a literary text are never explicitly explained or determined. Rather, they are reconstructed within the readers' thoughts about contexts and cultures

(Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, symbolically interpreting text is heavily dependent on the readers' experiences and interactions with the world.

Then, how does a reader understand nonliteral or symbolic language? One research approach has been the study of comprehension of figurative language. Searle (1979) proposed the stage model or pragmatics approach. In this model of comprehension nonliteral meaning is computed only after the failure to ascertain literal meanings. Conversely, if a literal sense is successfully comprehended then figurative meaning is not considered. But, if literal meaning is not obvious, then nonliteral meaning must be considered. However, few empirical studies have provided support for the stage model (see Clark 1979; Clark & Lucy, 1975; Ortony, Schallert, Reynolds & Antos, 1978). For example, Clark's (1979) study showed that the literal meaning and the inferred meaning are simultaneously understood as parts of a single package. This finding indicates that literal understanding of figurative language does not always underlie the comprehension of nonliteral language. As Ortony (1984) pointed out, the stage model represents a limited rather than a general account of the understanding of figurative language.

In the comprehension of figurative language schema theory is presented as a more powerful explanation of the process of symbolically understanding text (Ortony, 1984). In this view, context activates an interpretive schema as a conceptual framework of making sense of figurative language. In other words, context requiring a figurative interpretation accesses a network of prior knowledge as scaffolding to aid in encoding information from target language, then the nonliteral language is integrated with background knowledge, and finally it is understood. If not, understanding falters or fails. This view has been popular as an explanation not only for general language comprehension but also for figurative language. A few empirical studies have provided strong support for the schema theoretic view (see Baldwin, Luce & Readence, 1982; Ortony, 1979; Ortony, 1985; Ortony, Schallert, Reynolds & Antos, 1978). In the study of the effects of context on the comprehension of figurative language, Ortony, Schallert, Reynolds and Antos (1978) showed that participants spent longer time comprehending metaphorical language than literal language in the short context whereas no significant difference was found between metaphorical sentences and literal ones in the long context condition. Their findings indicate that the activation of appropriate background knowledge plays a major role in comprehending figurative language.

When the reader shares with the writer certain cultural conventions that sets up a network of prior knowledge that serves as a conceptual framework to aid in symbolically interpreting textual information. If the interpretation does not satisfy then the reader defaults to a more literal understanding of the text. A text rife with symbolism based on a particular culture presents a challenge for readers who are reading out of culture. A symbolic dimension of the text may be interpreted differently depending on the prior cultural background knowledge of the readers.

A variety of research studies have indirectly supported a schematic view of the comprehension of nonliteral language (see Droop & Verhoeven, 1998; Lipson, 1983; Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey & Anderson, 1982; Steffenson, 1987; Steffenson, Joag-Dev & Anderson, 1979). For example, Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson's (1982) study showed that white students from agricultural area tend to interpret a reading passage as a fight while black students from working class area understood it as verbal play. In a similar vein, Steffensen (1987) found that children for whom English is a second language were influenced in their reading comprehension according to differences in their religious affiliations. Children with a Christian background appeared to have higher comprehension scores on a reading passage about a Christmas celebration.

What we wanted to consider beyond the existing research was how cultural knowledge figures in understanding figurative language. Even though there is little research available on the effects of cultural knowledge on the comprehension of figurative language, except for Ortony's study (1985), it seems reasonable to assume that cultural background knowledge plays a critical role in understanding what is nonliteral.

With respect to figurative language comprehension Ortony's (1985) study found that those children who frequently participated in a cultural game such as "sounding" comprehended figurative language better than those children who did not. The study indicates that frequent exposure to that particular cultural game facilitated the comprehension of the use of figurative language. These studies directly or indirectly support the significance of cultural knowledge on the comprehension of figurative language.

Does cultural knowledge play a crucial role in constructing meaning from text that is rich with symbolism? There have been a few studies of figurative language comprehension, however, except for a prior study documented in a reader' designation and use of symbolic content (e.g., Davis, 1988), there

is little research available on the process of symbolically constructing meaning from text. In particular, research on the role of culture in symbolically understanding text has been relatively neglected. This comparative study was performed in an effort to understand more about the interplay between cultural knowledge and symbolic reading comprehension on individual readers who are either culturally familiar with the text or culturally unfamiliar with it.

Method

Participants

Eight graduate students participated from the University of Georgia. All of them volunteered for this study. No effort was made to achieve gender balance because we relied on voluntary participants. There were two groups; each group consisted of four participants sharing a national and cultural identity. One group was at least third-generation U.S. citizens who were pursuing doctoral degrees in reading education. All four were European American women ages 31 to 38 and none of them expressed a strong identification with their ancestors' former cultures or nationalities. The reason we selected at least third-generation American citizens was to try and get a group that could be thought of as sharing cultural knowledge typical of Americans in the United States rather than of Americans with more recent mixed cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The other group was Korean-born graduate students who are studying in the United States. They are in fields other than reading education. In the Korean group there were two males and two females ranging in age from 27 to 32. All had completed their undergraduate education in Korea before coming to the United States for their graduate study. Within each group the members were known to one another so there was a certain degree of comfort with regard to discussing the folktale. We chose college students for this study because they are more likely to be consciously aware of their cultural knowledge and also are accustomed to thinking critically and are able to express their thinking articulately.

Materials

Each group of participants was presented with the Korean folktale titled *The Salt Peddler and the Shinbone*. This is a folktale that is part of the oral tradition in Korea, which means it does not have a title from the past. It has been passed down from generation to generation. Nobody knows where, when, and by whom it was told for the first time. It might be as old as 500 years. The reason this particular folktale was selected is that it is highly symbolic and can be interpreted in many ways even though it looks easy to understand on the surface level. To our knowledge this particular folktale is not

well known in Korea so we were particularly interested to see how the Korean participants would use their cultural background knowledge in the process of comprehending and interpreting it. Each group read and discussed the story in their first language. With the exception that Korean students sometimes used English to restate or elaborate their thinking.

Procedure and Analysis

All the participants were asked to read a story thoroughly and then asked to write an initial response regarding the general meaning of message of this folktale. The initial essay included not only their understanding of the folktale but also questions they wanted to discuss with their group. Then they had a discussion with their group. The first two authors (Jun and Miri) were present at both discussions and served as facilitators and observers (Crotty, 1998). Most of the time they listened to the discussion and only spoke when asked questions by the participants or when they wanted to probe the participants' thinking. They did ask both groups to talk about the symbolic meanings that could be drawn from this folktale. Toward the end of each discussion Jun and Miri also asked the participants if they could come to an agreement about what moral message this folktale intended.

The discussion sessions were recorded on audiotapes and transcribed. For the Korean group's discussion, Jun and Miri first transcribed the tapes in Korean and then translated them into English. The analysis of the transcripts focused on identifying themes related to understanding the interplay of cultural knowledge and symbolic reading comprehension as expressed by individual readers.

Findings

Initial Reading Stances

Literacy theorists (e.g., Rosenblatt, 1983) have debated the locus of meaning in reading yet all recognize that reading must involve a process of using cues provided by the author in a given text and in doing so the reader makes use of his or her prior knowledge of the world. Such a process of making meaning influences the reader's stance toward reading. In terms of reading stance there were differences between the two groups.

Readers from Korea. The comments of the readers from Korea indicated that they regard reading as a process of finding the author's intention. All four readers expected that the author intended a moral because the genre was obviously a folktale. They launched their discussion by focusing on two questions: (a) Why did the shinbone follow the salt peddler? (b) Why did the old woman kill and eat the salt peddler? They all focused on what occurred between the salt peddler and the shinbone as they

searched for the moral. In pursuing their questions they used cues such as story structure, writing style and word choice in their process of constructing meaning. They found it difficult to quickly discern the moral or lesson. Sook, Hoon and Wong wondered if there was anything meaningful intended by the author. Sook said, "the story isn't meaningful." Hoon stated, "On the surface it did not seem to have any lessons." Hoon thought that whatever lesson was intended, "it seemed too far-fetched." Wong explained at length his view that "this story did not send any message."

Due to the structure and contents of this short story, it is somewhat difficult for readers to understand this story, and it is somewhat tedious of them to read it. I have no idea about the story as to why it was written. The construction of sentences is not coherent and the writing style is not terse, it is too diffuse. As a consequence these things exert a harmful influence and do not support the contents of the story. . . . If someone wrote this story then this story must give lessons. My feeling after reading this is that this story does not send any message. I could not feel anything, though I was a little frightened of the appearance of a shinbone and the fact that the old woman killed and ate the salt peddler. Even with these feelings the structure of the story is not coherent and very weak.

The Korean readers' initial stance toward the folktale was to use author cues to name the lesson or moral. When that was not obvious they faulted the author for the difficulty they experienced in constructing a meaningful interpretation of the text.

American readers. The American readers began their discussion trying to identify the genre. Like their Korean counterparts they were not told before the reading that this was a Korean folktale. Leslie offered, "My first guess was that this was a fairy tale like Hansel and Gretel." Alison said she did not know why but "it reminds me of one of the Canterbury tales." And Elizabeth thought it looked like a traditional fairy tale until the first "damn" and then she wondered, "Why is this word in a fairy tale? Fairy tales are for children and have a moral or lesson." The readers came to terms with the word "damn" by recalling that in the original versions of many known fairy and folk tales there was violence and elements that are shocking to people today who view these tales as primarily stories for children. Leslie remembered that, "At the end of the original Cinderella story the stepsisters and stepmother get rolled down a hill full of nails or something."

The Americans pooled their prior knowledge of fairy and folktales to situate the text with regard to genre and other texts they were familiar with. Apart from the fact that the American readers are reading specialists, one possible interpretation of the difference in initial reading stances comes from a consideration of each group's educational experiences with reading. The Korean readers' have been schooled to focus on finding the author's intended meaning as opposed to focusing on constructing their own meaning of text. An American schooling experience probably places more emphasis on personal response (Many, 1994) and in this case the readers focused on situating *The Salt Peddler and the Shinbone* among their prior reading experiences. Another possibility is that the Americans readers needed to do some preliminary thinking about genre and context to ready themselves to think about the moral whereas the Korean readers did not need to do this.

Symbolic Understandings

Symbolism can be conveyed through an object, a gesture, an incident, a person, the plot, a color, a sound, a number and even a pattern of action in any given text. Symbolism requires that the reader draw upon his or her experiences, observations and intuition in making meaning. The identification and interpretation of symbolic elements is always influenced by the reader's background knowledge of the world and prior reading experiences with symbolic texts. Sometimes symbolism is interpreted similarly within a community of readers and other times individual readers diverge in their interpretations. Texts where symbolism is prominent such as folk and fairy tales call for a dimension of reading comprehension or constructing meaning that is intellectually sophisticated. While the shinbone was often at the center of discussion with regard to reading the symbolism, there was also attention to several other dimensions in seeking the moral or lesson of the tale.

Readers from Korea. In the Korean group, Byung used the plot of the story to begin searching for the moral.

First, a salt peddler met a shinbone by chance; second, he cheated and dumped it and he went to another banquet which means a return to meet other people; and third, he came back to encounter the shinbone (an old woman). He got killed and eaten by the shinbone that he cheated and dumped. I understood the meaning of the story as-do not make anything less of a relation even though it is a trivial one.

Through a focus on plot Byung implies that the shinbone is symbolic of the most casual of

relationships. And that the lesson to readers is that we should accord due respect to all manner of relationships from those that might seem trivial to those that are profoundly important to us. Byung elaborated on his interpretation by drawing on his cultural knowledge.

In traditional Korean society a salt peddler is a person who always wanders and has lots of chances to contact many women. When the salt peddler said, "This is just like my shinbone," he endowed the shinbone with a sense of homogeneity. Therefore the shinbone followed him....There are many stories in Korean folk tales about a woman waiting for her man, and after all she becomes a stone. A woman is a being who waits for someone. A man is a being who wanders. In this story, a salt peddler symbolized a man who wanders. I am sure.

Hoon viewed the shinbone as the salt peddler's guilty conscience for his immoral actions. Hoon also draws on her knowledge of traditional society in a different way to develop her interpretation.

In a traditional society, a dead person's bone lying down in public is a serious problem. So he should have had the courtesy to bury it, but he did not. Instead he even played with it. From traditional values his behavior is not right. From my point of view, what followed him was not the shinbone itself but his own guilty conscience...This story seems to tell that after all, his own guilty conscience brought down death on him.

Hoon also thought that there was something sexual occurring that needed to be considered. Again her thinking offers something different from the other Korean participants.

This story can be interpreted from a sexual perspective. If we think of what playing with the shinbone symbolizes-that too is sexual....A shinbone out of human bones may have any peculiar characteristics. For example, human ribs have a special meaning in the Bible.

Hoon's thinking was picked up by Byung and led him to think about the shinbone from an *Um-Yang* theory of Taoism as reflected in Korean folk religion beliefs. Based on the dual principal of the negative (*Um*) and the positive (*Yang*), the male is positive and a sky and the female is negative and the ground. In terms of human body structure the bones of the lower part of the body pertained to the ground, therefore the shinbone may represent the female.

Hoon's focus on the sexuality followed a comment by Wong that the word hag seemed a

strange choice for the old woman. Byung offered that hag means a faded woman in terms of sexuality. Wong did not view the salt peddler as morally wrong in his actions.

As a salt peddler he had to come and go to sell his salt and if the shinbone follows him it will hinder his business. Therefore he lied to dump it. He is a person who had a thorough outlook on his job....This story is about a rancorous relation. The old woman unfairly died with a grudge and as said before if the salt peddler had buried the shinbone then she should have worked off her own grudge in her mind.

Later in the conversation Wong offered that in Korean folktales an old woman appears as a ghost. This provides some cultural information for thinking about the title *The Salt Peddler and the Shinbone*.

American readers. The American readers initially regarded the salt peddler and the shinbone as the two major symbolic references in the folk tale. They proposed a variety of interpretations regarding the symbolic significance of the shinbone. At the outset readers accepted the shinbone as belonging to the salt peddler in some fashion.

At first I thought it was his bone. Somehow his bone got separated from his body and it is trying to follow him around to get back in there. (Leslie)

Elizabeth said, "I think the shinbone is part of him" and soon thereafter suggests that the bone might be his wife whom he has neglected. Thinking of the shinbone as symbolic of a woman was discussed at length.

This bone is like his wife or woman. She is obedient, follows his footsteps. Does what she is supposed to do and then at the end after he abandons her she eats him. I thought that is pretty typical of men's fear of being swallowed up by women. (Leslie)

Leslie then wondered if she was bringing too much of a feminist interpretative perspective. Elizabeth thought the concept of a woman eating up a man might represent a wife that takes everything of material worth from a man after divorce. Alison said she purposely did not mention her thinking that the story was about "rejected love" because that came out of her "feminist" thinking. They found the story definitely "not predictable" and considered the shinbone a symbol of something mysterious like a woman. Steffanie offered that the bone represented something mysterious because it was "cold, dark and hard."

Another interpretative theme for the shinbone developed from thinking literally about how getting knocked in the shinbone hurts. Steffanie

likened the shinbone to an "Achilles tendon....a Roman's weakness." Elizabeth supported this by saying "you never talk about your shinbone until it hurts." Steffanie worked out the interpretation that the shinbone symbolizes weakness. When people are strong they can avoid it but when they become tired like the salt peddler did then the weakness comes out. The lesson drawn was that people can live in denial of their weakness but they cannot do so forever.

In searching for symbolic understanding the American readers frequently made reference to their cultural knowledge. They referred to European folktales (Aesop fables, Canterbury tales, Hansel and Gretel) and to American popular culture in the form of scary songs and campfire stories. Midway through their discussion Steffanie wondered, "if it changes our interpretation knowing it was a Korean folktale." Elizabeth's response was that she had forgotten about that. "I just thought about it being a folktale. I knew it was Korean but the peddler in my mind was not Korean. It is more European."

The readers accepted that there was "a lot of hidden meaning" and that they were "guessing" and "throwing out ideas." They considered far more story elements as potentially symbolic than did the Korean readers. In addition to the shinbone they discussed the symbolic possibilities for the A-frame the salt peddler carried on his back, the salt, the hag and the tavern. Even the word "damn" was considered for it possible symbolic intent. But most of the discussion time focused on the shinbone's symbolic significance. The repetition of certain words such as "A-Frame" led to speculation that this might indicate that they are of symbolic importance.

Moral or Lesson

A folktale is intended to communicate an important virtue to readers, particularly to children. Most of the Korean readers viewed this story as a lesson about responsibility. For example, Sook stated, "Take responsibility for even small and trifle things and don't lie." And Byung commented, "I understood that the meaning of the story is don't make nothing of a relation even though it is a trivial one." To draw such conclusions the Koreans depended on their cultural background as influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism. Sook's response, "Even a chance meeting is due to the Karma in previous life" reflects Buddhists' causal and effectual way of viewing the world. Among Buddhists, relationships are highly valued. Byung's interpretation of the shinbone as symbolic of the female is based on Um-Yang theory in Taoism. Hoon's comment that it is wrong to ignore a bone lying in public is indicative of the importance of courtesy reflected in Confucian ancestral worship and ideas about proper human relationships. So while they both used cultural knowledge they differed in

what they drew upon and how they applied it to symbolic reading comprehension.

The American readers arrived at a consensus regarding the moral of the folktale, weaving together individual and personal responses. They agreed that the moral was *do not turn your back or mistreat others or yourself because it will come back to haunt you*. In looking at their dialogue it is interesting to trace how they co-construct the meaning of this tale. Each speaker barely completes a thought but all together they weave something overall that satisfies them, as the following dialogue illustrates:

Stephanie: There's an element of being careful of the thing that might get you.

Elizabeth: Yes, it will come back to haunt you.

Allison: You cannot really turn your back on.

Elizabeth: Yes, turning your back is definitely rejecting

Leslie: Mistreatment

Steffanie: Of yourself or others

Elizabeth: If you do that it would come back to haunt you or eat you.

Discussion

We observe that for the American readers there was awareness that knowledge of Korean culture was relevant to interpreting the folktale but that it was difficult for them to make use of that given their lack of knowledge. They relied often on perspectives that must be viewed as coming directly from their cultural experiences as Americans. There was a gender perspective at work in both groups but in very different ways. Women's power and autonomy is stronger in the United States than in Korea. The old hag killing and eating the salt peddler was given a gendered interpretation. The old woman was using her power to take everything from a man who had wronged her and had left her. It is not uncommon to hear talk about the possibility that a scorned and vindictive wife might take everything from her former husband through divorce as adjudicated. This is different in Korea although times are changing with regard to women's rights.

It is important to acknowledge that both Koreans and Americans readers found the tale too odd to be for children because of the content and language (e.g., Damn & Hag -- Halmanggu). They both thought the story easy to understand at a surface level with regard to story events and progression. But both groups of readers engaged in a more in-depth discussion to consider the symbolism of the shinbone and the moral of the story. It was here that we found individualistic thinking within groups that eventually accrued to some collective thinking.

The Korean readers focused somewhat more on the moral aspects of the folktale. They spoke of the salt peddler's lie and his ignorance of his relationship to the shinbone and later the old woman. The American readers thinking emphasized a general social norm such as the good treatment of people. Korean readers come from a society where moral virtues such as responsibility are more important than other virtues such as honesty and individual freedom. For Korean readers the essence of the salt peddler's fault lies with his irresponsibility to the shinbone and later to the old woman but not in his lying or mistreatment. This may result from Korean's effect-centered way of thinking in their daily lives. In contrast the American readers have lived in a society where individual values and freedoms are highly valued. For them the salt peddler's mistreatment is of utmost concern regardless of his responsibility to the shinbone. This may represent America's cause-centered way of thinking in their daily lives.

We have learned from our qualitative analyses that the Korean readers as individuals and as a group eventually made moral sense of *The Salt Peddler and the Shinbone*. The same is evident for the American readers. Of significance are the variations in symbolic reading comprehension that occurred within groups as well as across groups. Prior quantitative research on cultural schemata in reading comprehension gives the impression that reading comprehension is singular across groups of cultural readers. Our qualitative analysis of Korean and Americans reading *The Salt Peddler and the Shinbone* supports those earlier findings, but goes further by revealing some variations that occur in symbolic reading comprehension within a cultural group. In both of our cultural groups there was the phenomena of readers making use of each other's thinking to seek some kind of collective understanding of the shinbone's symbolism. We propose that there is a danger that cultural affinity will be treated monolithically in education and in teaching reading as a process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader, the text, and the context of the reading situation (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). Our analysis reminds us to look for and appreciate the dynamic interaction among cultural references and individual readers as they work collectively to achieve symbolic reading comprehension.

Implications and Recommendations

Symbolic reading is not a single way of constructing meaning from text either for an individual or a cultural group. Rather, it is a process of exploring words, expressions, actions, customs, and beliefs evoked by or brought to text. Symbolic

reading comprehension is interesting reading particularly when shared with others. While it may be important to experience and feel able to do individually we have found it to be a richer experience through our own initial discussion of *The Salt Peddler and the Shinbone* and from our analysis of adult Korean and American readers. Symbolic reading can become an aesthetic way of making sense of the world expressed in the text. In comparison with literal reading, it provides greater potential for richer and deeper experiences with text. Srivastava (1997) states that it helps a reader reach a higher level of understanding of the invisible profound world of a work of art. In schooling, symbolic reading comprehension of multicultural literature would offer rich experiences, with text, self and community for readers learning to live in a multicultural ethically conscious world. It would also encourage readers of differing ethnicities to be aware of their own cultural heritage as well as other people's as they seek meaning. Therefore, symbolic reading comprehension of multicultural texts seems imperative for those educators teaching for social justice in the age of globalism where people can engage in self-expression within and across cultural contexts.

Admittedly, the current study is limited. First of all, the educational implications of the study may not be directly generalized to young readers in multicultural classroom because the study used a group of adults as participants, and because the story is more appropriate for adults than for children. To provide more convincing implications for teaching children in multicultural classrooms, further study is encouraged with children on symbolic reading comprehension of multicultural texts.

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Appendix

The Salt Peddler and The Shinbone

Once upon a time a salt peddler stopped to rest at the foot of a mountain pass. He was weary and his legs and back hurt from carrying his heavy load from one secluded village after another. Carefully he propped his A-frame carrier on the ground and slipped his arms out of the shoulder straps. He sat down with his back against a tree and was soon dozing. After a while he awoke and glanced around. Something on the ground nearby caught his eye. It looked like a human bone. The thought sent tingles up and down his spine. But his curiosity overcame his fright so he picked it up for a closer look. "This is just like my shinbone," he muttered to himself and put it back on the ground. He rested a while longer and then put his A-frame on and left. Hearing something behind him, he looked back and was frightened to see the bone standing in the path. He walked faster, thinking it couldn't go fast. But it went fast as well. Then he slowed down to let it go past. But it also slowed down. Then he stopped, thinking it would go on by. But it also stopped. He didn't know what to do.

At sundown he stopped at a tavern to spend the night. The bone followed him into his room and when he lay down to sleep, it lay down as well. The next morning, it got up when he got up and followed him out the tavern. This went on for several days. Then one afternoon when they came to the top of a ridge, the peddler noticed that a house in the village below seemed to be having a party. When they came near the village entrance, he told the bone, "There's a feast at one of the houses. You wait here with the salt while I go get us some meat and rice cakes and wine." He quickly removed his A-frame and walked toward the village. He looked back after a few steps and was delighted to see that the bone had not moved. He went into the village and left by another route.

Several years later when he found himself in the vicinity of that village, he was reminded of the bone and decided to visit the spot where he had last seen it. He went there but there was no trace of it, only the rotten remains of his old A-frame carrier. He looked around and saw a small tavern that had not been there before. Since it was already late afternoon, he went there and asked to stay the night. The old woman who ran the place took one look at him and said he could. "Here, have some wine," the old woman said, after he finished his meal. "You must be bored. How about telling me something interesting. Being a peddler, you must have lots of stories." "Not really. But you must have heard lots of interesting things yourself. You tell me something." The old woman talked for a while and then she said, "Why don't you have anything to say? Going from place to place you must have seen and heard all kinds of interesting things. And you must have had all kinds of interesting experiences." "Well, just the other day I was thinking of something that happened to me. You see, I had been going from village to village selling salt and, being very tired, I stopped at the bottom of a pass to rest. I was leaning against a big rock when I noticed something that looked like a shinbone. I looked at it and said to myself, 'This looks like my shinbone.' And after that, that damn bone made every move I made." "Well?" said the old woman. "Well, I was scared. If I walked fast, it walked fast. If I went slowly, it went slow. If I stopped, it stopped. The damn thing just kept following me," the peddler took a drink and was quiet. "Well, what happened?" asked the old woman excitedly. "I just couldn't shake that damn thing. That night when I went into a tavern to sleep, it lay right down beside me. And the next morning when I headed out, it was right behind me. It followed me for I don't know how many days." He drank down a bowl of wine. "So, what did you do?" "Well, one day I happened to come upon a village where some kind of celebration was going on. It was the village just down the road from here. So I said to that bone to wait here with the salt and I would go down and get us some food and drink. I headed down the road but the bone didn't follow. I was so happy to be free of that damn thing. I left that village by a different route and went straight home. That was quite a few years ago. Then, just the other day I found myself near here and, remembering that bone, I came here to see what had become of it. But it was gone. I wonder what became of it." "I'm that bone!" shouted the old woman and killed and ate the peddler.

2002 Article Citation

Yoon, J., Park, M., & Commeyras, M. (2002, May 6). A comparative study of symbolic reading: Salt Peddler and Shinbone. *Current Issues in Education* [On-line], 5 (2). Available: <http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume5/number2/>

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2015 Article Citation

Yoon, J., Park, M., & Commeyras, M. (2002). A comparative study of symbolic reading: Salt Peddler and Shinbone. *Current Issues in Education*, 5(2). Retrieved from <http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1618>



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